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STAFF REPORT

Date: January 4, 2022
To: TRPA Advisory Planning Commission
From: TRPA Staff
Subject: West Shore Environmental Restoration and Trail Connectivity Update

Summary and Staff Recommendation:

Staff will provide an update on restoration and planning in the State Route 89 Recreation Corridor, including the Meeks Bay Restoration Project environmental analysis and the Cascade to Meeks Trail feasibility study. This item is for informational purposes and no action is required.

I. Meeks Bay Restoration Project

Project Description/Background:


The [Meeks Bay Restoration project](#) area extends from Highway 89 to Lake Tahoe in Meeks Bay and includes Meeks Creek, Meeks Marina, the campground and resort on the north side of Meeks Creek, as well as the campground and day use area south of Meeks Creek. A small section of Meeks Creek upstream from Highway 89 is also included in the project area.

Recreational use and development along the shoreline of Meeks Bay began in 1928 with the establishment of a private resort and grew steadily into a destination that included at its height cabins, a dance hall, a movie theater, boat house, stable, a pier and car camping. A bridge was constructed across Meeks Creek on SR 89 in 1929 that is still in place today.






In 1960 a marina with approximately 120 boat slips and a boat launch facility was dredged at the mouth of Meeks Creek in the natural lagoon. In 1974 the Meeks Bay Resort, Marina and Campground were acquired by the U.S. Forest Service. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) maintains the resort and campground operations through special use permits. The marina operator discontinued its lease and ceased operation of the marina in 2015. Since that time, the LTBMU removed the floating docks to begin an aquatic invasive species control project in the lagoon.

