

3.9 SCENIC RESOURCES

3.9.1 INTRODUCTION

This section describes the physical characteristics of the landscape and scenic features and resources that exist in the Lake Tahoe Region, and the regulations that relate to the management of those resources. The potential scenic impacts that would result from implementation of the Regional Plan Update alternatives are identified and assessed, and mitigation measures are recommended for any significant or potentially significant impacts to scenic resources.

The scenic quality of the Lake Tahoe Basin is appreciated by visitors and residents alike as it is viewed from roads, trails, scenic resources such as parks and public beaches, and the surface of Lake Tahoe, while engaged in outdoor activities. Lake Tahoe, the focal point of the Basin landscape, is approximately 22 miles long and 12 miles wide with a surface area of 122,239 acres. The surface of the Lake affords panoramic views of the entire Lake Tahoe Basin.

3.9.2 REGULATORY BACKGROUND

Impacts to scenic resources are regulated by TRPA and at the federal, state, and local levels. Applicable planning documents, codes, ordinances and guidelines relating to scenic resources are described below.

TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

The two major scenic resource goals of TRPA are to maintain and restore the scenic qualities of the naturally appearing landscape and to improve the accessibility of Lake Tahoe for public viewing (TRPA 2011). These goals are implemented through the Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities and the Regional Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL THRESHOLD CARRYING CAPACITIES

The Tahoe Regional Planning Compact (Compact) provides for the development and implementation of Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities (thresholds). In 1982, the threshold study team completed the Scenic Resource Inventory and evaluation necessary to define and establish threshold standards for preservation of scenic quality. At that time, numerical standards were established for roadway and shoreline travel routes, and roadway and shoreline scenic quality, which are based on a rating scale or numeric standard. Additionally, TRPA adopted a management standard policy statement for overall community design elements. In 1993, TRPA adopted numeric standards for designated public recreation areas and bike trails (TRPA 2007, p. 8-1).

The goals of the Scenic Resources Thresholds are to:

- ▲ Maintain or improve 1982 roadway and shoreline scenic travel route ratings,
- ▲ Maintain or improve views of individual scenic resources, and
- ▲ Maintain or improve quality of views from public outdoor recreation areas.

The four thresholds for scenic resources are outlined below. The TRPA 2006 Threshold Evaluation Report found that positive trends have occurred for all four thresholds between 2001 and 2006 (TRPA 2007, Executive Summary p.12), and that three of the four thresholds, namely Scenic Quality, Public Recreation Areas and Bike Trails, and Community Design, are “at or somewhat better than target,” as reported in the 2011 Threshold Evaluation (TRPA 2012).

Travel Route Ratings

The travel route rating threshold tracks long-term, cumulative changes to views seen from major roadways in the Region within urban, transitional, and natural landscapes. It also tracks views seen from Lake Tahoe looking landward. Roadways have been divided into 54 segments or roadway travel units, each representing a continuous, two-directional viewshed exhibiting a similar visual character. Similarly, Lake Tahoe's shoreline is divided into 33 shoreline travel units. To be considered "at or better than target," all travel routes with a 1982 rating of 15.5 (roadway) or 7.5 (shoreline) or greater must maintain those 1982 scores, and all travel routes with a 1982 rating of 15 (roadway) or 7 (shoreline) or less must improve their scores until the threshold rating is reached.

To establish the travel route rating threshold, an analysis of the principal travel routes was conducted in 1982. This analysis became the baseline condition of existing resources, so that threshold levels could be tied to measurable degrees of change in resource status resulting from changes in the landscape. Threshold ratings for roadway units are based on the six aspects listed below. Items 1, 5, and 6 are used in determining the rating of shoreline travel units.

1. Human-made features along roadways and shoreline;
2. Physical distractions to driving along roadways;
3. Roadway characteristics;
4. Views of the Lake from roadways;
5. General landscape views from roadways and shoreline; and
6. Variety of scenery from roadways and shoreline.

Scenic Quality Ratings

The scenic quality rating threshold protects specific views of natural scenic features of Tahoe's natural landscape that can be seen from major roadways and from the Lake. To be considered "at or better than target," all 1982 scenic quality scores must be maintained. The purpose of scenic quality thresholds is to maintain or enhance existing scenic resources. Building on previous work by the Forest Service, the scenic resources in the region including views of the natural landscape and distinctive natural features were identified, mapped, described, and evaluated in 1982. They include the following:

1. Foreground, middle ground, and background views of the natural landscape from roadways;
2. Views of Lake Tahoe from roadways;
3. Views of Lake Tahoe and natural landscapes from roadway entry points into the Region;
4. Unique landscape features such as streams, beaches, and rock formations that add interest and variety, as seen from roadways;
5. Views of the shoreline, the water's edge and the foreground as seen from Lake Tahoe;
6. Views of the backdrop landscape, including the skyline, as seen from Lake Tahoe; and
7. Visual features that are points of particular visual interest on or near the shore, as seen from Lake Tahoe.

Scenic quality threshold ratings are a composite index of relative scenic quality of specific natural features in the region. As defined in the 1982 Threshold Study Report, the relative quality of each resource is rated using the following indicators: unity, vividness, variety, and intactness. Each indicator is rated using an index from zero (absent) to three (high). Ratings for all four indicators are summed to form the threshold rating. The ratings are intended to express comparative scenic quality ratings of low (rating of one), moderate (rating of two), and high values (rating of three), among all roadways or all shoreline mapped resources. These ratings are not absolute measurements of scenic quality.

Scenic quality ratings do not provide a means of evaluating urban or recreational development, but are used to ensure that development does not remove or substantially degrade individual scenic resources. The ratings are used to evaluate development only insofar as development affects natural features. This threshold is much more sensitive to change as a result of development than the travel route rating threshold, as views of resources can be blocked or significantly modified by an individual development project (TRPA 2007).

Public Recreation Areas and Bike Trails

The public recreation areas and bike trails threshold protects the viewshed as seen from public recreation areas and certain bicycle trails. To be considered “at or better than target,” all original 1993 scenic quality scores must be maintained.

This threshold applies to 37 public recreation areas including beaches, campgrounds, and ski areas. It also applies to 11 segments of Class I and Class II bicycle trails. 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.

The threshold contains three general types of scenic resources: (1) views from the recreation area or bicycle trail; (2) views of natural features within a recreation area or along a trail; and (3) visual quality of the built environment within a recreation area or adjacent to a trail. For bicycle trails, views of the Lake are also included. Threshold ratings for views from the recreation area or bicycle trail, views of natural features, and Lake views use the same criteria established for the scenic quality rating system described above. This involves ratings for unity, vividness, variety and intactness. Each of the criteria is assigned a value from one (low) to five (high). The sum of the ratings for each indicator is the threshold rating for the resource.

