

1.10 Conservation Element

The Compact requires that the Regional Plan include “a conservation plan for the preservation, development, utilization, and management of the scenic and other natural resources within the basin, including but not limited to soils, shoreline and submerged lands, scenic corridors along transportation routes, open spaces, recreational and historical facilities.” The Conservation Element addresses this requirement and consists of subelements for vegetation, wildlife, fisheries, soils, shorezone, scenic resources, open space, SEZ, cultural resources, and energy.

1.10.1 Vegetation Subelement

Overview

Vegetation is a Threshold program area in the Regional Plan. The vegetation of the Tahoe Region is diverse and ranges from shoreline plant communities at the Lake’s edge to high-elevation subalpine plant communities. These plant communities provide a variety of ecosystem functions including wildlife habitat, soil stabilization, and nutrient cycling. Plant communities also provide a scenic backdrop for the myriad outdoor activities enjoyed in the Region. The Vegetation Subelement provides guidance for managing the vegetation resources of the Region.

The five goals and 22 policies of this Subelement describe how to:

- provide for a wide mix and the increased diversity of plant communities;
- maintain and restore wetlands and other unique ecosystems;
- protect sensitive plant species and uncommon plant communities;
- increase the amount of forest land in later stages of stand development, including old growth; and
- retain appropriate amounts of coarse woody debris and snags in forests.

The direction provided is intended to result in attainment and maintenance of the vegetation Thresholds.

Regulations regarding vegetation management are primarily presented in the Resource Management portion of the following Code Chapters:

- 65 (Vegetation Management During Construction)
- 71 (Tree Removal), 73 (Livestock Grazing)
- 74 (Vegetation Protection and Management)
- 75 (Sensitive and Uncommon Plant Protection and Fire Hazard)
- 77 (Revegetation)

Management provisions for vegetation include:

- minimizing disturbance to native vegetation
- protecting sensitive plant species and uncommon plant communities
- reducing forest fuels
- revegetating disturbed areas
- requiring the use of appropriate native and adapted plant species for landscaping

- and revegetation
- requiring that vegetation be protected during construction activities
- requiring adherence to guidelines for tree removal, prescribed burning, and livestock grazing

Alternative 1—Continuation of Existing Regional Plan

Summary

Alternative 1, the “No Action” Alternative, assumes the continuation of the Goals, Policies, regulations, and programs of the 1987 Regional Plan, including those in place for vegetation.

Goals and Policies

No changes are proposed to this Subelement under Alternative 1.

Implementation Measures

No changes are proposed to this Subelement under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2

Summary

Under Alternative 2, the Goals of the 1987 Regional Plan would be reorganized as recommended through the Pathway process. The recommendations promote natural ecological processes occurring on the landscape, forests thinned of hazardous fuels, and an urban landscape comprised of native vegetation (desired conditions for healthy vegetation).

The new regulations proposed under this alternative were developed by the Pathway Vegetation Technical Working Group to:

- provide additional protection for native vegetation
- create vegetation management guidelines that complement federal, state, and local defensible space requirements
- provide assistance to the public in choosing appropriate plants
- prevent the spread of invasive plant species

This alternative relies on regulations and people’s interest in and willingness to protect the natural environment.

Goals and Policies

The Goals would be reorganized to reflect the five desired conditions for the vegetation Threshold developed as part of the Pathway Vegetation Technical Working Group’s collaboration, addressing healthy forests and vegetation, plant communities of concern, special-status species, hazardous fuels, and urban vegetation.

Under a new goal related to healthy forests and vegetation, replacing the existing goal of increasing plant diversity, new policies would be added to promote diverse vegetation development stages and types based on natural disturbance regimes and natural ecological processes; these policies would encompass the policies in the 1987 Regional Plan related to pine and fir age structure and forest pattern. An additional new policy would address the threat of introduction and spread of invasive weed species. Existing policies to promote the use and conservation of native plant species and to minimize disturbance to existing native vegetation while reducing the risks of fire and erosion would be retained. The goals regarding late-seral and old-growth forest vegetation and coarse woody debris would be encompassed by the healthy forests and vegetation goal, and the respective policies would be moved under this goal.

Two of the existing policies related to managing forests for characteristics of later stages of stand development would be removed because they would be covered under the new policy promoting natural ecological processes and diverse development stages on forested lands; these policies specifically required that prescriptions be prepared on a stand-by-stand basis and stated that prescribed fire is the preferred means to reduce fire hazard in stands in later stages of stand development. The intent of the Regional Plan Update is to emphasize habitat connectivity rather than fragmentation; therefore, the existing policy of maximizing edge zones between plant communities would be deleted.

Terminology would be changed under Alternative 2. The terms “uncommon plant communities” and “sensitive plants” would be changed to “plant communities of concern” and “special-status plant species,” respectively. (The concepts would not change, only the names.) New goals for plant communities of concern and special-status plants would reflect the desired conditions developed by Pathway. Existing policies to identify, protect, and restore these plant species and communities and to manage, restore, or expand riparian and wetland communities for the beneficial uses of passive recreation, groundwater recharge, nutrient catchment, and use as wildlife habitat would be retained.

