

3.2 SCENIC RESOURCES

This section includes a discussion of existing visual conditions, a summary of applicable visual quality regulations, and an analysis of potential visual impacts that could result from implementation of the Meeks Bay Restoration Project alternatives.

The methods of analyzing project-related impacts on visual resources/aesthetics in this section are consistent with the TRPA scenic threshold monitoring system and impacts are evaluated according to NEPA, CEQA, and the TRPA Regional Plan, Code of Ordinances, and Environmental Thresholds. The evaluation of the project alternatives includes a site-specific assessment of the current visual conditions and visual effects of each alternative, supported by visual simulations.

3.2.1 Regulatory Setting

FEDERAL

USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Land Management Plan

Management of National Forest lands within the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, including the project area, are guided by the USDA Forest Service (USFS), Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU), Land Management Plan (Forest Plan). The Forest Plan identifies the following desired conditions related to scenic quality (USFS 2016):

- ▶ DC102. Scenery viewed from Lake Tahoe and the Basin's major roadways, public recreation areas, trails and urban centers predominantly displays natural-appearing forest, meadows, mountains, and the shoreline of Lake Tahoe. Development, where visible, appears subordinate to and harmonious with the surrounding setting. (Pathway)
- ▶ DC103. Views of the night sky from the naturally-appearing areas of the Basin are conducive to star gazing. Light emanating from the built environment is carefully controlled to ensure safety and security and does not encroach upon the regional dark sky.
- ▶ DC104. Management activities promote scenic stability and increase resistance to visual disruption resulting from disturbance events. Landscape alterations complement and blend with the characteristic landscape of the Lake Tahoe Basin. Vegetation treatments produce natural-appearing diverse forest structure.

The Forest Plan also prescribes the following scenic quality strategies to achieve the desired conditions:

- ▶ Manage scenery to perpetuate the overall natural-appearing setting, protect significant scenic features, and ensure that development is appropriate for the area in which it is located in terms of size, mass, architectural style, and density.
- ▶ Consider the type, intensity, location, and visual characteristics of land use, visual dominance competition between the natural and built environments, and resource management actions, particularly in sensitive, undeveloped areas.
- ▶ Manage for scenic stability through actions that will enhance and protect desired scenic attributes through vegetation treatments to achieve High Minimum Scenic Stability (MSS), on a project-by-project basis over the Plan Period. Examples include aspen stand enhancements and riparian area restorations.
- ▶ Restore damaged landscape scenes (currently meeting Low or No Scenic Integrity Levels), to achieve the established scenery objectives shown in the Minimum Scenic Integrity (MSI) map.
- ▶ Mitigate the establishment of visible lines in landscape areas where vegetation is removed for management objectives; cleared areas will include edges that reflect the visual character of naturally occurring vegetation openings.

USDA Forest Service Visual Management System

The USFS LTBMU manages approximately 27 percent of Lake Tahoe's shoreline. The USFS employs the Scenery Management System (SMS) to analyze effects of management activities on the scenery of a given area. The SMS is structured to primarily emphasize "natural appearing" scenery, and SMS recognizes the positive scenic values

associated with some human modified (cultural) features and settings that are valued for their scenic influence. The SMS allows for analysis and conservation beyond national forest lands into adjacent communities and other jurisdictions. The SMS provides a systematic approach for determining the relative value and importance of scenery in National Forest lands (USFS 1995). The Forest Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (Forest Plan) establishes Minimum Scenic Integrity ratings for National Forest System lands within the Tahoe Basin. These ratings are categorized as either moderate, high, or very high.

The project area is rated as a high MSI. The forest Plan includes Standard SG 116, which requires that " [a]ll resource management and permitted activities shall meet or exceed the established scenery objectives shown on the Minimum Scenic Objective map" (USFS 2016).

TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

Thresholds

TRPA adopted environmental threshold carrying capacities in August 1982 for the purpose of maintaining and improving the various resources of the Tahoe Basin. Scenic quality is an exceptional attribute of the Tahoe Basin, and specific threshold carrying capacities were developed to protect and improve the scenic resources of the area. TRPA threshold standards require maintenance of numeric threshold rating values for roadway and shoreline travel routes, individually mapped scenic resources, and recreation area scenic resources. The scenic thresholds also include a policy statement that address the community design. Additional detail on the scenic thresholds is available in Chapter 9, "Scenic Resources," of the 2015 Threshold Evaluation Report (TRPA 2016).

Shoreline Travel Route Ratings

The shoreline travel route ratings evaluate long-term cumulative scenic conditions looking toward the shore from the surface of Lake Tahoe. The lake's 72-mile shoreline is separated into 33 individual units, each representing a portion of the shoreline (of varying length) that exhibits similar visual character. Updated travel route ratings that reflect current conditions are generated every 4 years during shoreline scenic threshold monitoring. The most recent ratings and threshold updates were completed in 2019 (TRPA 2021a). Travel route ratings consist of a numeric composite score that represents the relative scenic quality throughout the entire travel unit. The following components are considered and rated for each shoreline travel unit:

- ▶ man-made features along shoreline,
- ▶ general landscape views within the shoreline unit, and
- ▶ variety of scenery within the shoreline unit.

Each component is rated from one (low or absent) to five (high). A composite rating is obtained by summing the ratings of the three aspects. Therefore, the composite rating for an individual shoreline travel unit can range from three to 15. To be in attainment of the threshold standard, the current composite rating of any shoreline travel unit must be at least 7.5 and must also be at least equal to the rating originally assigned in 1982. Therefore, if the current rating for a shoreline travel unit is below the standard of 7.5, the unit is out of attainment. However, if the current rating is below its original 1982 rating, even if the current rating is above 7.5, the unit is out of attainment. Of the 33 shoreline units, 22 shoreline units are in attainment and 11 are not (TRPA 2021b).

Scenic Quality Ratings for Shoreline Scenic Resources

In contrast to travel route ratings that reflect the positive or negative effects of the landscape on scenic quality throughout an entire travel unit, the quality rating for scenic resources in shoreline travel units reflect the scenic quality of individual views or features of the shoreline that are visible from the lake. The scenic resources in the region include certain views of the natural landscape and distinctive natural features that were identified, mapped, described, and evaluated as part of a 1982 scenic resource inventory conducted by TRPA.

Scenic quality for shoreline scenic resources is measured by rating each of four subcomponents and summing the values to produce a composite score. The following visual characteristics, which comprise the subcomponents, are

well documented in academic and professional literature as useful and objective measures of relative scenic value (Iverson et. al. 1993; TRPA 2016):

- ▶ Unity - A unified landscape is one where the visual resources join together to form a single, coherent, harmonious visual unit.
- ▶ Vividness - Also described as distinctiveness, can be expressed by contrasting elements such as color, line, and shape, or marked differences in elements seen as related, or repetition of similarities.
- ▶ Variety - Variety or richness usually consists of numerous different parts seen together that add visual interest.
- ▶ Intactness - Intactness describes the degree to which modifications emphasize or enhance the natural condition of the landscape.

Each characteristic is rated from zero (absent) to three (high). A composite rating is obtained by summing the ratings of the four characteristics; therefore, the composite rating for an individual shoreline scenic resource can range from zero to 12. The adopted numerical standard for shoreline travel units is a non-degradation standard, which requires that scenic scores be equal to or better than the score when the scenic resources evaluation system was adopted. There are 184 inventoried shoreline scenic resources and 170 (92 percent) were in attainment of the threshold standard as of 2019 (TRPA 2021b).

Roadway Travel Units

Similar to the shoreline travel units, roadway travel units are used to evaluate long-term cumulative scenic conditions of traveling the region's major roads, including all state and federal highways. These roadways are separated into 54 travel units, each of which represents a continuous, two-directional viewshed of similar visual character. As with shoreline travel units, updated travel route ratings that reflect current conditions are generated every four years during scenic threshold monitoring. Travel route ratings consist of a numeric composite score that represents the relative scenic quality throughout the entire travel unit. Scenic roadway travel units are divided into three visual environments: urban, transition, and natural based on the level of human alterations that are visible within the unit. Section 66.2.2 of the TRPA Code provides definitions for each of these visual environments. The following components are identified and rated according to their effect on scenic quality within each roadway travel unit (TRPA 2016):

- ▶ man-made features along the roadway;
- ▶ physical distractions to driving along the roadways;
- ▶ roadway characteristics;
- ▶ view of the lake from the roadways;
- ▶ general landscape views from the roadways; and
- ▶ variety of scenery from the roadways.

Roadway travel unit ratings reflect all six of these components. Each component is rated from one, a strong negative effect on scenic quality, to five, a strong positive effect on scenic quality. A composite rating is calculated by summing the ratings of the six components. Therefore, the composite rating for a roadway travel unit can range from six to 30. To be in attainment with the threshold standard, the composite rating of each roadway travel unit must be at least 15.5 and equal or exceed the rating originally assigned in 1982. As of the 2019 evaluation, 34 out of the 54 (63 percent) roadway travel units are in attainment (TRPA 2021c).

Scenic Quality Ratings for Roadway Scenic Resources

Similar to the scenic quality rating for shoreline travel units, the scenic quality ratings for roadway travel units reflect the scenic quality of individual views or scenic resources that are visible from the region's major roadways that were identified, mapped, described, and evaluated as part of a 1982 scenic resource inventory. Scenic resources visible from roadways include:

- ▶ foreground, middleground, and background views of the natural landscape;
- ▶ views to the lake from roadways;

- ▶ views of the lake and natural landscape from roadway entry point into the basin; and
- ▶ unique regional landscape features such as streams, beaches, and rock formations that add interest and variety.

The quality of scenic resources in roadway travel units is measured by rating each of the four characteristics described above: unity, vividness, variety, and intactness. Each characteristic is rated from zero (absent) to three (high). A composite rating is obtained by summing the ratings of the four characteristics; therefore, the composite rating for an individual roadway scenic resource can range from zero to 12. There are 208 inventoried roadway scenic resources and, 203 (98 percent) are in attainment of the threshold standard (TRPA 2021b).

Public Recreation Areas and Bike Trails Scenic Quality Rating

The TRPA public recreation area scenic quality threshold applies to specific public recreation areas, including beaches, campgrounds, ski areas, and segments of Class I and Class II bicycle trails. Public recreation areas with views of scenic resources are valuable because they are major public gathering places, hold high scenic values, and are places where people are static (compared to people on the travel routes) and, therefore, have more time to focus their attention on the views and scenic resources. Scenic resources seen from public recreation areas include views of the lake and the surrounding natural landscape from within the recreation area; views of distinctive natural features that are within the recreation area; and views of human-made features such as cabins, the marina, or other shoreline structures in or adjacent to recreational areas that influence the viewing experience.

The scenic quality of views of natural features and the lake from public recreation areas and bike trails is measured by rating each of the four characteristics described above: unity, vividness, variety, and intactness. In addition, human-made features are rated for their coherence, condition, and compatibility. A composite score is generated for each inventoried public recreation area or bicycle trail by summing the scores of the applicable characteristics. There are 390 inventoried scenic resources associated with public recreation areas and bicycle trails and, as of 2019, 381 (approximately 98 percent) are in attainment of the threshold standard (TRPA 2021d).