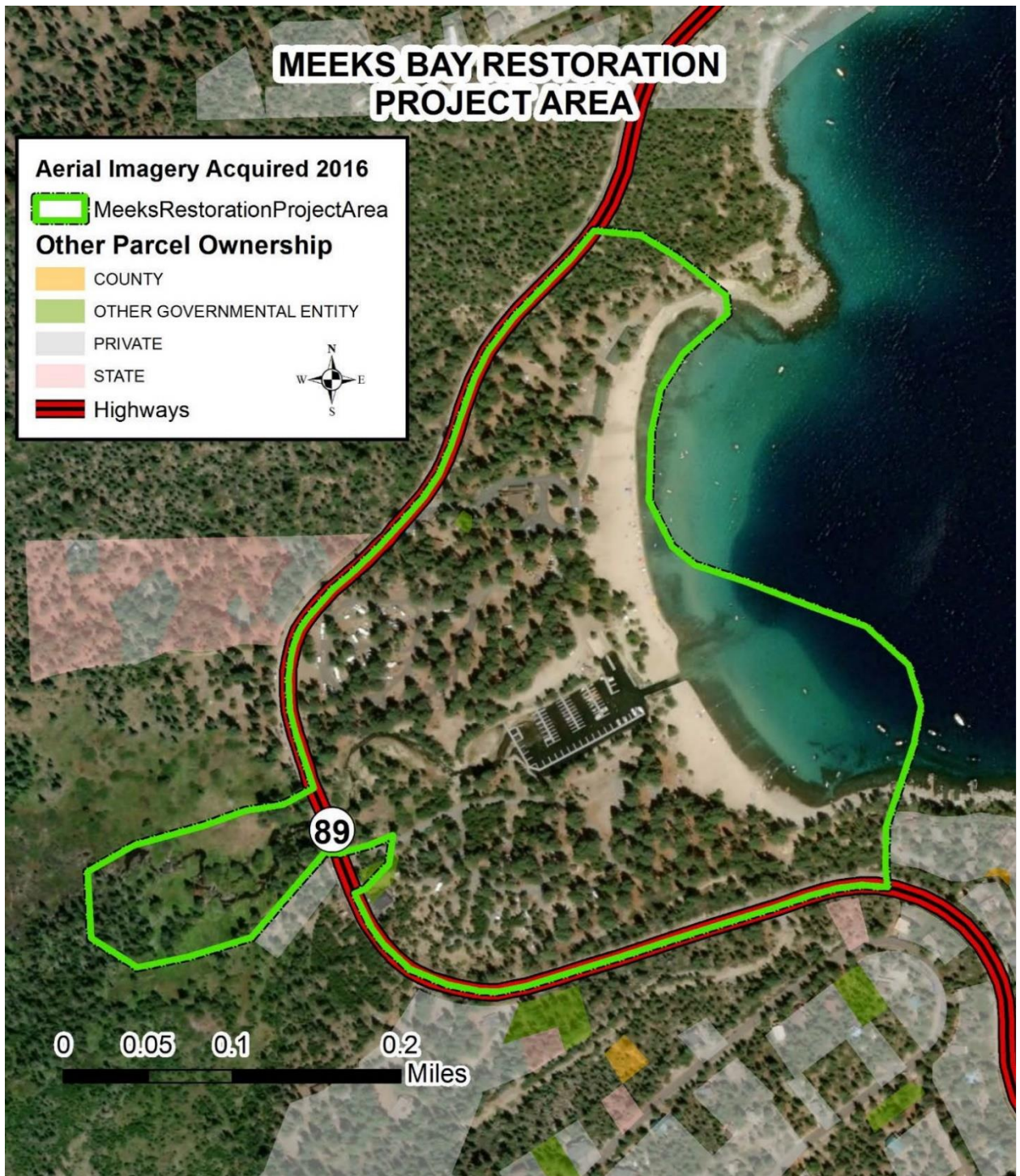

MEEKS BAY RESTORATION PROJECT AREA

Aerial Imagery Acquired 2016

 MeeksRestorationProjectArea

Other Parcel Ownership

-  COUNTY
-  OTHER GOVERNMENTAL ENTITY
-  PRIVATE
-  STATE
-  Highways



The deteriorating condition of the marina infrastructure, concerns over aquatic invasive species, and concerns over degraded habitat for native species have prompted the need for action at Meeks Bay. The purpose of this project is to restore the Meeks creek stream channel and wetland/lagoon below Highway 89 to a more natural condition where geomorphic and hydrologic processes support a functioning ecosystem while continuing to support sustainable recreation opportunities. Ecological improvements involve removing the marina infrastructure and replacing the Highway 89 bridge to facilitate restoration of Meeks Creek, lagoon, and barrier beach. Restoring the reach of Meeks Creek below the highway would complement the Washoe Meadow restoration project, led by the Washoe Tribe, to restore 300 acres of meadow habitat by conifer removal, vegetative treatments, and prescribed fire.

The LTBMU is also considering recreation improvements to the site including improved paddle craft facilities, redesign of the campgrounds, parking, bicycle/pedestrian connectivity, and a pier.

The design of recreation amenities, circulation, and parking at Meeks Bay is being closely coordinated with implementation of the Highway 89 Recreation Corridor Management Plan (see Section II. State Route 89 Recreation Corridor below). A segment of the proposed Tahoe Trail would be located at Meeks Bay, closing the gap between the West Shore and South Shore. Additional parking, transit service, and trail connections would help alleviate roadside parking congestion and safety concerns along the highway at Meeks Bay. The project must also be consistent with the Lake Tahoe Shoreline Plan, which includes design and location standards for shoreline infrastructure.

Replacing the Caltrans Highway 89 Bridge is a critical component of the restoration project and the Corridor Plan. The bridge, constructed in 1929, would be replaced with a wider span to allow natural stream flow, fish and wildlife passage, and be updated to current seismic and safety standards. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has agreed to participate and has identified funding for the Meeks Creek bridge replacement. This project has been identified as a high priority Environmental Improvement Project (EIP # 01.02.02.0039).

Environmental Review:

LTBMU, TRPA, and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan) are joint environmental document leads. TRPA, under a participating agreement with the LTBMU, is managing the joint environmental analysis and facilitation contracts for the project. The joint document is an EIR prepared by Lahontan pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared by the LTBMU pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and an EIS prepared by TRPA pursuant to the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact, Code of Ordinances, and Rules of Procedure.

To date, staff and consultants have completed scoping, a stakeholder engagement process, published the draft EIS/EIS/EIR, including a range of alternatives, and received public comment. The planning team is incorporating changes based on feedback received during the public review period and anticipates that the final document will be considered by the lead agencies in April 2023.

Alternatives:

The planning team prepared a range of environmental alternatives as required by NEPA, CEQA, and TRPA. The four action alternatives represent varying levels of infrastructure improvements, with the stream restoration as the element central to each of the action alternatives.

