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STAFF REPORT

Date: March 15, 2023

To: TRPA Environmental Improvement, Transportation, and Public Outreach Committee

From: TRPA Staff

Subject: Cascade to Meeks Trail Feasibility Study

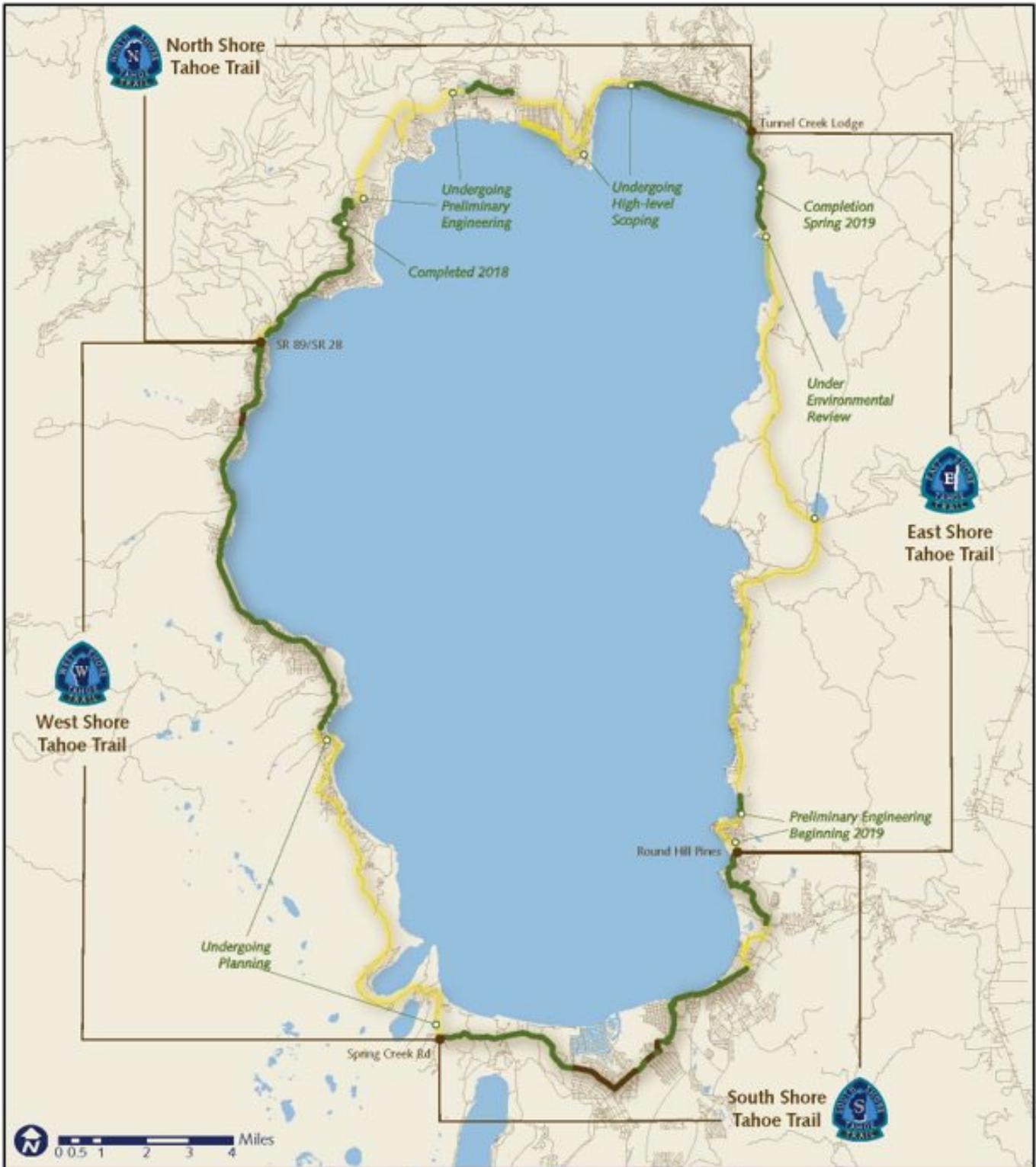
Summary and Staff Recommendation:

Staff will provide an update on State Route 89 Corridor Planning, specifically the Cascade to Meeks Trail Feasibility Study. This item is for informational purposes and no action is required.

Project Description/Background:

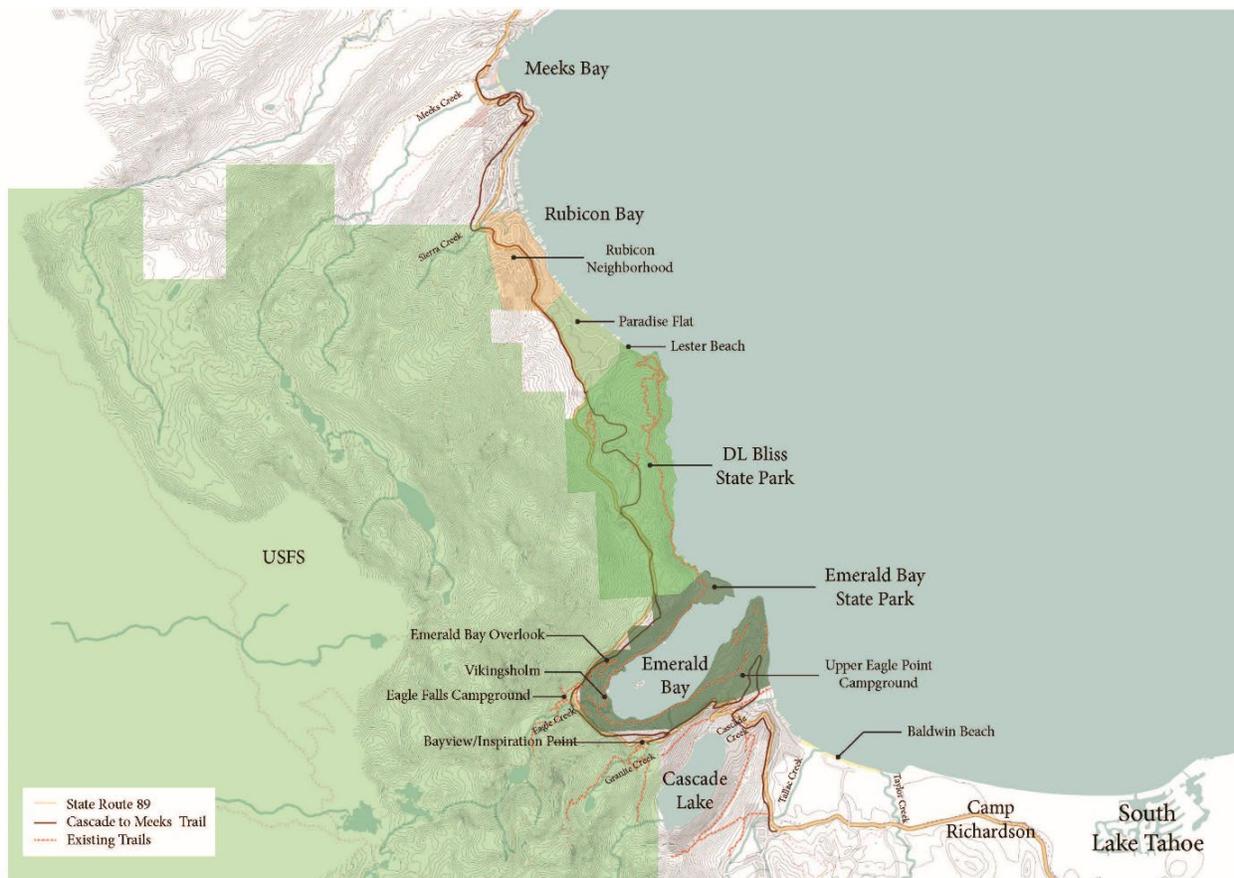
The State Route 89 Corridor Management Plan was completed in 2020 after a 2-year process that engaged key stakeholders, land managers and the public. The plan outlines a vision and a set of goals that address everything from traffic congestion to public access to environmental protections along State 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 and the 2022 Lake Tahoe Transportation Action 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. The study identifies the preferred alignment for the 11-mile trail, access points, and a cost/feasibility analysis. The study, launched in 2021, is funded by the U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) led by TRPA, supported by a consultant team, and overseen by a Steering Committee comprised of the California Department of Transportation (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, has incorporated feedback from the agency Steering Committee and considered comments from the public. The report is available on the project website <https://www.westshoretahoetrail.com/>.



Key Findings of the Feasibility Analysis

The Feasibility report outlines how the Steering Committee, stakeholders, and public were engaged to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to develop the proposed alignment. The report then breaks the 11-mile corridor into six buildable segments: Meeks Bay, Rubicon North/Tahoe Hills, Paradise Flat, D.L. Bliss State Park, Emerald Bay North, Emerald Bay South, and Cascade. In each of these segments, the report presents key opportunities and challenges including environmental, construction, design and engineering considerations, amenities (scenic viewpoints, interpretative signage), and cost estimates. To eliminate at-grade highway crossings and avoid sensitive stream and wetland environments, underpasses are proposed through the Meeks Bay segment; a bridge over Sierra Creek near Rubicon Bay; a boardwalk through Paradise Flat; a rock shed, tunnel, or pier supported trail through the landslide path at Emerald Bay; and a bridge crossing at Cascade Creek. Throughout the corridor, significant grading, rock excavation, retaining wall construction, and tree removal would be required.

The report provides guidance on priority and sequencing of project implementation through a proposed phasing approach. The Meeks segment is recommended as the first phase due to its connection to the Meeks Bay Restoration project and SR 89 Bridge replacement project. The environmental analysis for the restoration project is nearly complete, and funding has been secured by Caltrans to replace the bridge. The new bridge would include a bicycle and pedestrian path connected to the Meeks Bay resort, campgrounds, beaches, and to trail segments north and south of Meeks Bay.



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.

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
- Scenic impacts
- 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 and Implementation

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 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 and to review the Feasibility Report, please visit the project website:

<https://www.westshoretahoetrail.com/>

Attachment:

- A. Cascade to Meeks Feasibility Report

Contact Information:

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

Attachment A

Cascade to Meeks Feasibility Report

<https://www.westshoretahoetrail.com/>