Community Design

The TRPA community design threshold is a policy statement that applies to the built environment and is intended to ensure that design elements of buildings are compatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the region. The policy states:

It shall be the policy of the TRPA Governing Body in development of the Regional Plan, in cooperation with local jurisdictions, to ensure the height, bulk, texture, form, materials, colors, lighting, signing and other design elements of new, remodeled and redeveloped buildings be compatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the region.

The community design threshold is implemented in two ways. First, the area plan and community plan process has been used to develop design standards and guidelines that are tailored to the needs and desires of individual communities. These standards and guidelines are considered “substitute” standards because they replace all or portions of the TRPA Code that would otherwise regulate the same subject. Secondly, the site planning and design principles contained in the TRPA Code are implemented as part of individual development projects, and are reviewed and approved by TRPA and local governments. The 2019 Threshold Evaluation Report determined that the community design policy statement was being implemented (TRPA 2021e).

Tahoe Regional Plan

The Goals and Policies of the 2012 Threshold Standards and Regional Plan (Regional Plan) establish an overall framework for development and environmental conservation in the Lake Tahoe region (TRPA 2012). The goals and policies present the overall approach to meeting TRPA’s environmental threshold carrying capacities and establish guiding policy for each resource element. The Conservation Element (Chapter 4) of the Goals and Policies includes a Scenic Subelement. In addition, the Shorezone Subelement includes goals and policies that address the scenic quality of the shoreline. Applicable goals and policies are listed below:

GOAL SR-1 Maintain and restore the scenic qualities of the natural appearing landscape.

- ▶ Policy SR-1.1: All proposed development shall examine impacts to the identified landscape views from roadways, bike paths, public recreation areas, and Lake Tahoe.
- ▶ Policy SR-1.2: Any development proposed in areas targeted for scenic restoration or within a unit highly sensitive to change shall demonstrate the effect of the project on the 1982 travel route ratings of the scenic thresholds
- ▶ Policy SR-1.3: The factors or conditions that contribute to scenic degradation, as specified in the scenic quality improvement program (SQIP), need to be recognized and appropriately considered in restoration programs, plan development, and during project review to improve scenic quality.

GOAL SZ-1 Provide for the appropriate shorezone uses of Lake Tahoe, Cascade Lake, and Fallen Leaf Lake while preserving their natural and aesthetic qualities.

- ▶ Policy SZ-1.1: All vegetation at the interface between the backshore and foreshore zones shall remain undisturbed unless allowed by permit for uses otherwise consistent with the shorezone policies.
- ▶ Policy SZ-1.9: The agency shall regulate the placement of new piers, buoys, and other structures in the foreshore and nearshore to avoid degradation of fish habitats, creation of navigation hazards, interference with littoral drift, interference with the attainment of scenic thresholds, and other relevant concerns.

Code of Ordinances

The TRPA Code of Ordinances implements the policies of the Regional Plan. Chapter 36, "Design Standards," Chapter 84, "Development Standards Lakeward of High Water in the Shorezone and Lakezone," and Chapter 85, "Development Standards in the Backshore" establish mandatory design standard for structures on land and within the shorezone. Chapter 66, "Scenic Quality," of the TRPA Code contains regulations to protect scenic quality. It establishes a process for analyzing projects for scenic effects and defines those circumstances that require preparation of scenic assessments and/or other documents. Sections 66.1.3, 66.1.4, 66.1.5, and 66.2.4 describe scenic quality standards for roadway and shoreline travel units, and for public recreation areas and bicycle trails.

Visual Magnitude System

TRPA Code Section 66.3 includes requirements for the scenic quality review of projects in the shoreland (i.e., projects along the shoreline but landward of the shorezone). For all projects in the shoreland, except for some exact in-kind replacements of existing structures, a scenic assessment is required, and the visual magnitude of existing and proposed structures is regulated. Visual magnitude is a measure of the size and visual contrast of human-made structures that could detract from scenic views. Appendix H of the TRPA Design Review Guidelines (TRPA 1989) provides a detailed methodology for calculating the visual magnitude of a proposed project. For each element of a structure visible from the lake, this methodology calculates a score for the color, reflectivity of glass, surface texture, and percentage of the structure's perimeter that is visible. These factors are combined to generate a numeric contrast rating ranging from 3 to 35. TRPA Code Section 66.3 regulates the allowable visible mass of shoreland structures based on this contrast rating.

Visible Mass

To attain and maintain the scenic threshold standards, TRPA evaluates and regulates the visible mass of shoreline structures. Visible mass is defined by TRPA as the total visible area of a shoreline structure, including all elements of the structure. Visible mass is calculated by summing the area (in square feet) of visible elements of the structure when viewed in profile (i.e., parallel to the shore), and the area of visible elements of the structure when viewed from the end (i.e., perpendicular to the shore). Additional visible mass must be mitigated at a ratio ranging from 1:1.5 to 1:3 depending on the scenic character type. The portion of the project area south of Meeks Creek is designated as visually sensitive, which would require mitigation of new visible mass in that area at a 1:3 ratio. The north side of the project area is designated as visually modified, which requires mitigation of new visible mass at a 1:2 ratio. The location of additional visible mass must be consistent with the priorities identified in TRPA Code Section 84.4.3.6.d, which generally require mitigation as close to the location of new visible mass as possible.

Scenic Quality Improvement Plan and Environmental Improvement Program

The Scenic Quality Improvement Plan (SQIP) was adopted by TRPA to provide a program for implementing physical improvements to the built environment. The SQIP is intended to contribute to the attainment of the scenic thresholds and serves as an implementation guide for the Regional Plan. The Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), adopted in 1998 and updated in 2018, incorporates elements of the SQIP and includes a list of specific projects throughout the Basin that are needed to attain and maintain the thresholds. The EIP includes program elements to improve the scenic quality of roadways and shorelines. The project is included in the EIP project list and map, in which it is referred to as the Meeks Bay Ecosystem Restoration (Planning and Design) Project (TRPA 2021f).

STATE

California State Scenic Highway Program

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The goal of this program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated "scenic" depending on how much of the natural landscape travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view (Caltrans 2021). The program includes a list of highways designated as, or eligible to become, official scenic highways, and includes a process for the designation of official state and county scenic highways.

Approximately 27 miles of SR 89 is officially designated as a scenic highway through the State Scenic Highway Program. The portions of SR 89 in proximity to and within the project area are within the scenic designation (Caltrans 2019). All roadways that are eligible or officially designated under the program are also within TRPA-designated scenic roadway travel units.

3.2.2 Environmental Setting

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT AREA

The Meeks Bay Restoration Project area contains developed and natural elements that contribute to its overall visual character. Prominent built features within the project area include internal roadways and campground spurs, picnic tables, parking lots, and structures such as cabins and restaurants associated with Meeks Bay Resort, restrooms, and the Meeks Bay Marina. Fences surrounding structures and the campground are constructed of wood, brick, or stone, and are generally consistent in color with the surrounding environment. Structures within the project area generally blend with the natural environment. Meeks Bay Resort structures are made of dark wood with forest green trim, which match the prominent colors of the surrounding forested areas. Structures observable from publicly accessible areas appear to be aged, but are not in disrepair. Residential structures adjacent to the project area are generally not visible from publicly accessible viewpoints such as the beach and roadways, and may be obscured by trees and landscaping, but those that are visible are generally consistent in color with the surrounding natural features. See Figure 3.2-1 for views of structures and development within the project area.

Natural features within the project area include mixed-conifer forest, shrubs, Meeks Creek, the Lake Tahoe shoreline and beaches, and topography that is varied in elevation and embedded with rocks and boulders of different sizes. Most of the project area is forested with minimal development providing a high degree of unity and intactness. The sheet pile at the marina entrance/creek mouth and the motel-style cabins are prominent features that reduce the intactness of beach views. The presence of the beach and aquatic features, such as the creek and Lake Tahoe, add variety and vividness to views within the project area. Prominent natural features that are visible from the project area include high quality views across Lake Tahoe and of distinctive mountain peaks and ridges surrounding the Lake Tahoe basin (refer to Figures 3.2-2 and 3.2-3).



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Cabins at Meeks Bay Resort



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Informational signs at Meeks Bay Campground



Source: Design Workshop 2020.

Day-use area in Meeks Bay Resort



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Campground entrance and restroom at Meeks Bay Resort

Figure 3.2-1 Existing Development and Structures



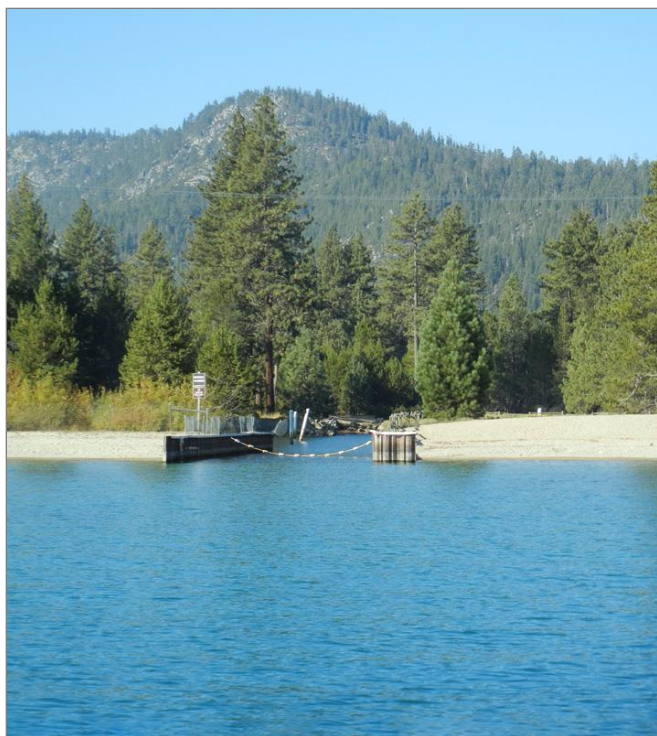
Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Marina and lagoon, facing east



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Meeks Bay shoreline and marina entrance, facing north



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Marina entrance/creek mouth from Lake Tahoe



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

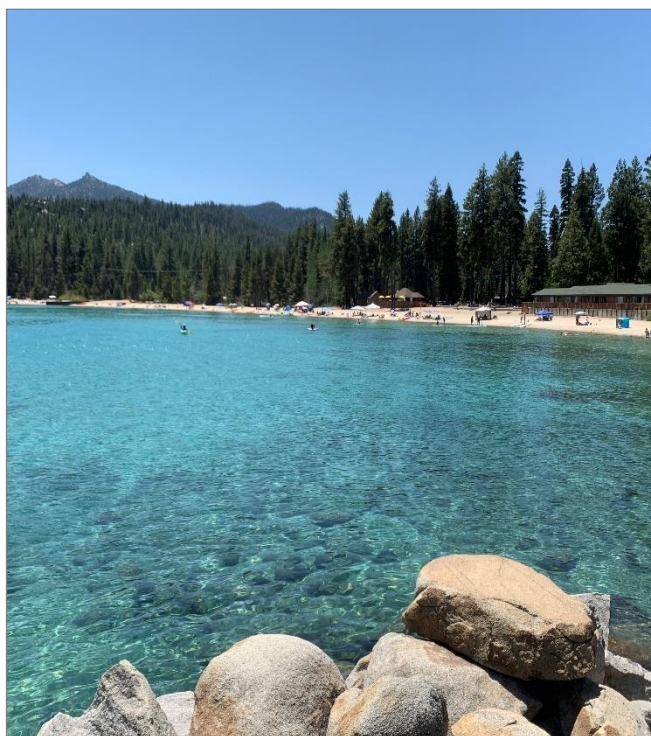
Meeks Creek, facing southeast upstream of the marina

Figure 3.2-2 Natural Project Area Views



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Lake and Kehlet mansion, facing northeast



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Lake and motel-style cabin, facing southwest



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Marina lagoon, facing east



Source: Ascent Environmental 2020.