Key differences between the alternatives considered are described below and shown in Attachment A:

- Alternative 1 – Restoration with Boating Pier. This alternative includes full restoration of the creek and lagoon and installation of a pier to provide motorized boat access. It includes replacement of the SR 89 bridge, relocation of two motel-style cabins, and other changes to facilities while not substantially changing the extent of any existing land uses.
- Alternative 2 – Restoration with Pedestrian Pier. This alternative includes full restoration of the creek and lagoon and installation of a shorter pier to provide pedestrian access. It includes replacement of the SR 89 bridge and changes to upland facilities while not substantially changing the extent of any existing land uses.
- Alternative 3 – Restoration with No Pier. This alternative includes full restoration of the creek and lagoon with no pier. It includes replacement of the SR 89 bridge, non-motorized lake access features, and changes to upland facilities including expanded campgrounds and parking.
- Alternative 4 – Preferred Alternative. This alternative is proposed for adoption by the lead agencies. It includes full restoration of the creek and lagoon with no pier. It includes replacement of the SR 89 bridge, non-motorized lake access features, and changes to upland facilities including expanded parking and the relocation of two motel-style cabins.
- No Action Alternative. This alternative reflects future conditions with current facilities and management approaches if the proposed project is not adopted.

Public Engagement and Outreach:

In March 2020, the consultant team conducted interviews with 29 individuals to assess perspectives on the future of Meeks Bay; identify areas of convergence and divergence; and to clarify key issues. Following the assessment, the planning team invited stakeholder representatives to participate in a Stakeholder Forum. Participants included representatives from the Washoe Tribe, Friends of the West Shore, Lake Tahoe Marina Association, Tahoe Lakefront Owners Association, Meeks Bay Yacht Club, League to Save Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Water Trail, and the Meeks Bay Fire District.

Staff presented this project to the TRPA Governing Board in 2018 during the environmental scoping period, in July 2021 while developing alternatives, and in June 2022 during the public review period for the Draft EIS/EIS/EIR. Staff also presented this project to the Regional Plan Implementation Committee in January 2021.

Based on feedback received during the scoping period, the stakeholder assessment, Stakeholder Forum meetings, an interactive website, public workshops, public hearings, and the 60-day public comment period on the EIS/EIS/EIR, the key issues and concerns raised include the following (described in more detail below):

- Desire to retain quiet recreation experience at Meeks Bay where motorized boating and swimming/paddling conflicts are avoided
- Necessity of additional infrastructure such as a pier
- Concern over removing marina mooring and launch opportunity for recreational boaters.
- Concern with impacts from increased visitation
- Desire to improve emergency access to and from the lake
- Desire to retain character of Meeks Bay
- Concern with scenic impacts of additional infrastructure
- Concern with overcrowding and user conflicts