Human-made features are rated using different criteria than for other threshold indicators. The following criteria respond to the visual character of the built environment rather than the natural environment:

- ▲ **Coherence** refers to a coordinated approach to the human-made facilities in terms of possessing some unifying characteristic or quality.
- ▲ **Condition** refers to the general physical condition of the human-made elements.
- ▲ **Compatibility** is the sense of fit between the human-made features and the surrounding natural landscape. Human-made features that are highly compatible blend in with their surroundings and defer to the form, colors, and textures of the natural landscape.
- ▲ **Design quality** refers to the relative presence or lack of architectural qualities that make the human-made elements a visual feature in and of themselves.

Human-made features such as recreation facilities are evaluated against each of the criteria and assigned a numerical rating between 1 (low) and 5 (high). The sum of the ratings for each indicator is the threshold rating for the feature. As with the other thresholds, the ratings are intended to express comparative scenic quality ratings of low, moderate, and high values, and not absolute measurements of scenic quality.

Community Design

The community design threshold is a policy statement that applies to the built environment and is not restricted to roadways or shoreline units. Design standards and guidelines found in the Code of Ordinances, the Scenic Quality Improvement Program, and in the adopted Community Plans provide specific implementation direction. To be considered “at or better than target,” design standards and guidelines must be widely implemented to improve travel route ratings and produce a built environment that is compatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the region.

REGIONAL PLAN

The 1987 Regional Plan originally had a 20-year scope and remains in effect until the adoption of a Regional Plan Update. The following goals and policies are from the 1987 Regional Plan.

Goals and Policies

The Goals and Policies document of the 1987 Regional Plan establishes an overall framework for development and environmental conservation in the Lake Tahoe region. The Goals and Policies document presents the overall approach to meeting TRPA thresholds, and establishes guiding policies for each resource element. The Conservation Element (Chapter IV) of the Goals and Policies document includes a Scenic Subelement, with the following goals and associated policies:

▲ **Goal 1: Maintain and Restore the Scenic Qualities of the Natural Appearing Landscape.** As with many of the Region's natural resources, the scenic qualities of the Region are vulnerable to change. Modifying the natural scenic features of the Region is a by-product of development, but such impacts need not cause degradation. A coordinated effort that incorporates architectural design and location considerations in the project review process is a useful means for promoting the maintenance and restoration of scenic quality in the Region. Policies for achieving this goal are consistent with the adopted environmental thresholds.

// Policies:

1. All proposed development shall examine impacts to the identified landscape views from roadways, bike paths, public recreation areas, and Lake Tahoe.
2. Any development proposed in areas targeted for scenic restoration or within a unit that is highly sensitive to change shall demonstrate the effect of the project on the 1982 Travel Route Ratings of the scenic thresholds whether it be positive or negative.
3. The factors or conditions that contribute to scenic degradation in identified areas need to be recognized and appropriately considered in restoration programs to improve scenic quality.

▲ **Goal 2: Improve the accessibility of Lake Tahoe for public viewing.** Lake Tahoe is the dominant landscape feature in the Region. Yet, opportunities to view the Lake from roadways are often limited due to inadequate or unmarked pull-off facilities, traffic congestion, and human made obstructions.

// Policies:

1. Enhance the opportunities to view Lake Tahoe by designing view corridors from highways.
2. Scenic viewpoints from roadways should be identified and pull-off facilities provided on public property, wherever desirable.
3. Signs should be placed along the roadways, as appropriate, to identify photo sites and scenic turnouts.
4. Time limits for parking at roadside turnouts should be established.

Code of Ordinances

The Code of Ordinances (Code) is a compilation of laws and ordinances needed to implement the Regional Plan Goals and Policies. Adopted standards in the Code must be met by all development projects.

Design Standards

Chapter 36 of the Code includes design standards that apply to all projects in the Region. Site design standards (36.5), building design standards (36.6), landscaping standards (36.7), exterior lighting standards (36.8) and other standards included in this chapter guide the location and appearance of buildings and associated features.

Because design standards direct where and how the built environment is created, these standards may affect views and scenic resources in an area. These standards are briefly summarized below:

- ▲ **36.5 – Site Design Standards:** Existing natural features outside of the building site shall be retained and incorporated into the site design to the greatest extent feasible. Projects shall be designed to avoid disturbance to rock outcrops and stream environment zones and to minimize vegetation removal and maintain the natural slope of the project site. Projects shall be designed to use existing disturbed areas rather than undisturbed areas for the siting of improvements, with some exceptions. For parcels abutting roadways rated in the TRPA's Scenic Resources Inventory, setback standards will apply. Additional standards apply to commercial, tourist accommodation, public service, multi-residential projects, and snow storage projects.
- ▲ **36.6 – Building Design Standards:** The architectural design of a project shall include elements that screen from public view all external mechanical equipment, including refuse enclosures, electrical transformer pads and vaults, satellite receiving disks, communication equipment, and utility hardware on roofs, buildings or the ground. Roofs, including mechanical equipment and skylights, shall be constructed of non-glare finishes and earth-tone colors that minimize reflectivity. For all structures visible from the Scenic Threshold Travel Routes and from Public Recreation Areas and Bicycle Trails, subdued colors of earth-tone ranges shall be used for the primary color of structures.
- ▲ **36.7 – Landscaping Standards:** Specific plant species from the TRPA Recommended Native and Adapted Plant List shall be used for lawns and landscaping. For projects other than single family home projects, minimum plant sizes and spacing shall apply.
- ▲ **36.8 – Exterior Lighting Standards:** Exterior lights shall not blink, flash or change intensity. String lights, building or roofline tube lighting, and reflective or luminescent wall surfaces are prohibited. Exterior lighting shall not be attached to trees except during the Christmas season. Parking lot, walkway, and building lights shall be directed downward. Fixture mounting height shall be appropriate to the purpose. Outdoor lighting shall be used for purposes of illumination only, and shall not be designed for, or used as, an advertising display. Illumination for aesthetic or dramatic purposes of any building or surrounding landscape utilizing exterior light fixtures projected above the horizontal is prohibited. The commercial operation of searchlights for advertising or any other purpose is prohibited.