Meeks Bay, facing southwest

Figure 3.2-3 Lake Tahoe Views

LIGHT AND GLARE CONDITIONS

Natural and artificial light reflect off various surfaces and can create localized occurrences of daytime and nighttime glare. Sources of light within the project area include occupied campsites and cabins, passing vehicles, and roadway lighting. Other light sources include residences adjacent to the project area. Sources of daytime glare within the project area include parked vehicles and windows on structures within the project area. Generally, buildings within the project area, such as cabins are constructed of materials that are not reflective and do not result in glare. Overall, sources of light and/or glare within the project area are minimal, and there is not excessive daytime or nighttime glare within or in the vicinity of the project area.

SHORELINE TRAVEL ROUTE RATINGS

The project area is within the Shoreline Travel Unit 10, Meeks Bay, which extends from Meeks Creek northward to the border of Ed Z'Berg Sugar Pine Point State Park. To be in attainment of the TRPA Shoreline Travel Route Scenic Threshold, the unit must have a rating of 7.5 or greater. The composite score for Shoreline Travel Unit 10 was determined to be 9 during the 2019 evaluation; the composite score for the unit has remained the same since the initial evaluation in 1982; therefore, the unit is in attainment. Observations recorded during the evaluation indicate that pier modifications were implemented within the unit since 2015, and that pier design is consistent with design standards. In addition, new rock riprap along a bike path was determined to be well screened but light in color; staining the rock a lighter color was recommended to reduce visual distraction from the riprap. The pier modifications and rock riprap are outside of the project area.

SHORELINE CHARACTER TYPES

In addition to the scenic shoreline travel units, each portion of the shoreline is classified as one of four shoreline character types based on the level of human development that is visible: visually dominated shoreline, visually modified shoreline, visually sensitive shoreline, and natural dominated shoreline. The sandy beach that encompasses the majority of the shoreline in the project area is designated as visually sensitive shoreline. Visually sensitive shoreline areas are highly scenic or vulnerable landscapes exhibiting the influence of human-made modifications within an otherwise natural setting. Visually sensitive areas include long expansive, sandy beaches where shoreline structures are highly visible and difficult to screen from view.

ROADWAY TRAVEL UNITS

The project is located within Roadway Travel Unit 7 (Meeks Bay). To be in attainment with the threshold standard, the composite rating of each roadway travel unit must be at least 15.5 and equal or exceed the rating originally assigned in 1982. From 1982 to 1996, Unit 7 received a composite score of 13. In 2001, the composite score improved to 14, and has remained at that level for every evaluation since. In the 2019 Threshold Evaluation, Roadway Travel Unit 7 received a composite score of 14 and therefore, was still in non-attainment. Observations from 2001 indicate that roadside parking posed a distraction to the quality of the Unit. In 2015, observations noted that the sound wall constructed near the Meeks Bay Campground resulted in visual distractions and was "unattractive" in design, however, noted that the sound wall was not sufficient enough to lower the unit's score. Observations from the 2019 evaluation indicate that a new bike trail and associated fencing was noticeable but did not detract substantially from the scenic quality (TRPA 2019).

SCENIC RESOURCES

The scenic quality rating for a roadway or shoreline travel unit is a distinct score for individual views or specific features of the landscape. "Scenic resources" are seen from a specific location within a roadway or travel unit or within a shoreline travel unit looking back to the shoreline. Tracking these changes is important because it provides a measure of how changes in land use and development over time affect these resources. The primary drivers affecting scenic quality of roadway travel units in the Tahoe region are land use, land and resource management activities, and

the visual/aesthetic characteristics of human-made development. The primary drivers affecting scenic quality of shoreline travel units are land use and the visual exposure and visual/aesthetic characteristics of development visible from Lake Tahoe. There are two scenic viewpoints along SR 89 in the vicinity of Meeks Bay in Roadway Travel Unit 7 and four designated scenic viewpoints in the vicinity of Meeks Bay in Shoreline Travel Unit 10.

Roadway Scenic Resource 7.3 is north of Meeks Bay facing south/southwest. This viewpoint includes views of Rubicon peak with glimpses of Lake Tahoe to the left side of the view (Wagstaff and Brady 1982). The project area is not visible from this viewpoint. Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4 is located on the SR 89 bridge over Meeks Creek. It includes views into the project area facing downstream (east) along the creek corridor (Figure 3.2-4).



Source: TRPA 2019.

Figure 3.2-4 View of the Project Area from Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4

Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.1 is located on the southern end of Meeks Bay facing south toward the private land south of the project area. A portion of the project area is visible on the right side of this view, although from the location of the viewpoint, the project area would be in the background view and project features would be less visible than when viewed from Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3. (Figure 3.2-7). Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3 includes panoramic views of the project area as viewed from Lake Tahoe directly offshore of the Meeks Bay Resort (Figure 3.2-5). Project features along the shoreline would be readily visible from Scenic Resource 10.3. Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.4 includes views of the Kehlet mansion on the north end of the project area. Most of the project area is not visible from this viewpoint; however, the rock gabion and concrete shoreline protective structures are visible on the far-left side of the view (Figure 3.2-6).



Source: TRPA 2019.

Figure 3.2-6 View from Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.4

SCENIC RECREATION AREAS

TRPA has designated scenic recreation areas with thresholds to protect the viewshed as seen from public recreation areas. The threshold applies to 37 public recreation areas including beaches, campgrounds, and ski areas. Views and scenic resources visible from these areas are considered of high value because they are major public gathering places, generally valued for their scenic quality, and they are places where people are static (compared to the travel routes), having more time to linger and focus attention on the views and resources. Meeks Bay Resort and Meeks Bay Campground are TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas and are described in more detail below.

Meeks Bay Resort

The Meeks Bay Resort occupies more than half of the shoreline within Meeks Bay. The beach is the central focus with the marina and campgrounds occupying the southern end of the resort, and the visitors' cabins occupying the northern end. Views from the area focus out toward the openness of the lake. Behind the beach, the forest and various structures restrict views. The strong definition of the bay makes the character of the area distinctive. Development on the southern peninsula has not been entirely sensitive to the natural character of the bay and additional development could alter it further. Although development for recreation uses at the resort itself has been intensive, the natural environment continues to dominate. Exceptions to this include the motel-style cabins and associated retaining wall sited close to the lake's edge.



Source: TRPA 2019.

Figure 3.2-5 View of Project Area from Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3



Source: TRPA 2019.

Figure 3.2-7 View from Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.1

Recommendations from the Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation (TRPA 1993) for preserving the scenic quality of Meeks Bay Resort include preserving existing trees to visually screen areas between structures and public use areas, discouraging new structures from extending above the ridgeline and forest canopy, use of materials that blend into the surrounding landscape should be encouraged, exposed cut-banks along roadways should be revegetated, and redesign of the parking areas and pedestrian circulation should be considered to eliminate existing visual clutter and landscaping be added between the visitors center and the beach. In addition, recommendations for mitigation of the visual impact of the Meeks Bay Resort multi-unit structures at the north end of the beach assumed that major remodeling or restructuring of the facilities would be too costly to be feasible. Alternatively, extensive landscaping is recommended to help screen the structures from view and the entries should be redesigned to include architectural additions such as screens and porches.

Meeks Bay Campground

Meeks Bay Campground contains campsites and a beach within the recreation area. The camping area occupies most of the recreation area. Since the campsites are located in the forested portion of the area, viewing distances are short and no significant viewsheds are visible. The camping area is separated from the beach by an open field and a mature stand of conifers. Two parking areas are located in this space, one sited in the trees and the other j outside the stand of trees in the open space. The beach itself is a wide, deep, and flat area covered with white sand. The facilities and natural features of the Meeks Bay Campground are somewhat limited. The beach, though visually appealing, is not distinctive. Views are of good scenic quality and the sheltered enclosure of the bay adds to the uniqueness of the viewshed. Care must be taken in development of the two peninsulas to retain the dominant natural setting. The campground was replanted with diverse species to reestablish the previously existing conifer forest that was devastated by insect infestation. The scenic quality rating is expected to increase as the forest recovers over time

Recommendations from the Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation (TRPA 1993) for preserving the scenic quality of Meeks Bay Campground include establishing a landscaped edge along the northern edge of the campground to help screen views of the marina and other activities in the adjoining resort, landscaping the parking area to integrate it more fully with the existing tree stand that screens the rest of the parking, introducing landscaping around the base of the restroom facility to integrate it with the surrounding forest and decrease the starkness of its appearance, and removal of the small snack bar structure if it is not used. The following recommendations are also provided specific to the peninsula along the northern and southern edges of Meeks Bay:

- ▶ structures should not extend above the ridgeline,
- ▶ tree removal for structures should not create gaps in the vegetation along the ridgetop,
- ▶ existing trees should be preserved as a visual screen between structures and major public use areas,
- ▶ structures should not be allowed to rise above the forest canopy,
- ▶ any new development should be set back from the lake's edge to preserve its natural appearance,
- ▶ no new piers or shoreline structures should be permitted between the beach and the existing pier near the end of the southern peninsula,
- ▶ use of reflective building materials should be restricted and use of materials that blend into the surrounding environment should be encouraged,
- ▶ exposed cut-banks along the existing roadways should be revegetation, and
- ▶ policies should be established to require any new development to revegetate all slopes exposed by grading.

3.2.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

METHODOLOGY

The methods of analyzing impacts on scenic resources are consistent with the TRPA scenic threshold monitoring system and Code of Ordinances, as described in Section 3.2.1, "Regulatory Setting," above. The methods are based on visual characteristics of the landscape, the condition of which, when considered as a group and expressed as a numerical rating, represents the relative level of excellence in scenic quality (TRPA 2016). Assessing the characteristics under pre- and post-project scenarios provides an understanding of the status of scenic quality and the visual effect of a proposed action, and can be used to determine if the project would alter the scenic rating under the Forest Service scenery management system or TRPA scenic thresholds. The existing scenic conditions of the project area are reflected in scenic threshold monitoring data collected by TRPA in 2019. Environmental review of the project is achieved through evaluation of the short- and long-term visual effects of the project alternatives. This evaluation is supported by visual simulations and a quantitative assessment of the net change in visible mass of structures visible from Lake Tahoe. Visual simulations are provided for the view from Lake Tahoe looking west toward the Meeks Bay shoreline and for the view from the north end of Meeks beach looking south. See Figure 3.2-8 for the locations of the visual simulations for the project.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The thresholds of significance were developed in consideration of the State CEQA Guidelines, TRPA Thresholds, TRPA Initial Environmental Checklist, LTBMU Forest Plan, and other applicable policies and regulations. Under NEPA the significance of an effect must consider the context and intensity of the environmental effect. The factors that are considered under NEPA to determine the context and intensity of its effects are encompassed by the thresholds of significance. An alternative would have a significant effect on scenic resources if it would:

- ▶ reduce the scenic rating under the Forest Service scenery management system;
- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- ▶ damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- ▶ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings;
- ▶ conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality;
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area;
- ▶ block or cause substantial degradation of an existing view of Lake Tahoe or other scenic vistas seen from a public area;
- ▶ decrease the TRPA Travel Route or Scenic Quality rating for roadway or shoreline travel units, scenic resources, or bicycle trails and recreation areas;
- ▶ be inconsistent with the TRPA Scenic Quality Improvement Program (SQIP), TRPA Design Review Guidelines, or applicable height and design standards; or
- ▶ create new sources of light or glare that are more substantial than other light or glare in the area or cause exterior light to be cast offsite.

ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

New sources of light can result from exterior lighting of new development while glare results from high-shine surfaces, such as building windows (glass) and high-gloss painted surfaces. None of the alternatives propose new sources of light or reflective materials that would result in glare. Therefore, there would be no impacts related to light and glare and the issue is not discussed further.



Source: Prepared by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Figure 3.2-8 Viewpoint Locations

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact 3.2-1: Substantially Degrade Views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe

The No Action Alternative would result in no impact on views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe because it would not result in any changes to existing conditions.

Alternatives 1 through 4 would alter human-made features visible from Lake Tahoe, but these visual changes would not reduce the quality of views from Lake Tahoe, reduce the Forest Service MSI rating, or degrade the TRPA scenic quality ratings for the applicable shoreline travel units and shoreline scenic resources and the impact would be less than significant.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative represents the future conditions if the project is not implemented (see Figure 2-2). Under this alternative, there would be no restoration and the existing marina would remain in place. Upland features would remain in their current configuration, which includes 76 campsites in two campgrounds and two day-use areas. Views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe would therefore be the same as under existing conditions and there would be no change to visual character of quality of the project area. For these reasons, there would be no impact under the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier

Implementation of Alternative 1 would result in several changes that could affect views toward Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe. In addition to the new pier, discussed below, the alternative would include restoration of Meeks Creek and removal and replacement of shoreline erosion control structures. These changes could affect the scenic quality and visual prominence of human-made features visible from Lake Tahoe, which could affect TRPA scenic threshold standards for Shoreline Travel Unit 10 (Meeks Bay) and associated shoreline scenic resources.

Because of the density of the stand of trees along the shoreline in Meeks Bay and the location of upland improvements, proposed upland features (e.g., changes to campground, bike and pedestrian circulation, parking lot configurations) would not be visible from Lake Tahoe under any of the alternatives.

All of the action alternatives, including Alternative 1, would result in changes that would benefit views toward Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe. These changes include removal of the sheet pile bulkheads near the Meeks Creek outlet and restoration of Meeks Creek, and removal of the rock gabion wall and concrete structures along the shoreline (see Figure 2-3 and Figure 2-4 in Chapter 2) and replacement with natural-appearing erosion prevention features such as boulders and native vegetation.

Alternative 1 also includes a new 300-foot-long boating pier (see Figures 2-8 and 2-9 in Chapter 2). The new pier would include a 20-foot-wide pierhead along the most lakeward 30 feet of the pier. The pierhead would include one boatlift capable of supporting a 29-foot-long emergency services boat to support emergency services in the area. Alternative 1 also includes the removal of the two motel style cabin units that are along the shoreline in the Meeks Bay Resort. Three smaller cabin units would be constructed farther inland to maintain cabin capacity, while reducing the visibility of structures along the shoreline. The potential visual effect of each of these project features visible from Lake Tahoe are described in more detail below.

Figure 3.2-9 shows the existing and future views (under Alternative 1) from Viewpoint 1 on Lake Tahoe approximately 0.25 mile offshore facing toward Meeks Bay. This reflects the view from TRPA-designated Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3 and it is 0.25 miles offshore consistent with the standard distance for scenic evaluation in TRPA Code Section 66.3. This is the view from Lake Tahoe that has the greatest chance of being degraded by Alternative 1 because it provides direct views of the changes that would be the most visible from the lake and have the greatest potential to detract from scenic quality, including the new pier and cabin relocations. In the existing view, the shoreline and background are dominated by conifer trees with patches of aspens. The motel-style cabin units in the Meeks Bay Resort are visible as brown and green horizontal structures near the center of the view, and additional structures are visible on either side of the motel-style cabins, partially obscured by trees. All other features in the project area are not visible because of the dense tree cover. Although the existing motel-style cabins and other structures detract from the quality of the view, overall, the quality of the existing view is good because of the predominance of trees along the shoreline, which screens most visible signs of development.



Source: Figure produced by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Figure 3.2-9 View of Meeks Bay from Viewpoint 1 under Existing Conditions/No Action Alternative and Alternative 1

In the simulation of Alternative 1, the relocated cabins are visible near the center and right side of the view. The relocated cabins are farther inland than under existing conditions and blend visually with the dense forested areas along the shoreline. They are darker brown in color and their form has vertical elements, consistent with the surrounding trees. The light-colored concrete retaining wall in front of the motel-style cabins has been removed and is replaced with natural boulder shoreline protection. Overall, this element of Alternative 1 increases the unity and intactness of the view from Lake Tahoe and benefits overall visual quality of views from the lake.

The new pier and fireboat visible on the left side of the simulation are the most prominent new visible features of Alternative 1. These features are noticeable; however, they do not dominate the view from the lake at 0.25 mile offshore. Their mass and brown and red coloring block views of, and contrasts with the light sandy shoreline. These features reduce the intactness and unity of views from Lake Tahoe and degrade the overall visual quality of the area.

In addition, Alternative 1 would modify other human-made features along the shoreline, which is one of the three criteria assessed to develop shoreline travel unit scenic ratings. Existing visible human-made features would be removed including the existing concrete and gabion shoreline stabilization features, which would be replaced with boulder and native vegetation shoreline stabilization (shown in the center-right of Figure 3.2-9). Although not shown in Figure 3.2-9, the sheetpile bulk head long the channel leading to the marina (see photographs in Figure 3.2-2, above) would be removed and the creek mouth would be restored to a more natural condition. The removal of the sheet pile bulkheads, restoration of Meeks Creek, and replacement of rock gabion and concrete shoreline stabilization structures with natural-appearing stabilization features would improve views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe by removing human-made visual intrusions along the shoreline and replacing them with natural-appearing features and contours. Accordingly, the visual prominence of these human-made features would be reduced under Alternative 1, which would benefit the TRPA scenic quality ratings for the shoreline travel unit.

TRPA has developed a quantitative method to evaluate and regulate the visible mass of piers and other shoreline structures. The visible mass of a pier is defined by TRPA as the total visible area of a pier, including all elements of the pier (e.g., pilings, deck, railings). Visible mass is calculated by summing the area (in square feet) of visible elements of the pier when viewed in profile (i.e., parallel to the shore), and the area of visible elements of the pier when viewed from the end (i.e., perpendicular to the shore). For purposes of evaluating and mitigating visible mass of new piers, the visible mass of boat lifts and associated boats are also included (TRPA Code Section 84.4.3.10.d). Tables 3.2-1 and 3.2-2 below summarize the visible mass of the new pier under Alternative 1 at a lake elevation of 6,226 Lake Tahoe Datum (LTD). As shown in the table, the new pier would result in the addition of 975.85 sq. ft. of visible mass.

Table 3.2-1 Visible Mass of the Boating Pier under Alternative 1

Description	Length (ft.)	Width (ft.)	Quantity	Area (sq. ft.)	Total (sq. ft.)
Profile View					
Pier deck	300	1	1	300	300
Piling	4.66	1.33	30	6	180
Boat Lift	30	1	1	30	30
Fireboat on Boat Lift	29	9.5	1	275.5	275.5
Fencing	10	5	1	50	50
End View					
Pier deck	20	1	1	20	20
Piling	4.66	1.33	3	6.2	18.6
Boat Lift	10	1	1	10	10
Fireboat on Boat Lift	9.5	9.5	1	90.25	90.25
Fencing	6	0.25	1	1.5	1.5
Total					975.85

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Alternative 1 would also involve the removal of existing visible mass from the shoreline, including removal and relocation of the motel-style cabins, existing rock gabion and concrete shoreline protection, and sheet pile bulkheads

at the Meeks Creek outlet. Alternative 1 would replace the motel-style cabins with three separate smaller cabins located farther from the shore. The visible mass of each of the features that would be removed under Alternative 1, and the additional visible mass from the new cabins is summarized in Table 3.2-2. Unlike the visible mass of the proposed pier, the visible mass of these on shore structures is calculated only as viewed from the lake (i.e., perpendicular to the shore). As shown in Table 3.2-2, approximately 2,928 sq. ft. of visible mass would be removed from the shoreline. When the additional visible mass from the proposed pier is considered, there would be a net decrease of 1,952.15 sq. ft. of visible mass under Alternative 1.

Table 3.2-2 Visible Mass of Other Shoreline Structures under Alternative 1

Description	Visible Mass Removed (sq. ft.)	Visible Mass Added (sq. ft.)	Total Change in Visible Mass (sq. ft.)
Motel-style cabin north building	3,443	0	-3,443
Motel-style cabin south building	2,470	0	-2,470
Three additional cabins	0	4,800	4,800
Rock Gabion/Shoreline Protection Features	1,603	0	-1,603
Sheet Pile Bulkheads at Meeks Creek Outlet	212	0	-212
Total			-2,928

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Because the proposed pier would be located in a portion of the shoreline that is designated as visually sensitive, the additional visible mass of the pier is required to be mitigated at a ratio of 1:3 (i.e., three times the visible mass of the pier must be removed; TRPA Code Section 84.4.3.A.6). Thus, the proposed pier would require the removal of at least 2,927.55 sq. ft. of visible mass. Because Alternative 1 would remove 2,928 sq. ft. of visible mass, it would meet the visible mass mitigation requirements of the TRPA Code.

TRPA Code Section 84.4.3.A.4 also requires that a project area for a new pier must be evaluated under the contrast rating system for visual magnitude described in Chapter 66 of the TRPA Code. This system produces a numeric score to quantify the visual magnitude of shoreland structures based on an evaluation of building materials, color, texture, articulation, and reflectivity. A higher score indicates less contrast with the natural environment. A project area for a new pier must meet an initial score of 21, then attain a score of 25 within 6 months of permit application submission. If Alternative 1 is approved, additional design detail work would occur, which would identify the specific materials, colors, and architectural details of proposed facilities, and the site would be required to achieve contrast rating scores required by TRPA Code Section 84.4.3.A.4. Compliance with these requirements could result in additional improvements to scenic quality in the project area.

As described above, Alternative 1 would alter human-made features visible from Lake Tahoe, which is one of the three criteria used to determine shoreline travel unit threshold scores. The Alternative would result in a net reduction in visible mass along the shoreline meeting TRPA Code requirements, which were developed to attain and maintain scenic threshold standards. As shown in the simulation in Figure 3.2-9, these visual changes would not reduce the quality of views from Lake Tahoe or degrade the Forest Service MSI rating, TRPA scenic quality ratings for the applicable shoreline travel unit and shoreline scenic resources, including Scenic Shoreline Resource 10.3. Thus, the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 2: Restoration with Pedestrian Pier

Some of the features of Alternative 2 that would be visible from the lake are similar to those in Alternative 1. As with Alternative 1, Alternative 2 would involve removal of the marina and full restoration of the creek, lagoon, and barrier beach, as well as the removal of rock gabion and replacement with natural-appearing shoreline erosion protection features. Alternative 2 does not include the development of a new 300-foot-long boating pier and instead, would include a 100-foot-long pedestrian pier in the same location. The pedestrian pier would be a floating design, with the pier deck floating directly on the surface of the water with pilings extending above the elevation of the pier deck under most lake levels. In addition, the motel style cabins would remain in place under Alternative 2. Figure 3.2-10 shows the existing and future views under Alternative 2 from Viewpoint 1 approximately 0.25 mile offshore on Lake Tahoe facing toward Meeks Bay.