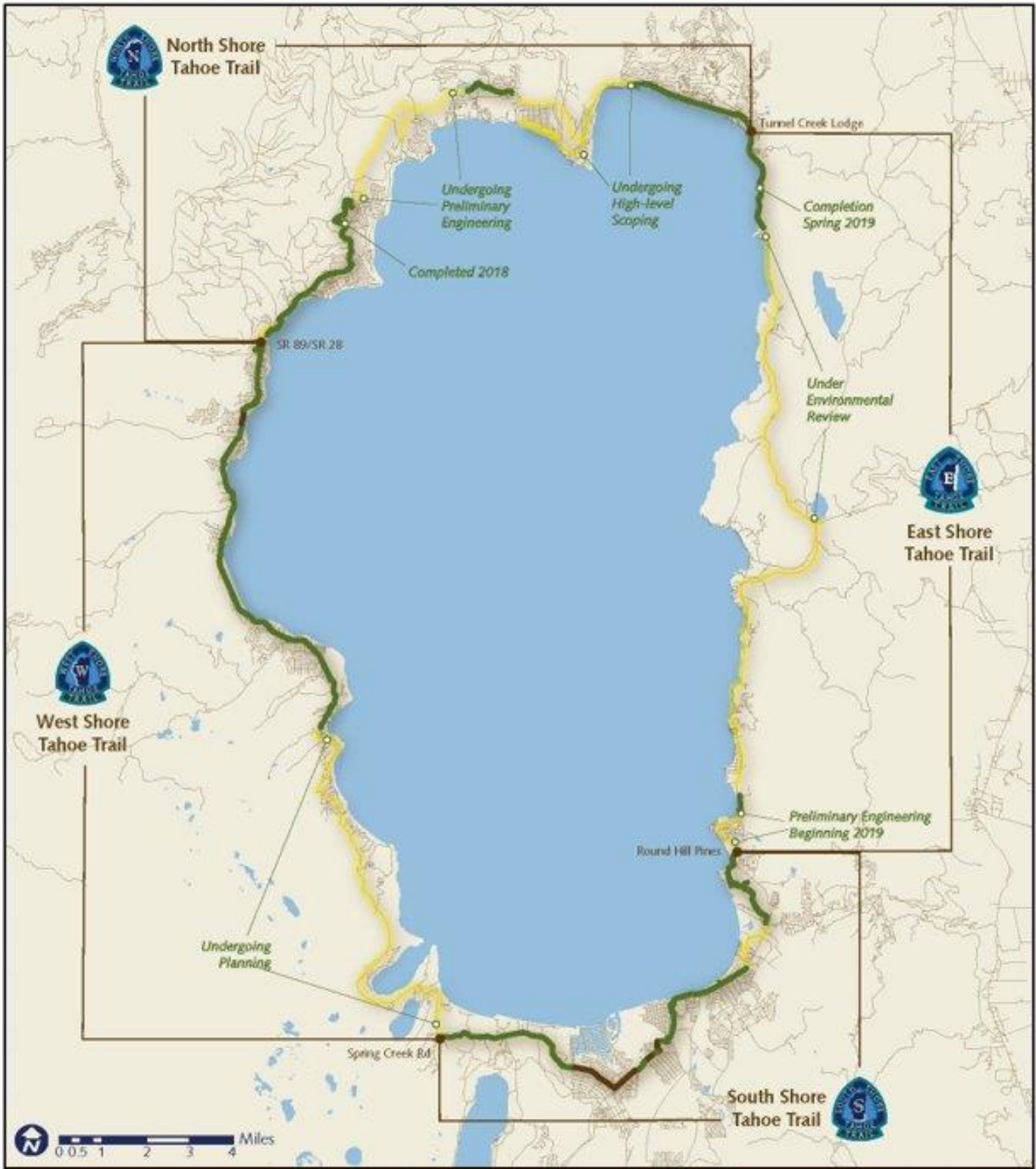
To learn more, please visit the project website. <http://meeksbayproject.org/>.

II. State Route 89 Recreation Corridor

Project Description/Background:

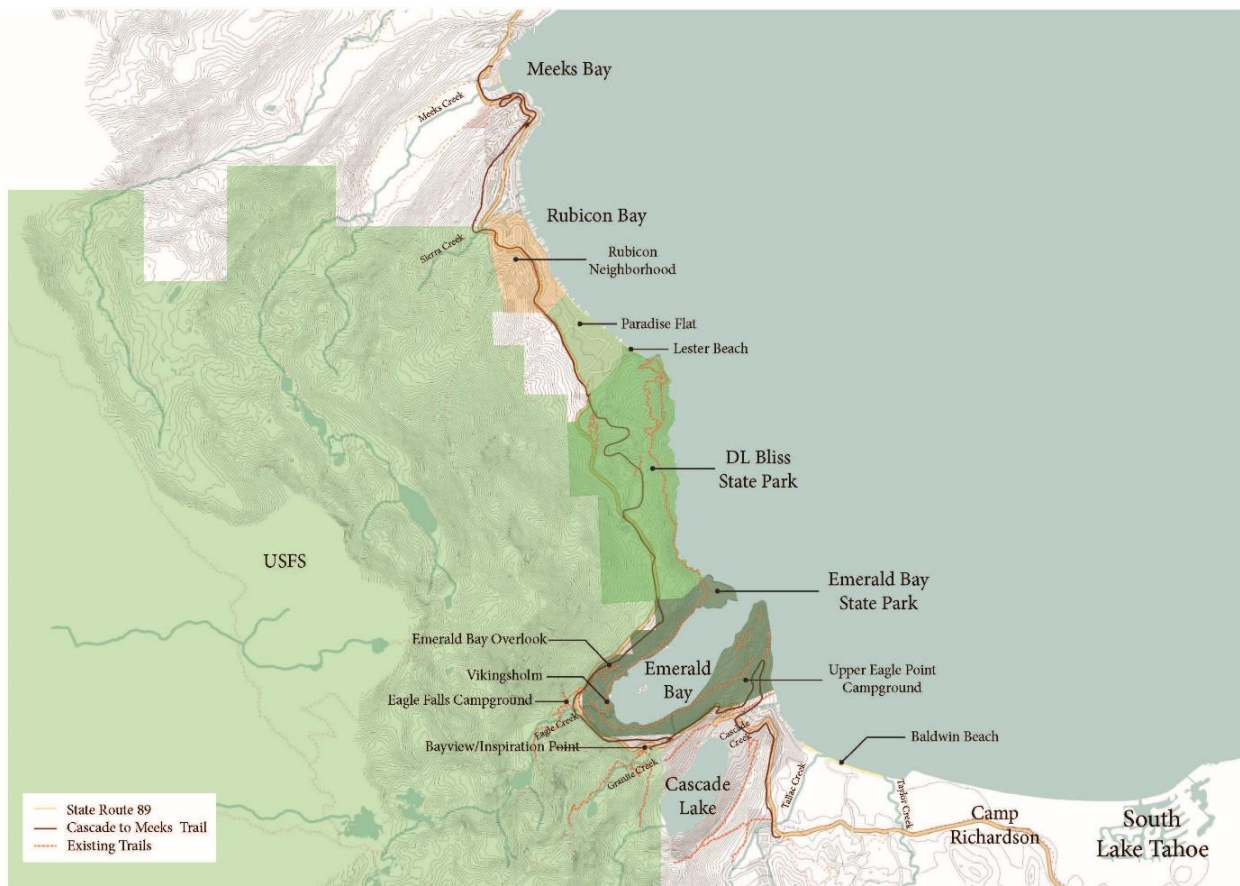
The State Route 89 Corridor Management Plan was completed in 2020 after a 2-year process that engaged key stakeholders, land managers and the public. The plan outlines a vision and a set of goals that address everything from traffic congestion to public access to environmental protections along State Route 89. The need to create a walking and biking trail from the area of Cascade Lake to Meeks Bay, through Emerald Bay, was identified as a top priority in the Corridor Management Plan. This segment, planned as part of the Tahoe Trail (shown below), would provide an important linkage to existing trails on the West Shore. As Lake Tahoe continues to experience increased demand for recreation, transportation solutions are important investments in sustainable recreation and communities.