Scenic Standards

Chapter 66 of the Code includes standards that are specific to scenic resources. Scenic quality standards (66.1) and the establishment of Scenic Highway Corridors (66.2) are two key standards that directly address scenic resources in the Region. These standards are briefly summarized below:

- ▲ **66.1 – Scenic Quality Standards:** Scenic quality standards are divided into three parts:
 - **66.1.3 Roadway and Shoreline Unit Scenic Quality:** The project shall not cause a decrease in the numerical ratings assigned to roadway or shoreline units, including the scenic quality rating of the individual resources within each unit, as recorded in the 1982 Scenic Resources Inventory and shown in Tables 13-3, 13-5, 13-8 and 13-9 of the Study Report for the Establishment of Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities, October 1982. The criteria for rating scenic quality as identified in the study report cited herein shall be used to determine if a project will cause a decrease in the numerical rating.
 - **66.1.4 Roadway and Shoreline Unit Travel Routes:** The project shall not cause a decrease in the 1982 roadway or shoreline travel route ratings as shown in Tables 13-6 and 13-7, respectively, of the Study Report for the Establishment of Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities, October 1982. The criteria for rating travel routes as identified in the study report and as further explained in the report entitled, *A Scenic Analysis of Principle Travel Routes in the Lake Tahoe Region, 1970*, shall be used to determine if a project will cause a decrease in the numerical rating. For projects in the shore-land, Section 66.3 shall be

used to determine if the project will contribute to a decrease in the numerical rating for a shoreline travel route rating.

- # **66.1.5 Public Recreation Areas and Bicycle Trails:** The project shall not cause a decrease in any numerical sub-component threshold rating or total threshold rating assigned to a scenic resource identified in the 1993 Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation. Prior to approving a project which may potentially affect an identified scenic resource, TRPA shall find that the project is consistent with applicable recommendations for preserving scenic quality of the affected recreation area or bicycle trail found in the 1993 Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation.
- ▲ **66.2 – Scenic Highway Corridors:** TRPA and other public agencies within the Tahoe Region shall maintain and enhance viewing opportunities, whenever feasible, by establishing scenic highway corridors. TRPA, through the project review process shall ensure that viewsheds and view corridors along the scenic highway corridors are maintained and enhanced.

Height Standards

Chapter 37 of the Code of Ordinances defines height standards for buildings and appurtenant structures that are intended to result in attractive and compatible development. The Code outlines maximum heights for buildings using the percent slope retained across a building site and a designated specified roof pitch. In accordance with the Code, general building height limits range from 24 to 42 feet based on the ground slope and roof pitch. As such, most buildings in the Basin are no more than three stories tall. Height in excess of 26 feet is considered “additional height” and is allowed only if specific findings can be made. Additionally, increased height is currently allowed for many use types and in many locations, subject to a variety of approval requirements. Existing opportunities for increased height include:

- ▲ up to 75 feet in Special Height Districts;
- ▲ up to 95 feet in the City of South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Area;
- ▲ up to 56 feet for certain recreation and public service buildings;
- ▲ up to 48 feet for affordable housing projects in certain areas of Kings Beach;
- ▲ up to 48 feet for tourist accommodation uses within adopted Community Plan areas; and
- ▲ up to 46 feet for a variety of environmentally beneficial design features.

Many of the redevelopment projects that have resulted in scenic improvement have utilized allowances for increased height, demonstrating that increased height and scenic improvement can occur simultaneously. Representative projects are described in Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts, and in the Draft 2011 Threshold Evaluation (TRPA 2012a).

Standards for Parking and Signage

Driveway and parking standards are set forth in the TRPA Code of Ordinances, Chapter 34. Chapter 38 of the Code of Ordinances contains standards pertaining to signs.

Scenic Quality Improvement Program

The Scenic Quality Improvement Program (SQIP) provides a comprehensive approach to improve the overall visual quality of the Region’s built environment. The program aims to meet or exceed the scenic resources targets in all roadway and shoreline landscapes within the Region (TRPA 1989, p. i) that are designated as “worse than target”. The SQIP discusses the characteristics and design implications of three visual environments: urban areas, rural transition areas, and rural areas. These visual environments are described below, in Section 3.9.3, “Affected Environment,” under the sub-heading “Visual Environments.” The following design principles apply to these three visual environments (TRPA 1989, pp. vii-ix):

A. Urban Visual Environments

1. Scale of Development: Human scaled; places for people, especially pedestrians and bicycles; low vehicle speeds make detail appropriate.
2. Level of Human Activity: Highest of the three environments; centers of commerce and activity where people create the interest in being there.
3. Access/Parking: Access constant and expected; parking is organized and readable; should be designed and sited to provide pleasing and attractive “car parks” wherever possible.
4. Architectural Style: Responds to context and setting; reflects community values and desires in terms of form, color, and material; pedestrian-oriented.
5. Landscaping: Embellish buildings; create interesting spaces which attract people; soften and screen undesirable views; most appropriate places for non-native plant palette, but native plants are recommended in areas outside immediate building sites.
6. Building Materials and Colors: Widest variety of colors and materials appropriate; reflects community or traditional values; community character strongly influenced by architecture.
7. Lighting: Appropriate to the use and to surrounding neighborhood lighting levels.
8. Signage: Orient individual signs to pedestrians, not autos; orient business/shopping complex identification signs to autos; widest range of colors and materials appropriate; competition of signs is inappropriate (TRPA 1989, pp. vii-ix).

B. Rural Transition Visual Environments

1. Scale of Development: Linear experience of spaces for vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles; moderate vehicle speeds means less detail needed.
2. Level of Human Activity: Moderate; primarily residential, recreation activities with well-organized landmarks of neighborhood commercial nodes.
3. Access/Parking: Access is controlled; parking integrated with setting; well buffered and sensitively sited; out of sight except in commercial/public service uses.
4. Architectural Style: Responds to context and setting; blends and appears to achieve a high degree of fit with the surrounding landscape.
5. Landscaping: Functional; used to highlight changes in use, access; limited palette with some non-native species is appropriate; overall goal is to blend with setting.
6. Building Materials and Colors: More narrow range of materials and colors than in urban settings; responds to and blends with context of setting; natural appearing materials and colors are most appropriate.
7. Lighting: Intermittent, as needed; primarily used at intersections, nodes, and other activity areas.
8. Signage: Existence of sign itself will draw attention to the use; moderate range of materials and colors with emphasis on those which respond to context and setting; in most cases internal lighting is not necessary; competition of signs is inappropriate (TRPA 1989, pp. vii-ix).

C. Rural Visual Environments

1. Scale of Development: Moderate-high vehicle speeds; humans become temporary yet participatory part of the landscape; less detail needed.
2. Level of Human Activity: Lowest of the three environments, primarily recreation, sight-seeing and conservation activities; places where nature creates the focal interest.