A new goal and associated policies would be added to promote reduction in hazardous fuels and creation of defensible space. The final report of the Bi-State Blue Ribbon Fire Commission (Emergency California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission 2008), convened in the aftermath of the June 2007 Angora Fire, recommended, and the agencies of the Tahoe Region adopted, important policies and measures to more aggressively and comprehensively address forest fuels reduction and management of private parcels for defensible space. Hazardous fuels provisions would be incorporated into the Regional Plan Update to prevent conflict with these and other agencies’ fuels policies and requirements.

Lastly, a new goal and associated policies would be added to promote the use of native, water- and nutrient-efficient, fire-resistant, and noninvasive vegetation in urban areas.

Implementation Measures

Alternative 2 would include the following new measures to implement the new vegetation-related policies described above:

- Maintain and make available to the public a list of plant species appropriate for use on backshore sites.
- Require projects to implement measures, such as noxious-weed risk assessments and weed prevention BMPs, to prevent the spread of noxious and invasive weeds during project activities (add to Reserved Chapter 76).
- Maintain and make available to the public a list of invasive, noxious, and nuisance species along with appropriate methods to prevent the introduction and slow the spread of these species.
- Modify the provisions which protect native vegetation to allow creation of defensible space and reduce fire hazards (Section 30.14 Soil and Vegetation Protection Standards and Section 65.2.A Vegetation Protection During Construction).
- Require projects to salvage and reuse native topsoil (Chapters 65 Vegetation Protection During Construction and 77 Revegetation).
- Extend protection for trees retained in a project footprint from the dripline to the critical root zone (Chapter 65).
- Amend revegetation guidelines to require that whenever possible all seed and propagules used in revegetation projects originate from sources within the Lake Tahoe Basin or within 50 miles of the Lake Tahoe Basin and within 1000 vertical feet of the project elevation. (Chapter 77.4.B Revegetation Plans).
- Prohibit lawn in the backshore or on natural sandy beaches and dunes located landward of the backshore (Section 30.7 Landscaping Standards).
- Allow tree removal to accelerate development of old growth characteristics to improve structural diversity of forest stands (Section 71.5E Tree Removal For Enhancement of Forest Health and Diversity).

Alternative 3

Summary

As in Alternative 2, the new regulations proposed under this alternative were developed by the Pathway Vegetation Technical Working Group. Because of the increased development potential of Alternative 3 and the land use pattern it entails (lower density leading to higher land disturbance per resident), this alternative requires additional regulations for the control of invasive plant species.

Under Alternative 3, all landowners would be required to eliminate noxious weeds on their property, and the sale or use of invasive species would be prohibited. Rather than relying on public utility districts to regulate the area of irrigated turf, a coverage standard similar to that adopted by the Incline Village General Improvement District would be enforced to conserve water and reduce fertilizer use.

Goals and Policies

The Goals and Policies proposed for Alternative 3 would be the same as those proposed for Alternative 2.

Implementation Measures

In addition to those in Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would include the following new measures:

- Require owners to eliminate weeds identified on the Lake Tahoe Basin Weed Coordinating Group (LTBWCG) Priority Weeds List from their property (add to Reserved Chapter 76).
- Use BMP evaluations and certifications to determine whether all four approved vegetation criteria have been met (i.e., low water use, low fertilizer use, native, and fire resistant) (Chapter 25, BMP Requirements).
- Establish a maximum area for lawns as a percentage of the non-covered area of a parcel (Chapter 30, Design Standards).
- Require landscapers, public agencies, developers, and plant vendors to use or sell only noninvasive vegetation and plants appropriate for each site (Section 30.7 Landscaping Standards, Chapter 77 Revegetation).

Alternative 4

Summary

As in Alternatives 2 and 3, the new regulations proposed under this alternative were developed by the Pathway Vegetation Technical Working Group. Alternative 4 would require more regulatory oversight than other alternatives regarding the use and sale of vegetation and the regulation of pesticide, herbicide, and fertilizer use.

Goals and Policies

The Goals and Policies proposed under this alternative would be the same as those proposed for Alternatives 2 and 3.

Implementation Measures

In addition to those included in Alternatives 2 and 3, Alternative 4 would include the following new measures:

- Develop a numerical measurement system to evaluate vegetation on a per-parcel basis. The system would need to consider defensible space, watershed protection, privacy screening, deviation from natural vegetation condition, etc. Establish a numerical level below which a parcel's vegetation is considered out of compliance and is required to be restored to acceptable levels (Chapter 25, BMP Requirements).
- Restrict use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers by homeowners (Section 30.7 Landscaping Standards).

- Require landscapers, public agencies, developers, and plant vendors to use or sell only locally sourced native vegetation and plants appropriate for each site (Section 30.7 Landscaping Standards, Chapter 77 Revegetation).