The Cascade to Meeks Trail Feasibility Study is the first project that has come as a direct result of the Corridor Management Plan. Once complete, the study will identify the preferred routes for the 11-mile trail, access points, and a cost/feasibility analysis. The study, launched in 2021, is funded by the LTBMU, led by TRPA, supported by a consultant team, and overseen by a Steering Committee comprised of Caltrans, El Dorado County, LTBMU, California State Parks, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California. The purpose of the Cascade to Meeks Trail Study is to identify a preferred alignment that achieves the vision for the corridor, obtain broad support, and assess the feasibility of designing, permitting, and constructing that alignment.



The study was initiated by gathering relevant background resource information, developing, and walking the proposed alignments, considering potential user amenities, and then refining the alignments based on the initial field and research efforts. Once a final set of trail alignments was identified, the alignment analysis began with the development of evaluation categories and criteria. The evaluation criteria used to determine the selected alignment included: access and operations, constructability, cost, environmental, landowner considerations, and user experience. Next, potential amenities were identified along the trail, including lookouts, crossings, and opportunities for interpretive signage.

Based on the work described above, In August 2022, the Steering Committee agreed on a selected alignment (shown below) that would be evaluated for the feasibility study and report. Planning, engineering, environmental resource, and landscape design considerations were applied to the preferred alignment to determine its feasibility. The process required developing schematic-level plans, profiles, and cross sections of the trail and structures; creating visuals of amenities; and determining implementation priorities and preliminary cost estimates. The consultant team completed the draft feasibility report on December 9, 2022. Once the agency Steering Committee provides feedback on the report, a final draft will be prepared and shared with the public.



Public Engagement and Outreach:

Agency and public involvement have been a cornerstone of the trail study since its initiation. A robust outreach and engagement approach was implemented to foster a spirit of collaboration with the Steering Committee, key stakeholders, and engaged members of the public. This included community workshops and information sessions, field visits, several focused meetings with homeowners' associations, press releases, a website, surveys, and an interactive web map. Input was received from permanent and part-time residents; homeowners associations; recreationists, environmental and conservation groups; chambers of commerce; tourism groups; resort associations; cities and counties; fire departments; transportation districts; law enforcement agencies, and visitors.

Input received during these activities was integral in defining evaluation criteria, arriving at the preferred trail alignment, and conducting the feasibility analysis.

The public will have the opportunity to review the results of the feasibility analysis once the report is published on the project website <https://www.westshoretahoetrail.com/> in February 2023. The planning team will also provide an informational workshop.

