



STAFF REPORT

Date: July 21, 2021
To: TRPA Governing Board
From: TRPA Staff
Subject: Meeks Bay Restoration Project Update

Summary:

Staff will provide an update on the Meeks Bay Restoration Project, including public feedback received thus far, selection of a preferred alternative, and anticipated environmental effects. This item is for informational purposes and no action is required.

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



0 0.05 0.1 0.2 Miles

89

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

Related Plans and Programs

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. The trail would be designed at Meeks Bay to connect with the proposed Tahoe Trail, closing the gap between 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 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. Caltrans has agreed to participate in the Meeks Bay Restoration planning process to ensure that the design meets the restoration and transportation objectives mentioned above. Including the bridge in the Meeks Bay Restoration Project environmental analysis will demonstrate agency collaboration and position Caltrans, the LTBMU, and local partners to compete for implementation funding.

This project has been identified as a high priority Environmental Improvement Project (EIP # 01.02.02.0039).

Project Goals include the following:

- Restore a functioning stream and lagoon ecosystem.
- Control and eradicate aquatic invasive species.
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat.
- Provide sustainable recreation opportunities and access.
- Improve educational and interpretive opportunities.
- Restore habitat for Tahoe yellow cress, Lahontan cutthroat trout, and species of value to the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.

Environmental Review:

The USDA Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU), TRPA, and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan) released a scoping notice for the project in September 2018.

The LTBMU, as the land manager for Meeks Bay, is the joint environmental document lead as well as the project implementor. TRPA, under a participating agreement with the LTBMU, is managing the joint environmental analysis and facilitation contracts for the project. TRPA contracted with Ascent Environmental and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to complete the environmental analysis and public engagement. The project planning team consists of staff from the three lead agencies and the consultant team.

The LTBMU, Lahontan, and TRPA will prepare a joint Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Meeks Bay Restoration Project. This 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. The planning team anticipates that the Draft EIS/EIS/EIR will be available for public review in Fall 2021, with consideration of the final document in Spring 2022.

The planning team has prepared a range of environmental alternatives as required by NEPA, CEQA, and TRPA. The alternatives represent varying levels of infrastructure improvements, with the stream restoration as the element central to each of the action alternatives. Project features that are common to all action alternatives include:

- Restoration of the creek and lagoon
- Removal of the remaining marina infrastructure and boat ramp
- On-site paddle craft storage
- Bike path along the highway with a spur loop through the project area
- Interpretive trail around creek
- Shoreline stabilization
- Reconfigured and expanded parking near the resort (North)
- Replacement of the Highway 89 bridge to improve fish passage
- Best Management Practices
- Aquatic Invasive Species Control
- Utility infrastructure relocation
- Formalize parking lot near resort cabins
- Tahoe Yellowcress habitat enhancement and protection
- Waterfowl nest structures, bat boxes, and willow plantings

Selection of Preferred Alternative

CEQA requires the lead agency to select a preferred alternative (i.e., the proposed project) prior to publishing a Draft Environmental Impact Report. Under NEPA, the lead federal agency is not required to identify a preferred alternative prior to release of a draft Environmental Impact Statement. The TRPA Rules and Procedures remain silent on this issue. Because this project is being planned through a multi-agency collaborative process, the agencies intend to select a preferred alternative prior to releasing the public

document. The draft environmental document will evaluate all the alternatives at an equal level of detail. Following public review and input on the draft document, the agencies could choose to modify the preferred alternative which will ultimately become the proposed action that is considered for decision by the LTBMU, the TRPA Governing Board, and Lahontan.

The agencies are considering the following range of alternatives shown below and in Attachment A:

	1 RESTORATION W/BOATING PIER	2 RESTORATION W/PEDESTRIAN PIER	3 RESTORATION FOCUS	NO ACTION
Alternative Features				
PIER	Central pier with boating and pedestrian access. Fire boat lift	Central pedestrian pier	No pier	No pier
CAMPGROUNDS	Reconfigure Meeks Resort (North): 36 Meeks (South): 36-42	Reconfigure Meeks Resort (North): 36 Meeks (South): 36-42	Reconfigure and expand (+20) Separate tent & RV sites Meeks Resort (North): 41-46 Meeks (South): 42-52	No change Meeks Resort (North): 36 Meeks (South): 40
CABINS	Relocate cabins	No change	No change	No change
PARKING	Formalize lot near cabins. Reconfigure South parking Meeks Resort: 300 Meeks Day Use: 76	Formalize lot near cabins Meeks Resort: 300 Meeks Day Use: 76	Formalize lot near cabins Expand South parking (+14) and relocate from beach w/drop off Meeks Resort: 300 Meeks Day Use: 90	 Meeks Resort: 300 Meeks Day Use: 76
DAY USE-SOUTH	Expand	Reconfigure & Expand	Reconfigure & Expand	No change
NON-MOTORIZED FEATURES	Paddle craft storage at south end	Paddle craft storage at south end	Paddle craft storage at south end, accessible paddle launch	No change