Source: Figure produced by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Figure 3.2-10 View of Meeks Bay from Viewpoint 1 under Existing Conditions/No Action Alternative and Alternative 2

In the simulation of Alternative 2, the proposed pedestrian pier is visible, as well as the natural-appearing shoreline protection features on the north end of the beach. The new pier is the largest new visible features of Alternative 2; however, its mass is relatively small, and it does not dominate the view due to its relatively small size, floating design, and coloring. Overall, the view from Lake Tahoe under Alternative 2 is not substantially different than under existing conditions. The new pier provides an additional human-made structure that detracts from the view, but the replacement of the concrete and rock gabion shoreline protection would remove a human-made structure that detracts from the view under existing conditions.

Table 3.2-3 below summarizes the visible mass of the new pier under Alternative 2, at a lake elevation of 6,226 Lake Tahoe Datum (LTD). As shown in the table, the new pier would result in the addition of 288.2 sq. ft. of visible mass.

Table 3.2-3 Visible Mass of the Pedestrian Pier under Alternative 2

Description	Length (ft)	Width (ft)	Quantity	Area (sq. ft.)	Total (sq. ft.)
Profile View					
Pier deck	100	2	1	200	200
Pilings	4.66	1.33	10	6.2	62
End View					
Pier deck	10	2	1	20	20
Pilings	4.66	1.33	1	6.2	6.2
Total					288.2

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Similar to Alternative 1, the removal of the sheet pile bulkheads, restoration of Meeks Creek, and replacement of rock gabion with natural-appearing erosion prevention features would benefit the scenic quality of Meeks Bay as viewed from Lake Tahoe by removing human-made visual intrusions along the shoreline and replacing them with natural-appearing features and contours. Accordingly, the visible mass of shoreline features would be reduced under Alternative 2 as shown in Table 3.2-4. With implementation of Alternative 2, there would be a net decrease of 1,526.8 sq. ft. of visible mass along the shoreline.

Table 3.2-4 Visible Mass Removed under Alternative 2

Description	Visible Mass Removed (sq. ft.)	Visible Mass Added (sq. ft.)	Total Change in Visible Mass (sq. ft.)
Rock Gabion/Shoreline Protection Features	1,603	0	-1,603
Sheet Pile Bulkheads at Meeks Creek Outlet	212	0	-212
Total			-1,815

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

As described above, the additional visible mass of proposed pedestrian pier is required to be mitigated at a ratio of 1:3. Thus, the proposed pier would require the removal of at least 864.6 sq. ft. of visible mass. Because Alternative 2 would remove 1,815 sq. ft. of visible mass, it would exceed the visible mass mitigation requirements of the TRPA Code.

If Alternative 2 is approved, additional design detail work would occur, which would identify the specific materials, colors, and architectural details of proposed facilities, and the site would be required to achieve contrast rating scores required by TRPA Code Section 84.4.3.A.4. Compliance with these requirements could result in additional improvements to scenic quality in the project area.

As described above, Alternative 2 would alter human-made features visible from Lake Tahoe, which is one of the three criteria used to determine shoreline travel unit threshold scores. The alternative would result in a net reduction in visible mass along the shoreline exceeding TRPA Code requirements, which were developed to attain and maintain scenic threshold standards. As shown in the simulation in Figure 3.2-10, these visual changes would not reduce the quality of views from Lake Tahoe or degrade the Forest Service MSI rating, TRPA scenic quality ratings for the

applicable shoreline travel unit and shoreline scenic resources, including Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3. Thus, the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 3: Restoration with No Pier

As with Alternatives 1 and 2, this alternative would involve removal of the marina and full restoration of the creek, lagoon, and barrier beach, as well as the removal of rock gabion and replacement with natural-appearing shoreline erosion protection features. As described above for Alternative 1, these shoreline changes would benefit views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe and reduce overall visible mass. When viewed from Viewpoint 1 on Lake Tahoe, Alternative 3 would appear the same as Alternative 2 (see Figure 3.2-10), except it would not include the floating pedestrian pier.

Alternative 3 would not include a pier but would include a small universally accessible paddlecraft launch structure on the south end of the bay (see Figure 2-12 in Chapter 2). The facility would include a floating platform or dock up to 30 feet long and 20 feet wide that could move with lake level fluctuations. It would include a ramp for paddlecraft launching. It could include handrails along the launch ramp, but otherwise would not include features extending above the floating platform/dock. While the exact design of the paddlecraft launch has not been determined, it is conservatively estimated to result in up to 100 sq. ft. of visible mass when calculated consistent with the visible mass calculations for piers (i.e., when summing the visible mass when viewed perpendicular and parallel to the shoreline). The launch facility would be medium tan color, or other earth tone color that blends into the surroundings, as approved by TRPA. Table 3.2-5 shows the estimated visible mass of shoreline structures under Alternative 3.

Table 3.2-5 Visible Mass of Shoreline Structures under Alternative 3

Description	Visible Mass Removed (sq. ft.)	Visible Mass Added (sq. ft.)	Total Change in Visible Mass (sq. ft.)
Paddlecraft Launch	0	100	100
Rock Gabion/Shoreline Protection Features	1,603	0	-1,603
Sheet Pile Bulkheads at Meeks Creek Outlet	212	0	-212
Total			-1,715

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Alternative 3 would alter human-made features visible from Lake Tahoe. The Alternative would result in a net reduction in visible mass along the shoreline of approximately 1,715 sq. ft. Given the small size of the paddlecraft launch and its coloring consistent with the existing surroundings, it would not substantially alter or degrade views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe. As described above, Alternative 3 would not reduce the quality of views from Lake Tahoe or degrade the Forest Service MSI rating, TRPA scenic quality ratings for the applicable shoreline travel unit and shoreline scenic resources, including Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3. The impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 4: Preferred Alternative

As with Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, this alternative would involve removal of the marina and full restoration of the creek, lagoon, and barrier beach. Like Alternative 3, it would not include a pier but would include a small universally accessible paddlecraft launch structure on the south end of the bay. As with Alternative 1, this alternative would relocate the two motel style cabin units in the Meeks Bay Resort farther inland and replace them with three smaller cabin units while maintaining the existing overnight visitor capacity. When viewed from Viewpoint 1 on Lake Tahoe, Alternative 3 would appear the same as Alternative 1 (see Figure 3.2-5), except it would not include the new 300-foot-long boating pier.

As described above under "Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier," the removal of the sheet pile bulkheads, restoration of Meeks Creek, removal and relocation of the motel style cabins. And replacement of rock gabion with natural-appearing erosion prevention features would benefit views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe by removing human-made visual intrusions along the shoreline and replacing them with natural-appearing features and contours. Table 3.2-6 shows the estimated visible mass of shoreline structures under Alternative 4.

Table 3.2-6 Visible Mass of Shoreline Structures under Alternative 4

Description	Visible Mass Removed (sq. ft.)	Visible Mass Added (sq. ft.)	Total Change in Visible Mass (sq. ft.)
Paddlecraft Launch	0	100	100
Motel-style cabin north building	3,443	0	-3,443
Motel-style cabin south building	2,470	0	-2,470
Three additional cabins	0	4,800	4,800
Rock Gabion/Shoreline Protection Features	1,603	0	-1,603
Sheet Pile Bulkheads at Meeks Creek Outlet	212	0	-212
Total			-2,828

Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Alternative 4 would alter human-made features visible from Lake Tahoe. The Alternative would result in a net reduction in visible mass along the shoreline of approximately 2,828 sq. ft. Given the small size of the paddlecraft launch and its coloring consistent with the existing surroundings, it would not substantially alter or degrade views of Meeks Bay from Lake Tahoe. As described above, Alternative 4 would not reduce the quality of views from Lake Tahoe or degrade the Forest Service MSI rating, TRPA scenic quality ratings for the applicable shoreline travel unit and shoreline scenic resources, including Shoreline Scenic Resource 10.3. The impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.

Impact 3.2-2: Alter Views of Lake Tahoe from the Project Area

Under the No Action Alternative, views of Lake Tahoe from the project area would be the same as under existing conditions because no structures would be constructed or demolished. Thus, there would be no impact under the No Action Alternative.

Implementation of Alternative 1 would result in changes that could affect views toward Lake Tahoe from the project area, including the TRPA-designated scenic recreation area Meeks Bay Resort. Alternative 1 includes a new 300-foot-long boating pier with emergency services boat that would be visually prominent along the shoreline and would substantially degrade the overall visual character quality of the view, including from the TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas at Meeks Bay Resort and Meeks Bay Campground. Because there is no feasible mitigation that would reduce this impact while achieving the intent of the alternative, the impact under Alternative 1 would be significant and unavoidable.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 include project features that would be visible from the project area looking toward the lake. Due to their small size and design, these features would not substantially detract from the view. Therefore, the impact of Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would be less than significant.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative represents the future conditions if the project is not implemented (see Figure 2-2 in Chapter 2). Under this alternative, there would be no restoration and the existing marina would remain in place. Upland features would remain in their current configuration, which includes 76 campsites in two campgrounds and two day-use areas. Views of Lake Tahoe from the project area would therefore be the same as under existing conditions and there would be no change to the view of Lake Tahoe. For these reasons, there would be no impact under the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier

Alternative 1 would result in changes that could affect views toward Lake Tahoe from the project area, including the TRPA-designated scenic recreation area Meeks Bay Resort. Although many of the proposed changes under Alternative 1 would not affect views of Lake Tahoe, such as the restoration of Meeks Creek, removal and replacement of cabins shoreline erosion control structures, and upland improvements (e.g., changes to campground, bike and pedestrian circulation, parking lot configurations), Alternative 1 includes a new 300-foot-long boating pier that would be visually prominent along the shoreline. The new pier would include a 20-foot-wide pierhead along the most lakeward 30 feet of the pier, and the pierhead would include one boatlift capable of supporting a 29-foot-long emergency services boat (see Figure 2-4 in Chapter 2).

The project area includes two TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas (Meeks Bay Campground and Meeks Bay Resort). These two areas encompass the entirety of the project area west of SR 89 and are regulated pursuant to TRPA's "Other Areas" scenic threshold standard. This non-degradation standard requires that the sites maintain a score that is equal to or greater than the scenic score recorded when the site was first inventoried in 1993. The scenic scores for designated recreation sites are calculated by rating four different elements of the scenic quality on a scale of 1 to 5 and combining the individual scores to develop a composite scenic score. The four elements of scenic quality that contribute to the score are: 1) coherence of the human-made and natural features visible at the site, 2) physical condition of built features, 3) compatibility of built features with the natural environment, and 4) the design quality of built features. Both designated scenic recreation areas were last evaluated in 2011 and both are in attainment of the threshold standard because the ratings are the same as those recorded when the sites were first inventoried. Table 3.2-7 shows the existing scenic scores for the two TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas within the project area.