Issues and Concerns:

While many participants in the public process expressed support and excitement for the trail concept, specific concerns were raised including:

- Increased visitation
- Parking and trespass near private property
- Trash
- Noise
- Slope stability
- Water resource protection
- Wildlife impacts

A large portion of the trail would cross Emerald Bay and D.L. Bliss State Parks, which raises concerns from California State Parks related to potential visual impacts, level of disturbance on steep slopes, and maintenance.

Environmental Review:

The feasibility report provides a foundation for implementing agencies to assess the costs and benefits of building a trail, or trail segments, from Cascade Creek to Meeks Bay. The next step for the project is to identify a lead implementing agency or agencies who will then determine the scope and funding sources for the environmental analysis, design, and implementation of the trail. Based on the level of environmental review required, and input received from the public, the agencies may select the alignment identified in the feasibility study as the preferred alternative and/or select additional alternatives for analysis.

To learn more, please visit the project website: <https://www.westshoretahoetrail.com/>

Contact Information:

For questions regarding this agenda item, please contact Rebecca Cremeen, Associate Planner, at (775) 589-5214 or rcremeen@trpa.org.

Attachment:

- A. Meeks Bay Restoration Alternatives Diagram

Attachment A

Meeks Bay Restoration Alternatives Diagram

Table 2-1 Key Features of Each Alternative

Alternative Feature	Alternative 1 Restoration with Boating Pier	Alternative 2 Restoration with Pedestrian Pier	Alternative 3 Restoration with No Pier	Alternative 4 Preferred Alternative	No Action Alternative
Restoration	Remove marina infrastructure and restore creek, lagoon, and barrier beach.	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	No restoration, marina remains
Pier	Centrally located pier to accommodate boat access	Centrally located pedestrian pier with no motorized boat access	No pier	No pier	No pier
Campgrounds	Reconfigured campgrounds with up to 50% of sites providing alternative camping, such as yurts or camping cabins. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 36 sites at Meeks Bay Resort campground ▶ 36–42 sites at the Meeks Bay campground 	Same as Alternative 1	Reconfigured campgrounds with up to 50% of sites providing alternative camping, such as yurts or camping cabins. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 41–46 sites at Meeks Bay Resort campground ▶ 42–52 sites at the Meeks Bay campground 	Same as Alternative 1	No change at either of the campgrounds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 36 sites at Meeks Bay Resort campground ▶ 40 sites at the Meeks Bay campground
Parking	No change	Reconfigured with no change in the number of parking spaces	Relocated parking with up to 14 additional spaces	Reconfigured parking with up to additional 14 spaces	No change
Paddlecraft infrastructure	Paddlecraft storage rack	Same as Alternative 1	Accessible non-motorized launch platform and storage rack	Same as Alternative 3	None
SR 89 bridge	Replace SR 89 bridge with a longer span bridge of an appropriate length to accommodate the creek's flow and provide terrestrial and aquatic organism passage. The bridge would include either a multi-use path or sidewalks and bike lanes Add a terrestrial wildlife undercrossing.	Replace SR 89 bridge with a longer span bridge of an appropriate length to accommodate the creek's flow and provide terrestrial and aquatic organism passage. Add a terrestrial wildlife undercrossing. Construct a separate multi-use path just east of the road bridge. Add a wildlife undercrossing.	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 1	No change
Fish management structure	Construct fish management structure between 50 feet upstream of the SR 89 bridge and new pedestrian bridge to manage fish passage upstream of the lake.	Similar to Alternative 1	Similar to Alternative 1	Similar to Alternative 1	No change
Day-use areas	Reconfigure and slightly expand day-use areas	Similar to Alternative 1	Similar to Alternative 1	Similar to Alternative 1	No change
Multi-use path	Create multi-use path along SR 89 with a spur loop through the project area with a new bridge	Similar to Alternative 1	Similar to Alternative 1	Similar to Alternative 1	None
Cabin relocation	Remove two motel-style cabins near the beach and replace them with new cabins farther from the beach	No change	No change	Same as Alternative 1	No change
Shoreline stabilization	Replace existing shoreline protection in front of and north of cabins	Replace existing shoreline protection north of cabins	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 1	No change
AIS control	Implement ongoing AIS control	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1
Habitat enhancement	Add nest/perch structures and Tahoe Yellow Cress protection	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	None
Interpretive features	Add interpretative path and features	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1	No change

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2022.