Alternative 1: Full Restoration & /Public Pier with Boating Access

This alternative achieves the restoration objectives while including opportunity for short-term motorized boat mooring, and pedestrian viewing via a pier in a protected bay. This alternative also provides improved emergency access and response within proximity to the Meeks Bay Fire District and Forest Service fire stations.

This alternative involves full restoration of the Meeks Creek stream channel and removal of the marina infrastructure. A new public pier would be located slightly north of Meeks Creek near the Meeks Bay Resort

“snack shack”. The pier would be approximately 300’ long to reach a navigable depth at lakebed elevation 6,217’. The pier would also include a boat lift to accommodate the Meeks Bay Fire District 28’ long firefighting boat. Both resort cabins would be removed to expand the available beach area and compensate for public beach area that is affected by the pier.

Alternative 2: Full Restoration with Pedestrian Pier

This alternative achieves restoration objectives while including opportunities for pedestrians to access the lake via a shorter public viewing pier. This alternative involves full restoration of the Meeks Creek stream channel and removal of the marina infrastructure. A pedestrian pier would be approximately 100 feet long and located near the Meeks Bay Resort snack shack. The pier would be available for pedestrian viewing and walking only, with no motorized boat mooring. Depending on the design, paddle craft may be able to temporarily tie off to the pier. The parking in the south would be reconfigured to expand and improve the day use picnic area.

Alternative 3: Full Restoration with No Pier

This alternative achieves restoration objectives and focuses recreation improvements on upland facilities. This alternative involves full restoration of the Meeks Creek stream channel and removal of the marina infrastructure. The main parking in the south would be relocated and serve as a buffer between the highway and the campground, allowing for an expanded day use picnic area and accessible drop off and paddle craft launch. This alternative would also reconfigure and expand the campgrounds, adding up to 20 campsites.

No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative will evaluate a range of feasible conditions that could occur if the project were not implemented, ranging from an inoperable marina to re-opening the marina. If the project were not implemented, the LTBMU could leave the stream channel “as is”, continuing to treat aquatic invasive species and implement limited BMPs on the site. The LTBMU could also re-open the marina under a new concession contract. In either scenario, the purpose and need for the project would not be addressed and restoration objectives of the project would not be met.

Alternative concepts Considered but Dismissed from Further Evaluation:

South Pier and Ramp:

Based on public feedback and input from the Stakeholder Forum members, the LTBMU is no longer considering a pier and boat launch in the south side of Meeks Bay. There is concern that this would disrupt the day use and swimming area. A boat launch would introduce noise, exhaust, and result in loss of beach.

Public Safety Pier:

The Meeks Bay Fire Protection District requested that the planning team consider a pier that would provide greater access for emergency response, including protected mooring for multiple boats. The scale and design of this type of public safety pier would be much larger than what is proposed in Alternative 1, and access would be limited to emergency response providers. The LTBMU could not support a pier that does not allow public access, as it would not meet the recreation objectives of the project. Furthermore, the Highway 89 Recreation Corridor Plan identifies improved public safety access and a water taxi stop at Sugar Pine Point State Park, just north of Meeks Bay. The planning team recommends a more comprehensive evaluation of lake wide emergency response needs prior to proposing such a public safety pier.

Reduced Capacity Marina:

The planning team investigated the feasibility of a “partial marina” where a limited number of slips and a boat launch would be retained. A ramp only design was also considered that would involve dredging a channel to the north of the stream to allow for some restoration. Another option would be to provide upland boat storage outside of the stream channel with a launch. The Forest Service deemed these options to be operationally infeasible given the low revenue that would be gained from limited moorings. Maintaining a dredged channel would require installation of barriers to separate a lagoon from the restoration area, limiting the ability of the stream to meander and for beach restoration.