Table 3.2-7 Existing Scenic Ratings for TRPA-Designated Scenic Recreation Areas in the Project Area

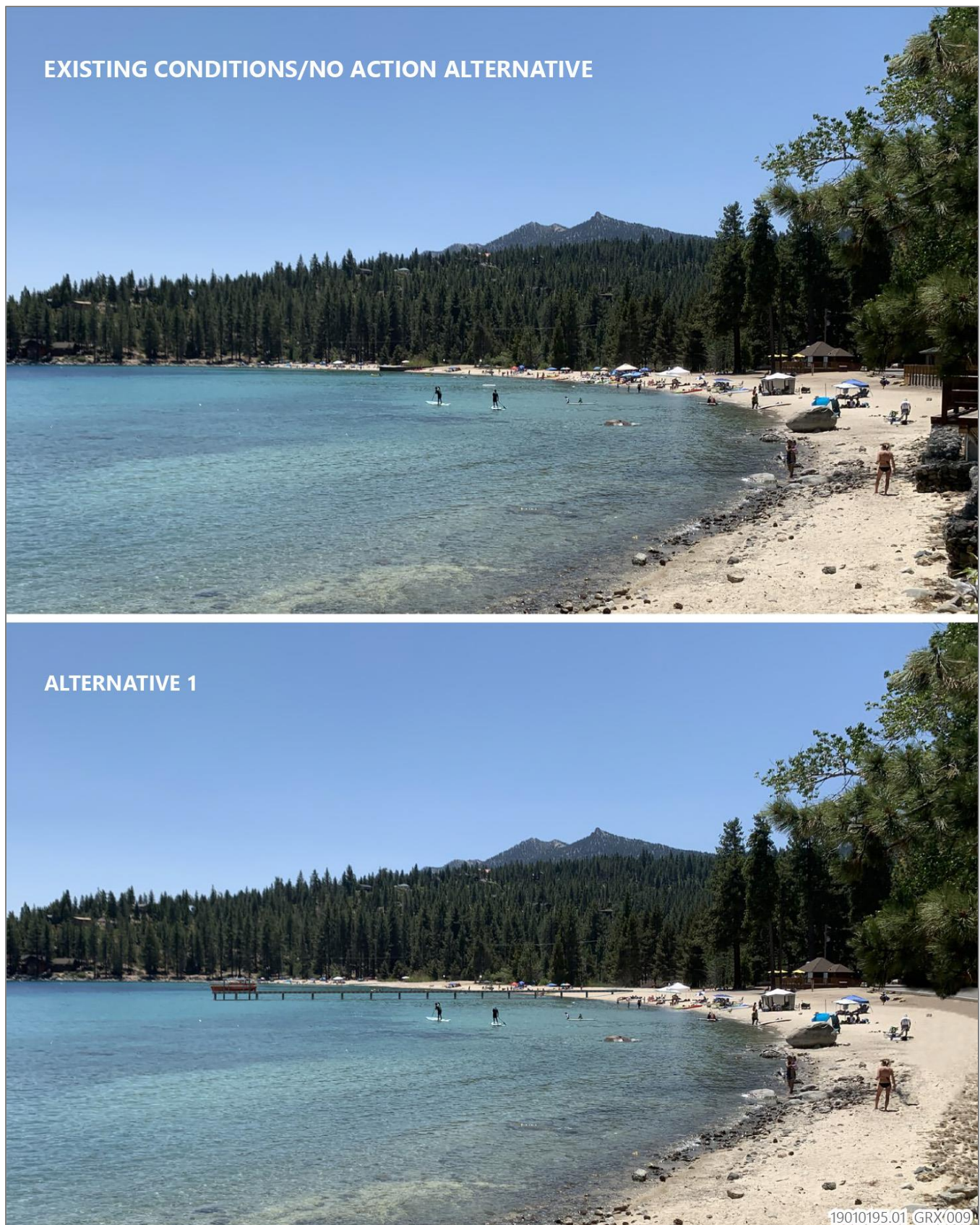
Designated Recreation Area (name and number)	Coherence	Condition	Compatibility	Design Quality	Composite Score
Meeks Bay Resort, # 23	4	4	4	3	15
Meeks Bay Campground, # 24	4	2	3	4	13

Source: TRPA 2011.

Figure 3.2-11 shows the existing and future views under Alternative 1 from Viewpoint 2 on the northern end of Meeks Bay facing south toward southern Meeks Bay and Lake Tahoe. While visitors experience views of Lake Tahoe from multiple points along the beach, this viewpoint provides for a representative assessment of changes in views affecting all viewers along the beach. This viewpoint provides views of the majority of the beach and the major features that would be visible from the beach; it provides a view of the proposed pier at an appropriate distance to view the entire structure and its visual context; and it is within the TRPA-designated scenic recreation area for Meeks Bay Resort. In the existing image, the view of Lake Tahoe is uninterrupted and intact. The lake appears flat and slightly textured and is crystal blue/green in color. The shoreline and background are dominated by conifer trees and distant mountain peaks. The quality of the existing view is good because of the open and highly intact view of the lake, it's crystal blue/green coloring, and the lack of human made structures in the viewshed.

In the simulation of Alternative 1, the new pier and fireboat are visible in the center of the simulation and are the most prominent new visible features of Alternative 1. These features are noticeable and dominate the view from the project area towards the lake. Their mass, horizontal and vertical elements rising above the lake contrast with the flat appearance of the lake. These features partially obscure the view of Lake Tahoe and reduce the coherence a of views from Meeks Bay toward Lake Tahoe.

As shown in Figure 3.2-11, the new pier and emergency services boat would substantially degrade the overall visual character quality of the view. These new features would reduce the coherence of the view by introducing new human-made features that partially block an existing unobstructed view of Lake Tahoe. This would reduce the scenic rating for the TRPA-designated scenic recreation area at Meeks Bay Resort. Therefore, the impact under Alternative 1 would be significant.



Source: Figure produced by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Figure 3.2-11 View of Meeks Bay from Viewpoint 2 under Existing Conditions/No Action Alternative and Alternative 1

Alternative 2: Restoration with Pedestrian Pier

Implementation of Alternative 2 would result in changes that could affect views toward Lake Tahoe from the project area, including from the TRPA-designated scenic recreation area Meeks Bay Resort. Although many of the proposed changes under Alternative 2 would not affect views of Lake Tahoe (see discussion above under “Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier”), Alternative 2 includes a 100-foot-long pedestrian pier in the same location at the 300-foot-long boating pier under Alternative 1. The pedestrian pier would be a floating design, with the pier deck floating directly on the surface of the water with pilings extending above the elevation of the pier deck under most lake levels.

Figure 3.2-12 shows the existing and future views under Alternative 2 from Viewpoint 2 on the northern end of Meeks Bay facing south toward southern Meeks Bay and Lake Tahoe. In the existing image, the view of Lake Tahoe is uninterrupted and intact as described above under Alternative 1. In the simulation of Alternative 2, the pedestrian pier is slightly visible toward the center of the image and contrasts with Lake Tahoe in form and color. However, the pedestrian pier does not dominate the viewshed. Although the presence of the pedestrian pier detracts from the view of Lake Tahoe, because of its small size and low-profile design, it does not substantially detract from the view and Lake Tahoe remains the dominant feature in the viewshed. Therefore, while it detracts from the scenic quality of the view, it would not reduce the scenic score for the TRPA-designed scenic recreation area Meeks Resort and the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 3: Restoration with No Pier

Alternative 3 would result in many of the same shoreline and upland features as Alternatives 1 and 2, which would not be visible in views from the project area toward Lake Tahoe. Alternative 3 would not include a pier but would include a small universally accessible paddlecraft launch structure on the south end of the bay. The facility would include a floating platform or dock of up to 30 feet in length and 20 feet in width that could move with lake level fluctuations. It would include a ramp for paddlecraft launching. It could include handrails along the launch ramp, but otherwise would not include features extending above the floating platform/dock. While the exact design of the paddlecraft launch has not been determined, it is conservatively estimated to result in up to 100 sq. ft. of visible mass when calculated consistent with the visible mass calculations for piers. The launch facility would be medium tan color, or other earth tone color that blends into the surroundings.

The view of Lake Tahoe from Viewpoint 2 under Alternative 3 would be similar to the view under existing conditions given the location of the paddlecraft structure at the south end of Meeks Bay and its small size. Although it would be visible from southern Meeks Bay looking out toward Lake Tahoe, it would be small and colored consistent with its surroundings and therefore would not substantially detract from the view or reduce the scenic score for the TRPA-designated scenic recreation area Meeks Resort. Thus, the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 4: Preferred Alternative

Alternative 4 would include the same paddlecraft launch structure as described under “Alternative 3: Restoration with No Pier” above. No other features or structures proposed under Alternative 4 would be visible in views from the project area toward Lake Tahoe. Therefore, for the reasons described above for Alternative 3, the impact under Alternative 4 would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation would be required for Alternatives 2, 3, and 4.

As described above, Alternative 1 would result in a significant impact because the new pier and emergency services boat would substantially degrade the overall visual character quality of views from the project area facing Lake Tahoe, including from the TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas at Meeks Bay Resort and Meeks Bay Campground. The new pier and fireboat would be the most prominent new visible features of Alternative 1, which would dominate the view from the project area towards the lake. Because the affected view is the localized view from the beach within the project area towards the lake, mitigation would be required to reduce or avoid degradation of views from the beach facing Lake Tahoe. While it could be feasible to incorporate additional scenic enhancement elsewhere in the project area or nearby vicinity (e.g., undergrounding utilities, vegetative screening of structures), these enhancements would not improve the degraded view from the beach and would not avoid or reduce the significant impact.



Source: Figure produced by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Figure 3.2-12 View of Meeks Bay from Viewpoint 2 under Existing Conditions/No Action Alternative and Alternative 2

Modifications to the pier design and location were considered as potential mitigation approaches. As described in Section 2.6.1, "Alternative 1 Boating Pier," in Chapter 2, the proposed pier already complies with TRPA design standards that minimize the visual prominence of the structure. These include color requirements, and open design that minimizes pilings, and limits on features extending above the pier deck unless necessary for public safety. The impacts to the view could be reduced by shortening the pier. However, as described in Section 2.6.1, the pier must be approximately 300 feet long to reach a lakebed elevation of 6,217 feet LTD, which would allow for motorized boat access during typical low water conditions. If the pier were shortened, it would not effectively provide motorized boat access, which is a primary purpose of the alternative that is intended to reduce significant impacts to motorized boating access.

Relocating the pier to another point on the beach was also considered as a mitigation approach. Alternative pier locations were considered in coordination with stakeholders during the alternative development process. Relocating the pier to the south end of the project area could result in introducing boating activity that would disrupt existing beach and campground uses and disturb nearby residents south of the project area. Relocating the pier to the north end of the project area would create access challenges and conflicts with the existing cabin uses. Relocating the pier farther north, to the north side of the Kehlet mansion would result in difficult access for visitors, alter the existing recreation uses at the Kehlet mansion, which serves as a private rental for events, and potentially degrade historic resources and be infeasible to construct. Access for this pier would require substantial grading and potential significant impacts to the other historic cabins at Meeks Bay Resort. More importantly, relocating the pier to different location on the beach would still result in degradation of views toward Lake Tahoe from the beach. With a relocated pier, the disruption to views would affect different portions of the beach to different extents than with the pier as proposed, but it would still substantially degrade views from a TRPA-designated scenic recreation area resulting in a significant impact.