3. Access/Parking: Points of access are nominal; parking is hidden except for existing uses and roadside scenic viewpoints.
4. Architectural Style: Responds to context and setting; typically small-scale which does not dominate surrounding landscape.
5. Landscaping: Responsive to plant communities in setting; very few opportunities for non-native species except for foundation plantings and planters.
6. Building Materials and Colors: Narrowest range of colors and materials is appropriate; colors should be dark toned and harmonize with those in and around site; natural materials are most appropriate; natural appearing materials should be a minimum requirement.
7. Lighting: Minimal; only as necessary for safety and function.
8. Signage: Minimal need for signs; signs should be small scale as presence of sign alone will draw attention to use; limited to natural and natural-appearing colors and materials only (TRPA 1989, pp. vii-ix).

FEDERAL

U.S. FOREST SERVICE, LAKE TAHOE BASIN MANAGEMENT UNIT

More than 75 percent of the lands within the Lake Tahoe Basin are managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). These public lands, totaling over 150,000 acres, include beaches, hiking and biking trails, wilderness, historic estates, and developed recreation areas such as campgrounds and riding stables. The land is managed primarily to provide public recreational access and to protect the diverse natural resources of the region. Management direction is spelled out in the 1988 LTBMU Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) in 2004. The LTBMU Forest Plan is currently being revised.

Scenic Integrity Objectives

According to the Forest Service, scenic integrity is a measure of the degree to which a landscape is visually perceived to be complete. The Forest Service has identified Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) for all LTBMU lands that serve as targets for managing scenic quality. The SIOs were derived based on information generated through a comprehensive scenic inventory process. They represent the desired future condition for scenery on lands managed by the LTBMU. In most areas, the existing scenic integrity level is equivalent to the desired future condition. Locales where scenic conditions are currently less than desirable constitute areas where improvement or rehabilitation is needed. Specific areas include ski runs and acreage affected by wildfires such as the Gondola Fire of 2002 and the Angora Fire of 2007. The assigned SIOs for the entire LTBMU will be represented in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan.

Built Environment Image Guide

The appearance and aesthetics of new facilities installed on National Forest System lands are directed by the Built Environment Image Guide for the National Forests and Grasslands. Such facilities include administration buildings, recreation structures, site improvements, structures on roads or trails, as well as signs installed by the Forest Service, its cooperators, and its permittees. The Built Environment Image Guide describes an approach for designing recreation and administrative facilities, as well as a process for ensuring that built facilities fit within the context of their ecological, physical, and cultural setting, while establishing specific architectural character types for new facilities.

NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY

The National Scenic Byways (NSB) Program was established under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, and reauthorized in 1998 under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. Under

the program, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads based on their archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities (FHWA 2011a).

The program aims to:

- ▲ create a distinctive collection of American roads, their stories and treasured places and
- ▲ create a unique travel experience and enhanced local quality of life through efforts to preserve, protect, interpret, and promote the intrinsic qualities of designated byways.

STATE

CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM

The California Scenic Highway Program was created by the California State Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Its purpose is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. 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 a traveler’s enjoyment of the view. Official designation requires a local jurisdiction to enact a scenic Corridor Protection Program that protects and enhances scenic resources along the highway (Caltrans 2011).

The program aims to:

- ▲ protect the scenic corridor from encroachment of incompatible land uses;
- ▲ mitigate activities within the corridor that detract from its scenic quality by proper siting, landscaping or screening;
- ▲ prohibit billboards and regulate on-site signs so that they do not detract from scenic views;
- ▲ make development more compatible with the environment and in harmony with the surroundings;
- ▲ regulate grading to prevent erosion and cause minimal alteration of existing contours and to preserve important vegetative features along the highway;
- ▲ preserve views of hillsides by minimizing development on steep slopes and along ridgelines; and
- ▲ prevent the need for noise barriers (sound walls) by requiring a minimum setback for residential development adjacent to a scenic highway (Caltrans 2011).

NEVADA SCENIC BYWAYS

In 1983, the Nevada State Legislature established the Scenic Byways Program. The Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) is the lead agency for the program and the Director has authority to establish a road as a Scenic Byway. NDOT enforces this program through the following actions:

- ▲ Maintain designated routes and enhance their scenic qualities
- ▲ Assure and maintain the proper signing of all scenic routes
- ▲ Facilitate federal funding for projects related to scenic routes
- ▲ Coordinate with the Nevada Commission on Tourism and the Scenic Byways Committee to perform evaluations on roadways that have been nominated for review
- ▲ Prepare agreements to ensure federal funds are expended properly on projects related to Scenic Byways

- ▲ Update the Scenic Byways procedural manual biannually
- ▲ Recommend to the Director of NDOT that a route be designated as scenic (NDOT 2011)

LOCAL

There are six local jurisdictions in the Lake Tahoe Basin. These jurisdictions have adopted various planning documents to guide development and protect scenic resources within their boundaries.

PLACER COUNTY

The Land Use section of the Placer County General Plan (adopted August 16, 1994) includes goals to identify and protect the visual and scenic resources of Placer County as important quality-of-life amenities for County residents and as principal assets in the promotion of recreation and tourism. This plan also includes policies to identify and maintain scenic routes, cultural and historic sites, and natural recreation areas. It also establishes design requirements for new development (Placer County 1994, pp. 43-45).

EL DORADO COUNTY

The Land Use Element of the El Dorado County General Plan (adopted July 19, 2004, amended December 2009) includes goals and policies to protect and improve scenic viewsheds, regulate the appearance of signs, and reduce the visual effects of light and glare (El Dorado County 2004, pp. 40-42).

CITY OF SOUTH LAKE TAHOE

The Natural and Cultural Resources Element of the City of South Lake Tahoe General Plan (adopted May 17, 2011) includes a goal to protect and enhance the visual connection of the City to the scenic resources of the Lake Tahoe Basin. This plan also includes policies to create view corridors, improve access to scenic areas, and require future design to incorporate scenic resource considerations (City of South Lake Tahoe 2011, p. NRC-2).

DOUGLAS COUNTY

The Land Use Element of the Douglas County Master Plan (adopted March 1, 2012) promotes the designation of future land uses to enhance community balance and character; to preserve and protect important natural resources; and to enable Douglas County to provide adequate public services to the community. One goal of the "Community Balance" section of the Land Use Element is to retain the beauty, the natural setting and resources, and the rural/agricultural character of Douglas County while providing opportunities for managed growth and development. Policies associated with this goal include undergrounding of new utility lines, consideration of aesthetics during development review and reduction of lighting impacts on night skies (Douglas County 2012, p. 8).

WASHOE COUNTY

The Conservation Element of the Washoe County Master Plan (amended September 2010) describes the high scenic quality of the Tahoe Basin within Washoe County and encourages the protection and enhancement of scenic and natural resources and existing views (Washoe County 2010, p. 4). This plan includes policies that direct building and landscaping design to blend with the natural environment and that encourage attainment and maintenance of TRPA's scenic quality thresholds (Washoe County 2010, pp. 8-9).