Public Engagement and Outreach:

Based on feedback received during the scoping period, a stakeholder assessment, Stakeholder Forum meetings, and public workshops, 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, specifically for the Meeks Bay Fire District

Scoping:

The LTBMU published the proposed action on September 12, 2018 and provided a 45-day scoping period for the public to provide input on the project. At that time, the LTBMU also led a site tour at Meeks Bay to discuss the proposed action, demonstrate the need for restoration, and solicit feedback from the public. During the scoping period, the LTBMU received over 100 comments on the project, the majority of which were supportive of restoration but opposed to a new pier or boat ramp at Meeks Bay. Others questioned the need to remove the existing marina to achieve restoration objectives.

Stakeholder Assessment:

Based on these scoping comments, In March 2020, CBI 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. Interviewees generally supported the restoration opportunities but shared mixed perspectives on a pier and relocated boat ramp. There was considerable resistance to placing a pier and boat launch in the southern section of Meeks Bay and concerns that any new infrastructure would be disruptive to the quiet recreation experience. Others would prefer to see the marina remain in place and returned to operable condition. The interviewees expressed the need to evaluate a range of technical information to support a robust alternatives analysis. A summary of the stakeholder assessment can be found in Appendix B.

Stakeholder Forum:

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. TRPA hosted five stakeholder forum meetings this past year to flesh out concerns, get input on project alternatives and design features, and compile the best available information for the environmental analysis. The forum members had the

opportunity to provide input on design features such as campground layout, bike and pedestrian path alignments, paddle amenities, and the feasibility of various pier and ramp locations. Stakeholder Forums were held virtually and open to the public.

Public Workshops:

TRPA also hosted two virtual public workshops, one in August and the other in January. The first was to introduce the project, describe the purpose and need, and to solicit feedback on a range of site conditions. Approximately 72 people attended the webinar. The second webinar, focused on the project alternatives and restoration objectives, was held on January 7 with 95 attendees.

Project Website and Interactive Tool:

TRPA created a Meeks Bay project interactive website that includes maps, background documents, history of the project and site, and information on workshops. <http://meeksbayproject.org/>.

The public continues to weigh in on specific elements of the design alternatives through an interactive online tool. The tool, posted in March, has received 141 individual comments from 95 commenters. Feedback on the design features shown in the tool is summarized below:

Pier: Only one respondent was in favor of the pier.

Paddle Amenities: Most preferred no paddlecraft launch, but a few respondents support storage racks and suggested they be available on both the campground and resort side of Meeks Bay.

Marina and lagoon: Most respondents prefer complete restoration, while a few would like the marina to remain due to limited mooring opportunities elsewhere.

Piers: Only one respondent supported a pedestrian pier, and all respondents were opposed to a motorized boating pier.

Campgrounds: Respondents provided a mix of opinions regarding campground capacity and configuration. Most would prefer to see a separation between recreational vehicles and tent camping.

Parking: Most respondents prefer to leave the parking configuration as it is today.

Interpretation: All respondents support interpretive signage.

Bicycle/Pedestrian Path: Most respondents favored the bike/pedestrian path alignment proposed in Alternative 2 to minimize conflicts between bikers, pedestrians, and campers. This route brings the path across the creek connecting the resort with the campground, but slightly removed from the beach parking lot.

Cabin Removal: Most respondents favored removing the cabin infrastructure to provide more beach and restore natural beach deposition processes. Other respondents were concerned with loss of revenue to the resort and affordable lodging options.

Publications and Printed Material:

TRPA published an article about the Meeks Bay project in the Summer Edition of "Tahoe In Depth", which is distributed widely and sent to all property owners in the Tahoe Basin. The article described the project, its relationship to plans on the west shore, and its cultural significance to the Washoe Tribe.

TRPA is also working with the LTBMU to distribute rack cards to visitors at Meeks Bay so they can learn more about the project and provide feedback through the interactive online tool.

Contact Information:

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

Attachment:

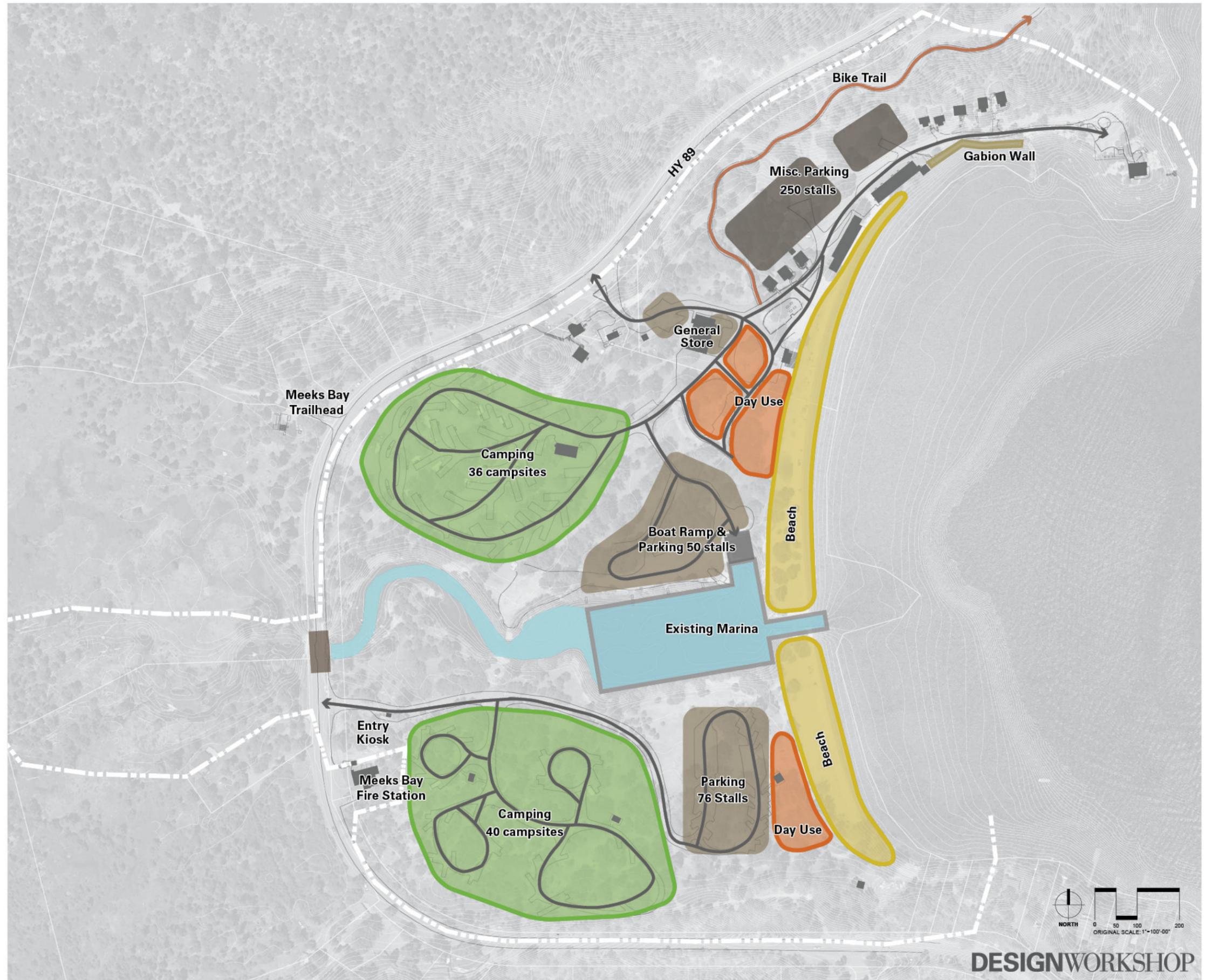
- A. Alternative Diagrams

Attachment A
Alternative Diagrams

No Action Plan

Legend

- Day Use
- Beach
- Camping
- Shore Improvements
- Restoration
- Parking
- Roads
- New Bike Path
- Existing Bike Path
- Combined Road/Bike Path
- Interpretive Trail
- Buildings
- Vehicular Bridge
- Pedestrian Piers/Ramps



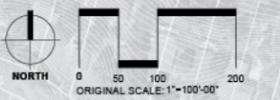
Alternative #1

Full Restoration with Boating Pier



Legend

- Day Use
- Beach
- Camping
- Shore Improvements
- Restoration
- Parking
- Roads
- New Bike Path
- Existing Bike Path
- Combined Road/Bike Path
- Interpretive Trail
- Buildings
- Vehicular Bridge
- Pedestrian Piers/Ramps



DESIGNWORKSHOP

AGENDA ITEM NO. VII.B

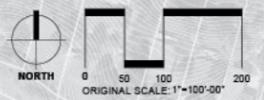
Alternative #2

Full Restoration with Pedestrian Pier



Legend

- Day Use
- Beach
- Camping
- Shore Improvements
- Restoration
- Parking
- Roads
- New Bike Path
- Existing Bike Path
- Combined Road/Bike Path
- Interpretive Trail
- Buildings
- Vehicular Bridge
- Pedestrian Piers/Ramps