As described above, there is no additional feasible mitigation that would reduce the impact of the proposed pier in Alternative 1, while still achieving the intent of Alternative 1.

Significance after Mitigation

As described above, no feasible mitigation would avoid or reduce the impact of Alternative 1 on views toward Lake Tahoe from the project area. Therefore, Alternative 1 would remain significant and unavoidable.

Impact 3.2-3: Substantially Degrade Views from SR 89

No structures would be constructed or demolished and the creek would not be restored under the No Action Alternative. Therefore, views from SR 89 would not be altered and there would be no impact under the No Action Alternative. Alternatives 1 through 4 would result in changes that would be visible from SR 89, including the updated and widened bridge, the new multi-use path and bridge, and the restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon. Because most of the changes that would occur under Alternatives 1 through 4 would be screened from view by the existing trees in the project area, and the changes that would be visible from SR 89 would be consistent with the existing landscape and not substantially alter or degrade existing views of the project area from SR 89, the impact under Alternatives 1 through 4 would be less than significant.

Views from SR 89 into the project area are limited by the dense trees throughout the project area. Only project features near SR 89 would have the potential to be visible from SR 89; therefore, only proposed non-shoreline features are evaluated under each alternative in this section.

No Action Alternative

No visible changes would be evident from SR 89 under the No Action Alternative. Therefore, there would be no changes to the scenic quality or character of the project area and views for SR 89 would not be altered. There would be no impact under the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier

The stone railings on the existing SR 89 bridge contribute to the scenic quality of human-made features along the roadway travel unit (see Figure 3.2-13). The replaced SR 89 bridge would be widened and include a new multi-use path, which would be visible to motorists. The addition of a multi-use path along and adjacent to SR 89 would not detract from the existing views from SR 89 because it would be consistent in color and marking to the existing



Source: Photograph taken by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

Stone Railing of SR 89 Bridge over Meeks Creek



Source: Photograph taken by Ascent Environmental in 2021.

View of Meeks Creek from Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4 Looking East from SR 89 Bridge

Figure 3.2-13 Bridge Photographs

highway and would provide a more orderly appearance to the existing road shoulder. Although the existing SR 89 bridge would be replaced and would be widened to include a multi-use path, the new bridge would be designed to replicate the look of the existing bridge railings. The new railings would closely mimic the appearance of the existing stone railings as shown in Figure 3.2-13. The replaced railings would be constructed of stone or materials that closely mimic the appearance of natural stone, such as molded and hand painted concrete. Thus, the bridge replacement would retain the appearance of the existing stone railings and would not substantially degrade views from SR 89.

Meeks Creek is visible briefly as motorists cross the SR 89 bridge, as shown in Figure 3.2-13. TRPA-designated Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4 is located on the SR 89 bridge and includes views into the project area facing downstream (east) along the creek corridor as shown in Figure 3.2-13. The natural appearance of the creek and surrounding vegetation contributes positively to the variety of natural scenery along SR 89 in this roadway travel unit and to the quality of Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4. The restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon would alter views of the creek and riparian vegetation as seen from SR 89. During construction, views of the creek would be degraded due to the presence of equipment, materials, and active earthwork. However, these changes would be temporary and short term. Over the long-term, the creek would continue to appear as a natural creek corridor containing native riparian vegetation. The creek channel directly downstream from SR 89 would be raised, which would increase groundwater levels and improve the diversity and vigor of riparian vegetation. Steep eroding banks would be replaced with bio-engineered bank stabilization constructed of natural materials such as willow plantings, logs, and rocks. Adjoining areas would be replanted with native riparian vegetation, which would increase the extent of riparian vegetation and contribute positively to the diversity of views of natural features from SR 89. Overall, the restored creek would continue to appear as a natural creek, which would not detract from or degrade the views from SR 89 or from Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4.

Under Alternative 1, the Meeks Bay Resort Campground, on the south side of the project area, would be reconfigured and the total number of campsites would be slightly increased or decreased as needed to accommodate an improved layout, from the current 40 sites to 36–42 sites. Over time, some campsites in the campgrounds could be replaced with alternative camping facilities such as yurts, cabin tents, or camping cabins. The number of alternative camping facilities would not exceed 50 percent of the total number of campsites. The replacement of campsites with yurts, cabin tents, or camping cabins would result in permanent facilities that would be more visible than regular tents, particularly in campsites near the SR 89. Views of the project area from SR 89 include tents and RVs using the campgrounds, overhead powerlines, a large stone wall and other fencing separating the shoulder of SR 89 from the campgrounds within the project area, and large trees. Given the presence of several non-natural features in the viewshed from SR 89 that contrast with the natural environment in color and form and reduce visual unity and intactness, the existing visual character and quality of views from SR 89 is moderate. Similarly, the yurts and tent cabins would likely be more visible than regular tents, and be a permanent presence in the campgrounds. However, they would be visually consistent with current views from SR 89 of RVs and tents in the project area and would not substantially alter views. Nor would these changes be highly evident to motorists travelling along SR 89 due to the distance of these changes from the roadway and the speed at which motorists are traveling.

Two multi-use paths would be constructed to connect the existing Tahoe Trail, which would end in the northern portion of the project area and provide access through the project area to SR 89 on the south where it would eventually connect to a proposed multi-use path along SR 89. This would include a multi-use path along SR 89 crossing Meeks Creek on the new SR 89 bridge and a new trail bridge across the restored creek located approximately 450 feet east of SR 89. Reconfiguration or improvements would be made to the existing parking areas for resource protection and to achieve more efficient use of the area, although overall quantities of parking would remain the same. These proposed changes would not be discernable to motorists traveling along SR 89 due to intervening trees, the speed at which motorists would be traveling, their focus being on the immediate vicinity of the road, and the minimal change to aesthetics that would occur.

Therefore, because most of the changes that would occur under Alternative 1 would be screened from view by the existing trees in the project area, and that the changes that would be visible from SR 89 would not substantially alter or degrade existing views of the project area from SR 89 or reduce the Forest Service MSI rating, the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 2: Restoration with Pedestrian Pier

The replacement of the existing SR 89 bridge and restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon would be similar to what would occur under Alternative 1. The only difference would be that two separate bicycle and pedestrian bridges would be constructed adjacent to the east side of the SR 89 bridge as opposed to one of the multi-use paths being accommodated along the SR 89 bridge. The separate bicycle and pedestrian bridge closest to SR 89 would introduce an additional human-made element into the view from SR 89 and TRPA-designated Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4. The second bicycle and pedestrian bridge would be located approximately 450 feet east of SR 89, far enough from SR 89 that it would likely not be visible. The addition of the bicycle and pedestrian bridge closest to SR 89 could create additional roadway distractions, which have the potential to detract from scenic quality. However, both bridges would be designed consistent with USFS and TRPA design standards, which require earth tone colors, prohibit reflective materials, and minimize the visual prominence of roadside structures. Scenic threshold monitoring conducted by TRPA in 2019 evaluated several similar bicycle and pedestrian paths with fencing, including north of the project area in Roadway Travel Unit 7 (Meeks Bay), in Roadway Travel Unit 26 (Sand Harbor), as well as a new multi-use path and bridge across Madden Creek in Roadway Travel Unit 11 (Homewood). In all cases, this monitoring determined that the new paths and bridge were clearly visible from the road but did not detract from scenic quality because they were consistent with expected facilities along roadways and complied with relevant design standards. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the separate pedestrian and bicycle bridges proposed in Alternative 2 would not detract from scenic quality because they would be consistent with the same design standards.

As described in Section 2.7.2, "Alternative 2 Campgrounds," the campgrounds would also be similar to Alternative 1. The Meeks Bay Resort Campground, on the north side of the project area, would remain similar to its current condition with minor improvements as described under Alternative 1. The Meeks Bay Campground, on the south side of the project area would be reconfigured to provide additional privacy between campsites. The total number of campsites in this campground would be slightly increased or decreased as needed to accommodate an improved layout, from the current 40 sites to 36–42 sites. Like Alternative 1, some campsites in both campgrounds could be replaced with alternative camping facilities such as yurts, cabin tents, or camping cabins to provide a greater diversity of camping options. In addition, parking and circulation improvements under Alternative 2 would be similar to Alternative 1, and it would include a similar multi-use path and creek crossing as described above under Alternative 1. Therefore, because most of the changes that would occur under Alternative 2 are the same as or similar to Alternative 1, they would be screened from view by the existing trees in the project area, and the changes that would be visible from SR 89 would not substantially alter or degrade the Forest Service MSI rating, or existing views of the project area from SR 89 or Scenic Resource 7.4 for the same reasons described for Alternative 1. Therefore, the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 3: Restoration with No Pier

The replacement of the existing SR 89 bridge and restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon would be the same as Alternative 2. As with Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would result in the same multi-use paths and bridges, and would result in the same number of campsites that could be converted to alternative camping; however, the Meeks Bay Resort and Meeks Bay campgrounds would be expanded and reconfigured, for a total increase of 7 to 22 campsites in the project area. The Meeks Bay Campground would also be partially relocated away from SR 89 in the southwest corner of the project area to reduce noise in the campground. Overall, parking capacity would be increased by 14 spaces. On the south side of the project area, parking would be expanded to include 80 stalls in a new parking area near the entrance to the Meeks Bay campground in the southwest corner of the project area. A drop-off area near the beach and day-use area would be provided, which would include up to 10 handicap parking spaces.

Although there would be additional camping and parking expansions under Alternative 3, camping and parking facilities already exist in the project area and the potential increase of up to 22 campsites and 14 parking spaces would not substantially alter views of the project area from SR 89. Furthermore, the parking area would be screened by an existing wall along SR 89 and would be consistent with existing views of parked vehicles along this section of SR 89. For this reason and the reasons described above for Alternatives 1 and 2, the impact would be less than significant.

Alternative 4: Preferred Alternative

The replacement of the existing SR 89 bridge that would be widened to include a multi-use path, the installation of a bicycle and pedestrian bridge for the second multi-use path, and restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon would be the same as Alternative 1. As with Alternative 1, Alternative 4 would include a multi-use path adjacent to SR 89, which would not detract from the existing views from SR 89 and would be consistent in color and marking to the existing highway. The Meeks Bay Resort Campground on the north side of the project area would remain similar to its current condition with minor improvements as described under Alternative 1. The Meeks Bay Campground on the south side of the project area would be reconfigured to provide additional privacy between campsites. The total number of campsites in this campground would be slightly increased or decreased as needed to accommodate an improved layout, from the current 40 sites to 36–42 sites. Like Alternative 3, overall parking capacity under Alternative 4 would be increased by 14 spaces. At Meeks Bay Resort, parking capacity would remain the same as under existing conditions (300 spaces). On the south side of the project area, parking would be expanded to include 90 stalls in an expanded parking area near the same location as the existing parking lot between the campground and day-use area.

Although there would be camping and parking expansions and reconfigurations under Alternative 4 relative to existing conditions, camping and parking facilities already exist in the project area and the potential changes would be mostly screened from view by existing trees and a wall along SR 89. These changes would not substantially alter views of the project area from SR 89 or Roadway Scenic Resource 7.4. For this reason, and the reasons described above for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, the impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.

Impact 3.2-4: Degrade the Visual Character of the Project Area

No facilities would be constructed or demolished, and no visible changes would occur under the No Action Alternative; accordingly, there would be no changes to the scenic quality or character of the project area. Therefore, there would be no impact under the No Action Alternative.