CARSON CITY

Guiding Principle #3 of the Carson City Master Plan (adopted July 6, 2006) provides for “Stewardship of the Natural Environment.” This principle includes a goal to protect visual resources in the City. Policies associated with this goal include limitations on hillside development, limiting light pollution on night skies, protecting the City’s visual quality, and maintaining sign controls (Carson City 2006: p. 3-9).

3.9.3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The appearance of the landscape may be changed by forces of nature and human action. In the Lake Tahoe Region, human activity has had a notable influence on the landscape. Beginning with the Comstock era around 1859, demand for timber resulted in extensive logging within the Lake Tahoe Region with large portions appearing virtually deforested by 1890 (Elliot-Fisk et al. 1997). Urban development began in the early 1900s with small vacation resorts and a few communities. After World War II, demand for recreation, tourism, and permanent housing fueled large increases in development. Gaming casinos were built and commercial development increased to become the second largest developed land use next to residential by 2002. Even so, concentrated development in the Region is largely confined to private lands, which make up 10 percent of the land Region-wide compared to 90 percent in public ownership (as indicated by TRPA GIS and Assessor’s data). Today, 90 percent of the privately owned buildable parcels in the Region have already been developed. Thus, while some new development will occur, most new projects involve redevelopment of previously developed sites and transfers of development from one location to another.

VISUAL ENVIRONMENTS

The Lake Tahoe Region contains a mix of environments, including urban centers, residential neighborhoods, small commercial nodes that serve the residential neighborhoods, large-scale recreation areas, and undeveloped stretches of wild and rural landscapes. These elements are described by three general visual environments: urban, rural, and a rural transition environment between the urban and rural areas (TRPA 1989, p. vii).

- ▲ **Urban Areas:** Urban areas are dominated by commercial uses, public service activities, and residential uses (human-made development). Examples include Tahoe City, South Lake Tahoe, Stateline, Kings Beach, and Incline Village.
- ▲ **Rural Transition Areas:** Rural transition areas are a combination of human-made development and natural landscape features. Examples include Round Hill, Zephyr Cove, Christmas Valley, Tahoma, Sunnyside, and Homewood.
- ▲ **Rural Areas:** Rural areas are dominated by natural elements and processes. Examples include Emerald Bay, Luther Pass, and the east shore forests (TRPA 1989: p. vii).

NATURAL FEATURES

The dominant natural features of the Lake Tahoe Region are the expansive alpine lake (Lake Tahoe) ringed by rugged mountain peaks with thickly forested slopes.

LAKE TAHOE

Lake Tahoe is a water feature of remarkable color, clarity, size and depth. Water clarity is noted to approximately 70 feet deep, though the clarity has declined from greater than 100 feet since readings began in the late 1960s (USGS 2008). Lake Tahoe is the second deepest lake in the United States and the tenth deepest in the world, with a maximum depth measured at 1,645 feet. The color of Lake Tahoe’s water is highly variable,

influenced by depth. Water color ranges from clear, light green at the shallow lake edges (especially noteworthy in areas such as Emerald Bay), to dark blue in the deeper areas. The Lake is approximately 22 miles long and 12 miles wide, with 72 miles of shoreline and a surface area of 191 square miles (USGS 2008). The expansiveness of the Lake allows for long-distance views throughout the area.

MOUNTAINS

Distinctive mountain ridges and peaks surround the flat plane of Lake Tahoe and create an enclosed landscape. The Lake Tahoe Basin is ringed by several high mountains rising to elevations up to 10,891 feet at Freel Peak in the Carson Range. The mountains are thickly forested, predominately by evergreen species, and many have rocky summits that maintain patches of snow year-round.

NATURAL VIEWS

Views of the natural scenery are dominant. The clear blue water of the Lake is ringed by rocky shorelines and sandy beaches. Human-made features including marinas, piers, and other structures are also located along the water's edge. Slopes rise from the Lake with a variety of vegetation and rocky outcrops intermingled with streams and waterfalls. Above these slopes, forested mountains climb to high peaks. These views contain a high degree of natural contrast and variety and are generally of high visual quality.

DARK SKIES

Rural and rural transition areas in the Lake Tahoe Basin have dark skies with little light pollution from urban areas, making them ideal locations for astronomical viewing. Views from lakeside beaches and from watercraft on the Lake are especially expansive and free of nighttime light interference. Lighting associated with urban development and human presence can result in light pollution and spillover, which can adversely affect the dark night skies that contribute to the natural scenic character of the Basin.

SCENIC ROADWAYS

In the Lake Tahoe Basin, Eastshore Drive (in Nevada) is designated as a National Scenic Byway. Eastshore Drive is the name given to the combined lengths of US 50 and SR 28 along the eastern shore of Lake Tahoe from the California-Nevada border in the south to the Nevada-California border in the north. Both US 50 and SR 28 are designated as Nevada State Scenic Byways (FHWA 2011b, NDOT 2011). Mt. Rose Highway (SR 431), located in the northern portion of the Lake Tahoe Basin is also designated as a Nevada State Scenic Byway (NDOT 2011).

There are two Officially Designated California State Scenic Highways in El Dorado County and two Eligible State Scenic Highways (not officially designated) in Placer County. In El Dorado County, SR 89 is Officially Designated from the Placer County line to the Alpine County line, while US 50 is Officially Designated from Placerville to the South Lake Tahoe city limit (Caltrans 2010). In Placer County, SR 28 (Caltrans 2009a) and portions of SR 89 (Caltrans 2009b) are Eligible State Scenic Highways.

EXISTING SCENIC QUALITY AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Systematic monitoring of scenic conditions in the Lake Tahoe Region has been regularly conducted by TRPA since 1982. USFS also monitors scenic conditions throughout the lands it manages. TRPA scenic monitoring data show that, in most cases, scenic quality is highest in areas that have little or no development and that, where development exists, the level of scenic quality depends on the visual character and quality of the built environment and its visual compatibility with the natural landscape. Improvements in scenic quality have resulted primarily where development has been removed or redeveloped.