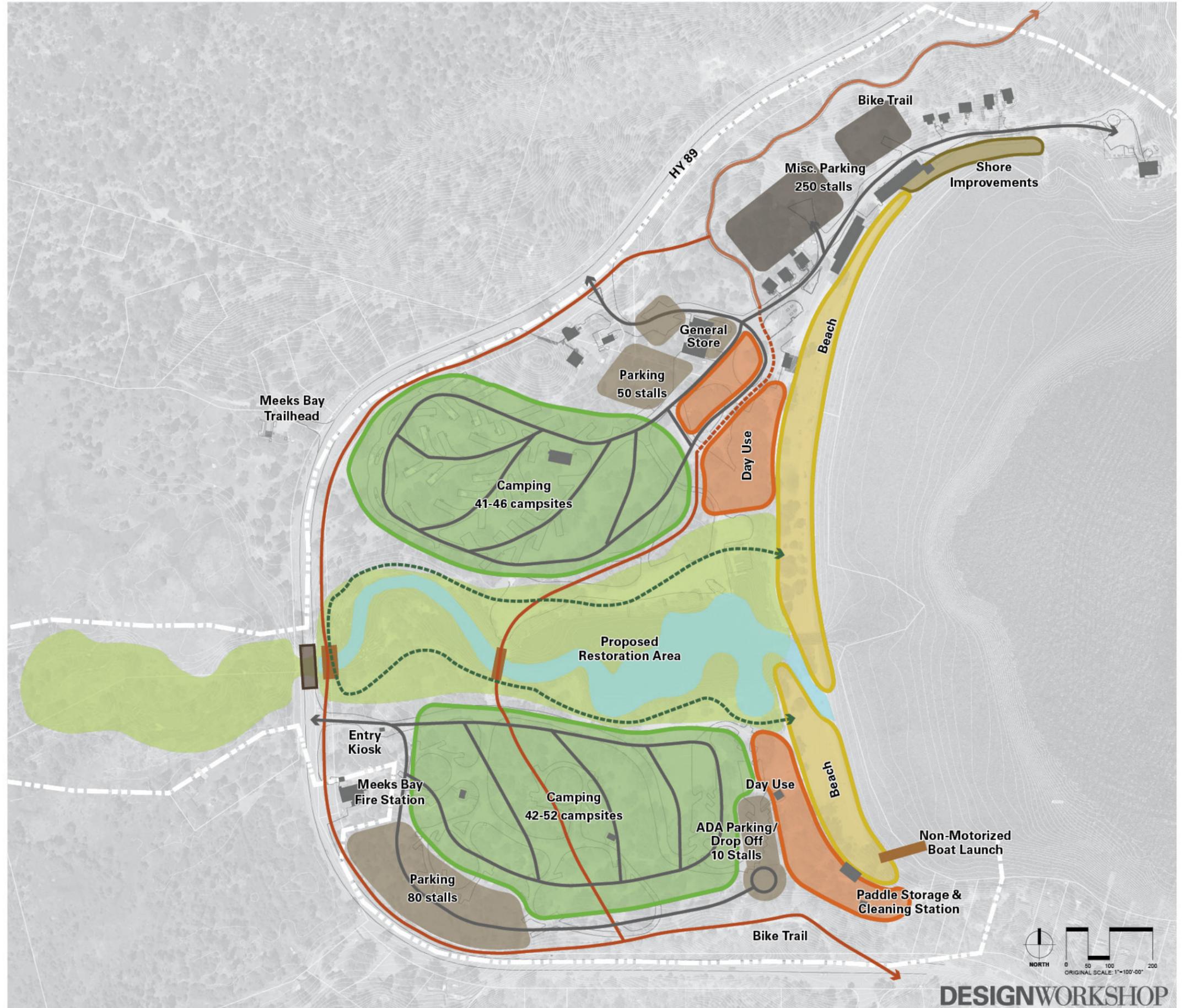


DESIGNWORKSHOP

AGENDA ITEM NO. VII.B

Alternative #3

Full Restoration with No Pier



Legend

- Day Use
- Beach
- Camping
- Shore Improvements
- Restoration
- Parking
- Roads
- New Bike Path
- Existing Bike Path
- Combined Road/Bike Path
- Interpretive Trail
- Buildings
- Vehicular Bridge
- Pedestrian Piers/Ramps

