

1.10.5 Scenic Subelement

Overview

Scenic quality is the signature natural resource of the Tahoe Basin. The magnificent lake set in a forested, mountainous environment creates a unique combination of visual elements and exceptionally high aesthetic values. The maintenance of the Basin's scenic quality depends largely on careful regulation of the type, location, and intensity of land uses in the Tahoe Region.

Scenic quality is a TRPA Threshold program area. The Scenic Subelement of the Regional Plan sets out Goals, Policies, and Implementation Measures intended to achieve scenic quality Thresholds and maintain them through appropriate land use practices, restoration, and enhancement efforts.

The regulations in the Subelement aim to protect the views and natural features of the Tahoe Basin. Protected resources include, but are not limited to, views of the lake; the mountain backdrop and ridgelines; the natural landscape; and unique features, such as sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, and rock formations, including Cave Rock. Since 1971, the condition of the scenic resources has been described and interpreted in extensive inventories of past and present conditions (as viewed from major roadways, bikeways, recreation areas, and Lake Tahoe itself).

The 1987 Regional Plan includes three numerical scenic threshold standards that are used to maintain scenic quality in the Tahoe Basin. These standards are based on scenic units or use areas and apply to travel route ratings, scenic-quality ratings, and scenic quality of visual resources as seen from major public recreation areas and designated bicycle trails. Although there is some degree of overlap among these threshold standards, each is oriented toward a different element of the landscape.

The first scenic threshold standard, *travel route ratings*, is used to analyze and evaluate the complete perceptual experience of traveling on the main travel routes. These routes include federal and state highways and the Pioneer Trail; for boaters and other aquatic recreationists, the "route" is the nearshore of Lake Tahoe, from which the landscape can be readily seen. The standard is to maintain or improve on the 1982 travel route ratings.

For the second threshold standard, *scenic-quality ratings*, numerical ratings are used to evaluate the relative scenic quality of specific views of the natural landscape and resources from the Lake and the main highways. The ratings apply to 184 mapped scenic resources (i.e., subcomponents) visible from the Lake and 202 mapped resources visible from the highways. The ratings are a "nondegradation" numerical standard (i.e., a standard requiring that any project's implementation not result in reduced scenic quality when compared with the adopted threshold).

In 1993, TRPA identified 37 recreation areas—parks, beaches, picnic areas, campgrounds, five alpine ski areas, and designated bicycle trails—for inclusion in the third scenic threshold standard, *scenic quality of visual resources as seen from major public recreation areas and bicycle trails*. The subcomponents that make up these resources are views of the Lake and natural landscape from the recreation area; special landscape features, such as streams, beaches, and rock formations that add interest

and variety to the views; and human-made features of the recreation area that influence the viewing experience. The threshold is nondegradation for all mapped resources visible from and in identified recreation areas.

The two goals identified in the 1987 Regional Plan are to maintain and restore the scenic qualities of the natural-appearing landscape and to improve the level of public access to Tahoe views. Six policies exist to achieve these goals. The recurring themes are to ensure that proposed development will not have degrading impacts on identified scenic resources and to implement projects and programs that enhance views of the Lake at publicly accessible viewpoints.

Scenic regulations in the Basin are applied through the guidance of the following: Thresholds, Goals and Policies, Code, Design Review Guidelines (described in the Community Design Subelement of the Land Use Element), and the Scenic Quality Improvement Program (SQIP). Requirements in the Goals and Policies and the Code cover site design, building height, bulk and scale, landscaping, lighting, and signage; these standards are also covered in the Community Design Subelement.

Specific design standards that implement community design goals and policies were adopted as part of the Code (Chapter 22 establishes maximum height standards for buildings and other structures, and Chapter 30 includes applicable standards for scenic quality, shoreland development, site design, and building design).

Alternative 1

Summary

Alternative 1, the “No Action” Alternative, assumes the continuation of the goals, policies, regulations, and programs of the 1987 Regional Plan for Scenic Resources. The existing programs (i.e., shoreland ordinances, SQIP, Design Review Guidelines) would continue to be implemented for all projects that affect scenic resources.

Goals and Policies

No changes are proposed for this Subelement under Alternative 1.

Implementation Measures

No changes are proposed for this Subelement under Alternative 1.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4

Summary

For the Scenic Subelement, Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 each contain the same Goals, Policies, and Implementation Measures. The rationale for this is that scenic quality can be affected by any development pattern, regardless of intensity or type. It is worth noting that Community Design and Shorezone regulations also require the built environment to be compatible with the natural one and also serve to promote scenic threshold attainment.

In each of these “action” alternatives, the Scenic Subelement of the Regional Plan would be reorganized to reflect the addition of a desired condition for scenic resources related to the natural environment, as developed as part of the Pathway process. The existing Goals and Policies would be amended for clarity and intent. The focus would remain on protecting natural scenic resources, and new policies and implementation measures would be added to promote and enhance them.

Goals and Policies

Six new policies would be added to enhance scenic resource protection and maintenance. As stated above, the existing Goals and Policies would be amended while retaining their focus. The new goal would be to improve scenic quality developed through the Pathway process; the three new policies proposed under this goal would focus on achieving the adopted thresholds, ensuring the continued protection of scenic quality, and requiring projects to be in harmony with the dominant natural landscape.

Under the existing goal to maintain the natural-appearing environment, a new policy would require that all projects located in areas in non-attainment units and areas targeted for scenic restoration implement the recommendations for scenic resources outlined in the SQIP.

Under the existing goal to provide publicly accessible views of the Lake, two new policies would be added. The first policy relates to protecting the views of the natural landscape by requiring views of ridgelines and Lake Tahoe from transportation corridors, public recreation or gathering areas; it also requires that the shoreline be protected. The second policy relates to protecting public viewsheds and natural vegetation along scenic highway corridors by encouraging the consolidation of parking lots.

Revisions to Community Design and Land Use Goals and Policies are also proposed because of their direct relationship to achieving scenic-resource goals. The revisions focus on reinforcing incentive- and place-based values and themes, such as dark-sky standards, revision to existing height standards to allow additional height and bulk in mixed-use areas, and regulations on the design of telecommunication towers. These revisions are discussed in further detail in the respective Subelements.

Implementation Measures

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would include the following new measures to implement the new scenic-related policies listed above:

- Design standards in Code Chapter 30 would be amended for site design to protect ridgeline views, views of natural features, and lake views from scenic highway corridors, public gathering areas, and the shoreline of Lake Tahoe; and
- Design standards in Code Chapter 30 would be amended to require the consolidation and co-location of parking lots visible from the scenic corridors.