SCENIC THRESHOLD STATUS

Travel Route Ratings

In 1982, when the scenic threshold system was implemented, 46 individual roadway travel units were identified, mapped, and assigned scenic threshold ratings. The officially adopted numerical threshold standard for roadway travel units is a rating of 15.5. To be “at or better than target,” the current rating assigned to any roadway travel unit must be at least 15.5 and must be at least equal to the rating that was originally assigned to the unit in 1982. Therefore, if the current rating for a roadway travel unit is below the standard of 15.5, it is considered to be “worse than target;” if the current rating for any roadway travel unit is below its original 1982 rating, the unit is also considered to be “worse than target.” This is true even if the current rating is above 15.5. In 1982, when scenic threshold ratings were first determined, 23 of the 46 roadway travel units (50 percent) were rated below the scenic threshold standard of 15.5. Today, there are 54 Roadway Travel Units because in recent years some of the original units have been subdivided due to changes in their visual characteristics. Of the 54 current roadway travel units, 21 (39 percent) are currently “worse than target,” 17 because they fail to meet the threshold standard of 15.5 and four because their current rating is lower than the original 1982 rating despite the fact that they are at or above the threshold standard of 15.5. As of 2011, five roadway units were rated lower than their original rating; 36 were rated higher than their original rating, and 13 were equal to their original rating. Exhibit 3.9-1 depicts the current status of roadway travel units. The overall improvement in ratings for roadway travel units was largely the result of utility undergrounding and redevelopment projects.

There are 33 individual shoreline travel units, the same number as originally identified in 1982. The officially adopted numerical threshold standard for shoreline travel units is 7.5. To be “at or better than target,” the current rating assigned to any shoreline travel unit must be at least 7.5, and, as with the roadway travel units, must be at least equal to the rating that was originally assigned. In 1982, four shoreline travel units (12 percent) failed to meet the scenic threshold standard of 7.5 and therefore were “worse than target.” As of 2011, 12 shoreline travel units (36 percent) were “worse than target,” five because they failed to meet the threshold standard of 7.5 and seven because their rating was lower than the original rating (although at or above the threshold standard of 7.5). As of 2011 there were 10 shoreline units with a rating lower than their original ratings, six with a rating higher than their original rating, and 17 with a rating equal to the original rating. Exhibit 3.9-2 depicts the current status of shoreline travel units. The overall decline of ratings for shoreline travel units was largely the result of single family lakefront homes and piers constructed prior to adoption of 2002 shoreland ordinances.

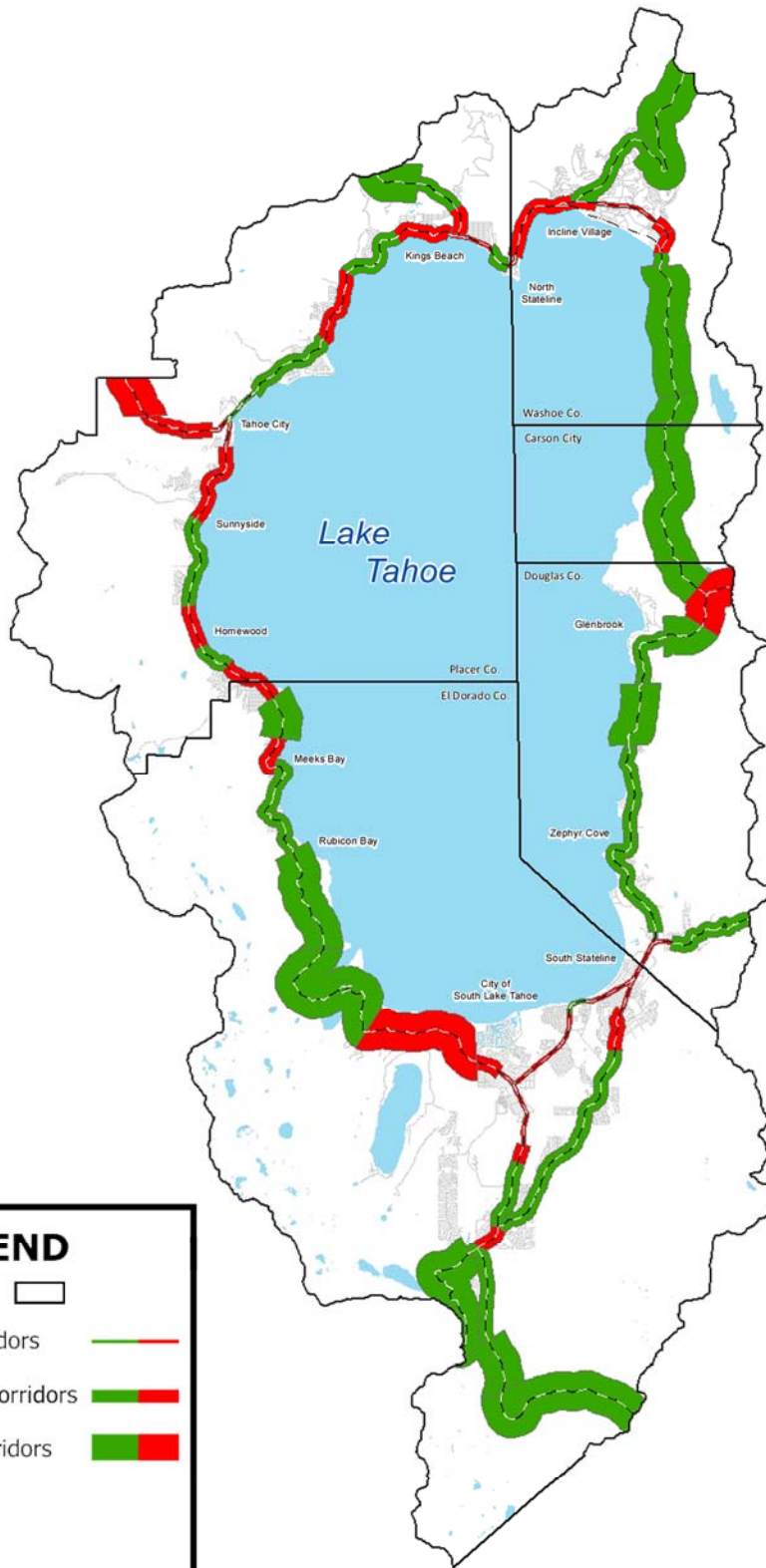
Scenic Quality Ratings

The threshold standard for Scenic Quality is not numerical but is a non-degradation standard. This means that a scenic resource is considered “at or better than target” if its scenic quality rating remains equal to or higher than the rating it was originally assigned. There are 209 roadway scenic resources that are viewed from main roads within the Basin. Of these, four had ratings in 2011 that were below the original 1982 rating and therefore considered “worse than target.” On the other hand there were 17 scenic resources with ratings higher than their original rating. This represents improvement in the quality of these scenic resources.


There are 184 shoreline scenic resources that are viewed from the Lake. As of 2011, 16 had ratings that were below the original and are considered “worse than target,” and 23 had ratings higher than their original rating, indicating improvement in scenic quality.