Under Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4, several proposed changes would improve the visual character and quality of the project area, including the restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon, removal and replacement of shoreline erosion control features with natural-appearing erosion prevention features. Other features of the alternatives would be consistent with the existing visual character of the area, such as parking and campsite reconfigurations. The shoreline structures proposed in the action alternatives are common along the Lake Tahoe shoreline and therefore, would not substantially alter the visual character of the area or reduce the Forest Service MSI rating. The impact of Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4 would be less than significant.

No Action Alternative

No structures or facilities in the project area would change under the No Action Alternative; accordingly, there would be no changes to the scenic quality or character of the project area. Therefore, there would be no impact under the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier

Implementation of Alternative 1 would result in several changes that could affect the visual character of the project area. As described under "Scenic Recreation Areas" in Section 3.2.2, "Environmental Setting," above, Meeks Resort and Meeks Campground are TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas and are rated as having high scenic integrity under the Forest Service Scenic Management System. From Meeks Bay Resort, views focus out toward the openness of the lake, but behind the beach the forest and various structures restrict views. In the TRPA Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation scenic recreation areas inventory, it is noted that development on the southern peninsula has not been entirely sensitive to the natural character of the bay and additional development could alter it further. Although development for recreation uses at the resort itself has been intensive, the natural environment continues to dominate.

The barrack-like cabins and associated retaining wall sited close to the lake's edge are called out specifically as detracting from the scenic quality of Meeks Bay Resort (TRPA 1993).

From Meeks Bay Campground, because the campsites are located in the forested portion of the area, viewing distances are short and no significant viewsheds are visible. The camping area is separated from the beach by an open field and a mature stand of conifers. Two parking areas are located in this space, once sited in the trees and the other just outside the stand of trees in the open space. The beach itself is a wide, deep, and flat area covered with white sand. The facilities and natural features of the Meeks Bay Campground are somewhat limited. The beach, though visually appealing, is not distinctive. Views are of good scenic quality and the sheltered enclosure of the bay adds to the uniqueness of the viewshed. It is noted that care must be taken in the development of the two peninsulas to retain the dominant natural setting (TRPA 1993).

Recommendations from the 1993 Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation for preserving the scenic quality of Meeks Bay Resort and include using materials that blend into the surrounding landscape and redesign of the parking areas and pedestrian circulation to eliminate existing visual clutter. In addition, recommendations for mitigation of the visual impact of the Meeks Bay Resort multi-unit structures at the north end of the beach (TRPA 1993).

Recommendations for preserving the scenic quality of Meeks Bay Campground include landscaping several areas to better integrate them with the surrounding forest, preserving existing trees as a visual screen between structures and major public use areas, structures should not be allowed to rise above the forest canopy, any new development should be set back from the lake's edge to preserve its natural appearance, use of materials that blend into the surrounding environment should be encouraged, and policies should be established to require any new development to revegetate all slopes exposed by grading (TRPA 1993).

Alternative 1 includes the removal of the two motel style cabin units in the Meeks Bay Resort and replacement by new cabins farther inland (refer to Figure 3.2-5). The new cabins would be dark brown in color and their form would have vertical elements, consistent with the surrounding trees. The relocated cabins would blend better with the dense forested areas along the shoreline than under existing conditions and would not dominate views of the beach like the existing cabins. Overall, this element of Alternative 1 would improve the visual character of the project area by relocating and redesigning the cabins to visually blend with the natural surroundings, would contribute to maintaining the high MSI rating, and would be consistent with the recommendations for preserving the scenic quality of Meeks Bay Resort in the 1993 Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation (TRPA 1993). Alternative 1 also includes restoration of Meeks Creek and removal and replacement of shoreline erosion control features with natural-appearing erosion prevention features such as boulders and native vegetation. These features of Alternative 1 would also improve the overall visual character of the project area by using natural-appearing materials and returning the landscape to a more natural condition consistent with recommendations from the Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation and a high MSI rating.

In addition, under Alternative 1, a new 300-foot-long boating pier would be developed and the Meeks Bay Resort Campground and Meeks Bay Campground, would be reconfigured and the total number of campsites would be slightly increased or decreased as needed to accommodate an improved layout.. Over time, some campsites in the campgrounds could be replaced with alternative camping facilities such as yurts, cabin tents, or camping cabins. Two multi-use paths would be constructed to connect the existing Meeks Bay Bike Trail, which ends in the northern portion of the project area and would provide access along the road and through the project area to SR 89 on the south where it would eventually connect to a proposed multi-use path along SR 89. Reconfiguration or improvements would be made to the existing parking areas for resource protection and to achieve more efficient use of the area, although overall quantities of parking would remain the same. In addition, the existing SR 89 bridge over Meeks Creek would be replaced and widened to accommodate the new multi-use path along the road and the multi-use path through the project area would include construction of a trail bridge over Meeks Creek. Campsite and vehicle/pedestrian reconfigurations would not substantially alter the visual character of the project area because the reconfigurations would not result in any substantial changes to the locations or quantities of available parking or campsites and would be visually consistent with the existing condition of the area. The new SR 89 bridge would be designed to replicate the look of the existing bridge, including the stone railings as shown in Figure 3.2-13, keeping with the existing visual character. The new trail bridge would introduce a new human made feature into the project

area. However, that bridge would be consistent with TRPA and USFS design standards, which would minimize contrasts with the natural environment, would be offset by the removal of hum-made features at the marina, and would be consistent with the existing type of level of development at the site. The 300-foot-long boating pier would alter the visual character along the shoreline by adding a new recreation element and visual mass in Meeks Bay. It would be a visually prominent feature that would degrade views of the lake. However, piers are common around Lake Tahoe and are consistent with the types of recreation activities that occur in the project area; therefore, the presence of a new boating pier at Meeks Bay would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the overall area or change the Forest Service MSI rating.

Given that several of the proposed changes under Alternative 1 would improve the visual character and quality of the area and are consistent with the recommendations for the TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas, and others would be consistent with the existing visual character of the area, the impact under Alternative 1 would be less than significant.

Alternative 2: Restoration with Pedestrian Pier

As with Alternative 1, this alternative would involve removal of the marina and full restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon, campground alterations involving a slight increase or decrease in total number of campsites and some replacement with alternative camping facilities, parking and circulation improvements, and SR 89 bridge replacement. However, as discussed under Impact 3.2-3, this alternative would include two multi-use paths over Meeks Creek. As described above under "Alternative 1: Restoration with Boating Pier," these proposed changes would either improve the visual character and quality of the area and would be consistent with the recommendations for the TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas or would at least be consistent with the existing visual character of the area.

Alternative 2 includes a new, floating 100-foot pedestrian pier. It would be a medium tan color or other earth tone, consistent with TRPA design standards. The pedestrian pier would change the visual character of the area by adding a new recreation element that is visually prominent in Meeks Bay. However, piers are common around Lake Tahoe and are consistent with the types of recreation activities that occur in the project area; therefore, the presence of a new pedestrian pier at Meeks Bay would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the overall area or change the Forest Service MSI rating.

Given that several of the proposed changes under Alternative 2 would improve the visual character and quality of the area and others would be consistent with the existing visual character of the area, the impact under Alternative 2 would be less than significant.

Alternative 3: Restoration with No Pier

Under Alternative 3, the same restoration of Meeks Creek and lagoon that would occur under Alternatives 1 and 2 would be implemented, and similar alterations to campgrounds and parking and circulation would occur. This alternative would include two multi-use paths across Meeks Creek with one bridge located near SR 89 and the second bridge located more internally to the project area. Overall, a total of 7–22 campsites would be added, and parking capacity would be increased by 14 spaces. Alternative 3 would also include a non-motorized launch platform or ramp in the southern portion of the project area. The facility would include a floating platform or dock of up to 30 feet in length that could move with lake level fluctuations. It could include handrails along the launch ramp, but otherwise would not include features extending above the floating platform/dock. The launch facility would be dark to medium tan color, or other earth tone that blends into the surroundings. All of the components of Alternative 3 would be visually similar to existing conditions and consistent with the existing visual character of the project area and the existing Forest Service MSI rating. The paddlecraft launch facility would be small and would visually blend in with its surroundings. The restoration components of all alternatives would improve the visual character of the Meeks Creek area. Therefore, the impact to visual character under Alternative 3 would be less than significant.

Alternative 4: Preferred Alternative

As with Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, this alternative would involve removal of the marina and full restoration of the creek, lagoon, and barrier beach. Alternative 4 would include two multi-use paths through the project area with one path following the road and incorporated into the new SR 89 bridge and on path traversing the creek on a separate bridge. Like Alternative 3, it would not include a pier but would include a small universally accessible paddlecraft

launch structure on the south end of the bay. As with Alternative 1, this alternative would remove the two motel-style cabins in the Meeks Bay Resort inland and replace them with three smaller cabin units farther inland while maintaining the existing overnight visitor capacity. This alternative would not relocate the parking on the south end of the project area, but it would expand parking capacity by 14 spaces. Meeks Creek restoration and the relocation of the motel style cabins farther from the shoreline would improve the visual character and quality of the project area by returning Meeks Creek to a more natural condition and improving shoreline views by moving the cabins farther inland. Like the other action alternatives, parking, circulation, and campground reconfigurations would not change the existing visual character of the area because visually, the changes would be consistent with existing conditions and existing Forest Service MSI rating. Therefore, the impact to visual character under Alternative 4 would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

While scenic effects are generally limited to a particular viewshed depending on the visibility of specific features, localized effects on multiple viewsheds can combine to affect the cumulative scenic quality. To maintain scenic values in the Tahoe Basin, as mandated by the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact, the TRPA environmental thresholds include scenic standards for roadways, the shoreline, and public recreation areas and bike trails. As described in the most recent Threshold Evaluation (TRPA 2019), all scenic threshold categories are at or somewhat better than the target and are either trending toward moderate improvement or show little to no change. Thus, while there are localized scenic concerns in some portions of the Tahoe Basin, there is not an existing adverse cumulative effect associated with scenic quality in the Tahoe Basin. Of the cumulative projects identified in Table 3-2, only the Shoreline Plan could combine with the project to affect views from the project area. As documented in the Shoreline Plan EIS (TRPA 2018), buildout of the shoreline plan would not have significant effects on the scenic quality of the Lake Tahoe Basin due to required design standards, scenic offsets, and mitigation measures. In addition, there is little opportunity for additional shoreline structures to be developed within the same viewshed as the project because the viewshed is primarily public land and nearby private parcels mostly already include piers and would not be eligible for additional shoreline structures. As described in Section 3.2.3, "Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures," Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would not degrade the scenic quality ratings for the roadway or shoreline unit, or the TRPA-designated scenic recreation areas, and would therefore not contribute to a cumulative effect on scenic resources. Alternative 1 would result in a significant impact to views of Lake Tahoe from Meeks Bay, which could degrade the TRPA scenic recreation area threshold for the Meeks Bay Resort. However, there is not an existing adverse cumulative condition related to the scenic quality of recreation areas and other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects would not degrade the scenic resources within the same viewshed. Therefore, the scenic impact of Alternative 1 would not combine with other reasonably foreseeable projects to create a new adverse cumulative condition. For these reasons, the action alternatives would have a less than cumulatively considerable impact on scenic resources.

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