

## **3      AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE ALTERNATIVES**

### **3.1      APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

This environmental analysis has been prepared to evaluate the environmental impacts of the five Regional Plan Update alternatives under consideration. Because of the broad geography and long timeframe to which the Regional Plan Update applies and the policy-oriented nature of the Plan’s guidance, the EIS environmental impact analysis is prepared at a policy level: that is, it contains a general analysis of each resource area with a level of detail and degree of specificity commensurate with that of the Regional Plan itself. The EIS focuses on the potential effects of policies, which—because they are to be implemented through later site-specific projects over the duration of the Plan—are inherently less precise than analyses that evaluate implementation programs or specific projects.

#### **3.1.1      NEED FOR FUTURE PROJECT-LEVEL ANALYSIS**

The EIS is not intended to take the place of project-specific environmental documentation that will be needed to implement actions anticipated to occur following approval of the Regional Plan Update. This EIS, consistent with its policy-level purpose, analyzes the environmental implications of the policies identified in each of the alternatives and provides the information necessary for the TRPA Governing Board to select the alternative that would best achieve TRPA’s regional objectives. As such, the EIS evaluates impacts of the Regional Plan Update alternatives at a policy level. It is not possible to speculate on the specific type, number, location, or timing of future projects that would be proposed over the Regional Plan period, nor on the precise nature or degree of environmental impacts associated with such projects. It is nonetheless understood that, consistent with the proposed Regional Plan goals, policies, and implementation measures, threshold standard attainment would be accelerated and/or realized through future projects. These later projects may include development, redevelopment, commercial and tourist uses, transit and transportation, recreation, public/quasi-public facilities, and environmental restoration.

For future projects that are not otherwise exempt or qualified exempt, TRPA will review those site-specific projects to determine the appropriate level of environmental review: initial environmental checklist (IEC), environmental assessment (EA), and/or environmental impact statement (EIS), as appropriate. Specific regulations that pertain to such analyses include Article VII, “Environmental Impact Statements,” of the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact; Article V, “Project Review,” and Article VI, “Environmental Impact Statements,” of the Rules of Procedure; and Chapter 3, “Environmental Documentation,” of the Code of Ordinances. For projects that have the potential to result in significant effects on the environment, TRPA would—in coordination with other federal, state, or local agency with jurisdiction by law, or specialized expertise with respect to environmental impacts—conduct project-level, site-specific analysis to identify adverse effects and develop feasible mitigation measures that must be implemented to minimize any such effects.

As a separate process and prior to approving any project subject to environmental review requirements, TRPA would, in accordance with Chapter 4, “Required Findings,” of the Code, make written findings supported by substantial evidence in the record that the project is consistent with, and would not adversely affect, implementation of the Regional Plan, Goals and Policies, plan maps, Code, and other plans and programs; that it would not cause threshold standards to be exceeded; and that it would meet or exceed applicable federal, state, or local air and water quality standards.

In sum, all of TRPA's existing procedures requiring environmental review of projects to determine their potential for significant impacts, feasible and effective mitigation to address those impacts, findings pertaining to project effects on threshold standard attainment, and other environmental safeguards remain in place and would continue to ensure that proposed projects are fully evaluated prior to approval and implementation of later site-specific projects.

### 3.1.2 CONTENTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS SECTIONS

Discussion of each technical topic is contained in Sections 3.2 through 3.15. Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts, contains a discussion of impacts in the context of other reasonably foreseeable plans, programs, and development projects in the Region that may contribute to cumulative impacts.

The issues evaluated in Chapter 3 include environmental topics potentially affected by the Regional Plan Update alternatives. Sections 3.2 through 3.15 of this EIS are organized into the following major subsections:

- ▲ **Introduction** provides introductory text pertaining to each technical topic.
- ▲ **Regulatory Background** presents the applicable regulatory framework and planning context, if any, for the specific technical issue.
- ▲ **Affected Environment** describes the existing regional conditions relevant to the specific technical issue.
- ▲ **Environmental Consequences and Recommended Mitigation Measures** identifies and describes the methods and assumptions used in the analysis, the criteria used to determine the level of significance of environmental impacts, the potentially significant effects of implementing the Regional Plan Update alternatives, and feasible mitigation measures that could reduce potentially significant impacts.

Project impacts are numbered sequentially in each section. An impact statement provides a summary of the impact and its level of significance for each alternative. This summary statement is followed by a more detailed discussion of each impact topic, organized by alternative, and includes the analysis, rationale, and substantial evidence upon which conclusions are based. Mitigation measures are set forth to reduce any identified potentially significant effects, and the level of significance after mitigation is described.

### 3.1.3 RELATIONSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS TO THE RTP/SCS EIR/EIS

The environmental impact analysis, significance determinations, and mitigation measures in the Regional Plan Update EIS and RTP/SCS EIR/EIS have many similarities as well as important differences. Consistency between the two documents is important because TRPA and TMPO have formulated the two plans using a coordinated approach. (See Sections 1.5 and 1.6 for a full discussion of the coordinated planning processes and the similarities and differences between the two environmental documents.) The Regional Plan Update EIS and RTP/SCS EIR/EIS are being circulated for public review at the same time so the public can consider environmental impacts of both plans together. The Regional Plan and RTP/SCS are different types of plans, however, and variations between the two environmental documents are appropriate and important to serve the differing purposes of the respective environmental reviews. Where helpful and relevant, cross references are provided from one analysis to impacts in the other environmental document.