Public Recreation Areas and Bike Trails


The threshold standard for Public Recreation Areas and Bike Trails Scenic Quality is a non-degradation standard as described above for roadway and shoreline scenic resources. There are 242 scenic resources that are viewed from public recreation areas and bike trails. As of 2011, four had ratings that were below their originally assigned rating and therefore considered “worse than target.” At the same time, there were 13 scenic resources with ratings higher than their original rating, indicating improvement in their scenic quality.




LEGEND


TRPA Jurisdiction 


Urban Scenic Corridors 

Transition Scenic Corridors 

Natural Scenic Corridors 

Status:

Attainment 

Non-Attainment 



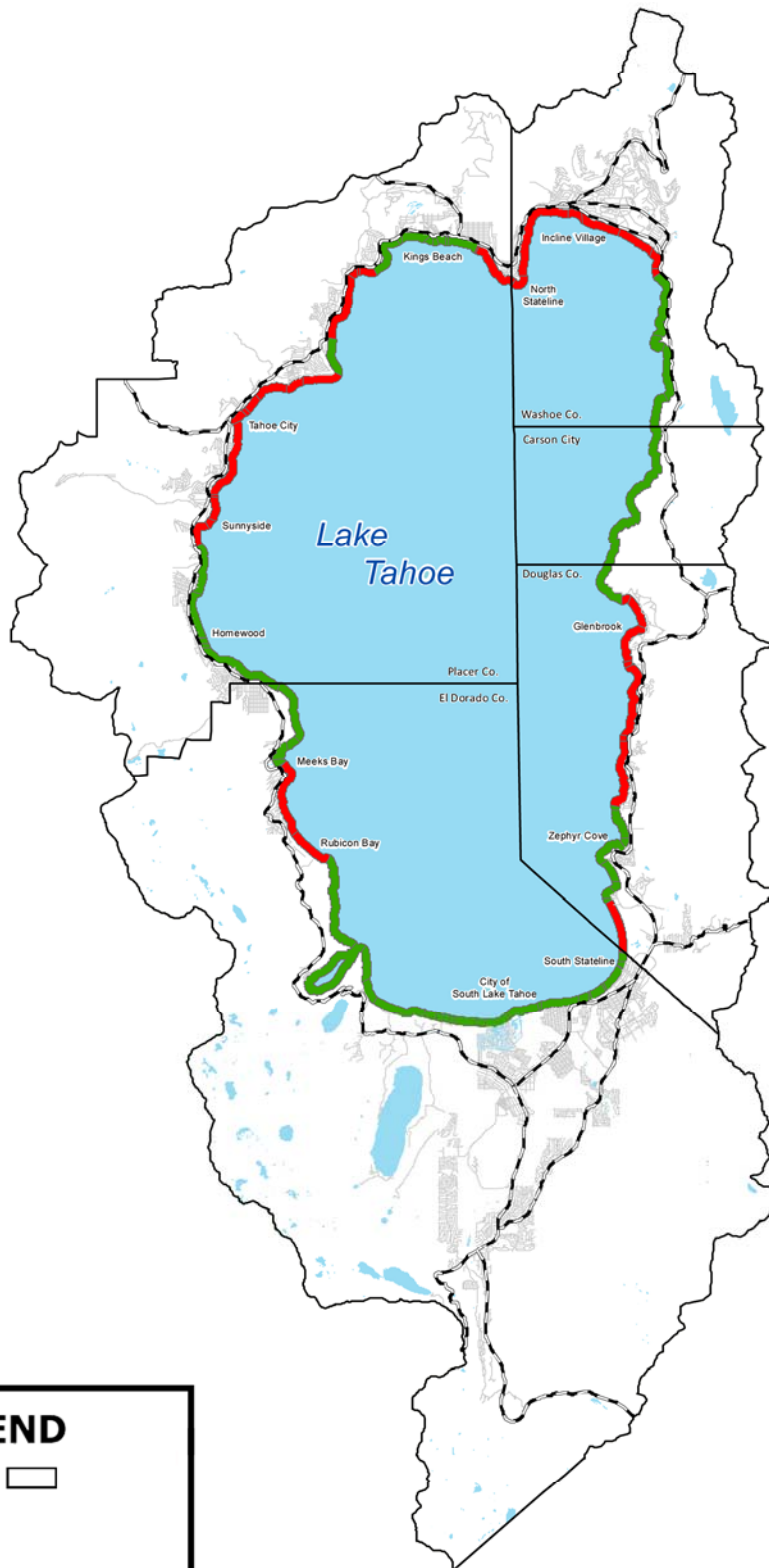
X10010042 01 019

Source: TRPA 2012


Exhibit 3.9-1.

Scenic Attainment Status of Roadway Travel Units







LEGEND

TRPA Jurisdiction 

Status:

Attainment 

Non-Attainment 



X10010042 01 020

Source: TRPA 2011

Exhibit 3.9-2.

Scenic Attainment Status of Shoreline Travel Units



Community Design

The threshold standard for Community Design is a policy statement that calls for implementation of design standards and guidelines found in the Code of Ordinances, the Scenic Quality Improvement Program, and in the adopted Community Plans. To be “at or better than target,” design standards and guidelines must be widely implemented such that travel route ratings improve and the built environment is seen as compatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the region. The effects of changes to the built environment, central to the evaluation of the community design threshold, are evident in the Basin.

Overall, the contributions from the built environment toward the target for travel route and scenic quality ratings have increased over time beginning with the first evaluation in 1986 and accelerating over the past ten years. Specifically, the visual quality of the built environment is improving in most areas of the Basin due to implementation of design standards and guidelines. This is true within the urban/commercial centers along the roadway travel units and within the shoreland of the shoreline travel units where redevelopment has taken place.

3.9.4 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Each of the Regional Plan Update alternatives is examined in light of the potential for development or redevelopment, the nature and character of that possible development, and where it would be likely to occur. In addition, the analysis considers the effects of removal of existing development and restoration of lands based on regulatory requirements and incentives of each alternative. As described in Chapter 2, Regional Plan Update Alternatives, each alternative offers different types and levels of regulatory controls and incentives. This assessment is a comparative analysis of the likely effect each of these regulatory and incentive packages would have on the scenic environment. For all of the alternatives, the existing scenic thresholds would remain as they are today, as would the scenic review process and the SQIP.

Because no specific projects or development proposals are proposed or would be approved as a result of this Regional Plan Update, assumptions must be made about the likely type, location, and scale of development, redevelopment, and restoration under each alternative. It is important to note that any new development or redevelopment project and any new local or specific plan proposed pursuant to regulations of the updated Regional Plan would be subject to project-specific environmental review requirements, as required.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Implementation of the Regional Plan Update would result in a significant adverse effect on scenic resources if it would:

- ▲ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista from a public area, including blocking or modifying existing views of Lake Tahoe, or specific views identified in TRPA’s scenic resources inventory;
- ▲ cause substantial damage to scenic resources such as trees, rock outcroppings and historic buildings, or landscape features identified in TRPA’s scenic resources inventory;
- ▲ cause substantial degradation of the existing visual quality of the region by allowing development that is incompatible with the scenic values of the Region;
- ▲ cause substantial degradation of the existing visual character of the Region; or
- ▲ create substantial new sources of light or glare that would affect day or nighttime views in the Region.

IMPACT ANALYSIS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact 3.9-1 **Scenic Quality.** All five alternatives would allow for changes in the built environment through the use of remaining allocations, use of newly authorized allocations, and implementation of existing and revised policies that ultimately affect the form of new development and redevelopment. While redevelopment often results in improvement in the scenic quality of roadway travel routes, changes in the built environment could have undesirable consequences on scenic quality if they adversely affect views or vistas, damage or remove scenic resources, or result in development that is incompatible with the scenic values of the Region.

Alternative 1 would maintain existing land use designations, PASs, and Community Plans, and the system of development regulations and incentives would not change, scenic conditions would be similar to those that have resulted from the Regional Plan since 1987 and would remain largely unchanged as compared to existing conditions. Movement toward scenic threshold standard targets would continue, and development and redevelopment would not be incompatible with the scenic values of the Region. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 1 would be **less than significant**.

Alternative 2 would establish Development Transfer Zones (DTZs) and transfer and coverage policies that, while generally more stringent than those that currently exist, would allow redevelopment and promote more concentrated development in these areas relative to areas outside of DTZs. The impact of Alternative 2 would be **less than significant**.

Alternative 3 would establish mixed use as a new land classification within 10 Town Centers, a Regional Center, and a High Density Tourist District and would include redevelopment incentives aimed at concentrating higher intensity uses in these target areas and reducing coverage and development in sensitive lands and lands distant from the community centers. These areas targeted for redevelopment generally correspond to travel units that need additional scenic improvements. Greater redevelopment incentives are likely to result in a greater pace and degree of redevelopment activity, resulting in **beneficial** scenic impacts. Alternative 3 would also modify height standards such that taller buildings could be permitted in the Town Centers, Regional Center, and High Density Tourist District. Because taller buildings could substantially increase visual mass and magnitude and result in impacts to scenic resource views, this impact of Alternative 3 would be **potentially significant**. Alternative 3 would also modify how maximum allowable height is measured on slopes greater than 10 percent to encourage stair-stepping of structures. The resulting increased visual mass and magnitude may result in impacts to scenic resource views. This impact of Alternative 3 would be **potentially significant**.

With Alternative 4, the transect district approach would result in compact, higher-density, four-story urbanized areas in Town Centers and six stories in Tourist Centers that support transit, bicycle and pedestrian activity. While Alternative 4 would result in beneficial scenic improvements through redevelopment, Alternative 4 would also modify height standards such that additional height would be allowed for uses beyond tourist accommodation facilities in Town Centers and redevelopment of existing towers in the South Stateline Casino Core Tourist Center would be allowed to their existing height, but in other areas it would limit building height. The impact of Alternative 4 would be **potentially significant**.

Because Alternative 5 would maintain existing land use designations and the system of development regulations and incentives would not change, changes in scenic conditions would be similar to those that have occurred since 1987 under the existing Regional Plan. New development and redevelopment would be required to comply with existing development standards, and design guidelines and scenic thresholds standards would continue to apply. Development and redevelopment, therefore, would not be incompatible

with the scenic values of the Region. Changes to the visual environment over the planning period under Alternative 5 would not be substantial, and roadway travel route ratings would continue to improve. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 5 on scenic quality would be **less than significant**.

The visual environment is subject to change from new development and redevelopment, and also from the removal and transfer of existing development and restoration of sending sites. The degree to which these changes would occur and the way in which development would be redistributed as a result, varies by alternative. Changes in the built environment would have undesirable consequences on scenic quality if they adversely affect views or vistas, damage or remove scenic resources, or result in development that is incompatible with the scenic values of the Region. Potential scenic impacts from development and redevelopment activities in the Tahoe Region are currently mitigated through environmental review and compliance with existing TRPA regulations.

The existing scenic environment of Lake Tahoe is the result of pre-1987 Regional Plan development and activities, coupled with those that have been implemented pursuant to the goals, policies, and implementing ordinances of that plan. The Regional Plan, completed in 1987, came as a result of extensive work through the 1980s to determine how best to address the amount and type of growth that was occurring at the Lake, and to implement current planning concepts at the time. Through the Regional Plan, TRPA established zoning that allowed for commercial, public service, conservation, recreation, residential and tourist uses around the Region. These mostly corresponded with the existing uses at the time so that as growth occurred, it was consistent with existing uses.

Community Plans and Plan Area Statements (PASs) fine-tuned these designations around the Lake, within the context of limiting future growth while honoring private property. Residential, tourist, and commercial development occurred at a controlled pace while sensitive private lands were converted to public ownership with a corresponding transfer of development rights to non-sensitive lands. These public lands, mostly state and federal, became protected conservation and recreation lands, building on the existing Forest Service, state parks and California Tahoe Conservancy land base that makes up the majority of the Region's landscape today.

A complex system of environmental regulations, grandfathered rights, limits on impervious coverage, and requirements for property owners to install BMPs, has resulted in improved environmental conditions, but has also created some barriers to renovation, redevelopment, and accelerated improvement in scenic quality. Each of the Regional Plan Update alternatives emphasizes, to different degrees, redeveloping existing commercial areas, tourist accommodations, recreation facilities, and residential structures, while at the same time removing and restoring existing development on sensitive lands and realizing other important environmental benefits. Each of the alternatives approaches this in a different manner, each with comparative changes to the scenic environment.

For context, it is important to note that the Tahoe Region is very close to a built-out condition. Approximately 90 percent of privately owned, developable lots in the Region have already been developed, so the potential for new development on undeveloped land, particularly in the community centers, is very low under all alternatives. An estimated 6.4 million square feet of commercial floor area (CFA) has already been developed at the Lake, approximately 383,600 square feet remain unused from the 1987 Regional Plan, and new CFA authorized in the five alternatives ranges from approximately 200,000 to 600,000 square feet, a maximum increase of about 15 percent. The same is true for residential development with a total of 47,400 residential units that have already been developed, the alternatives only address different rates of building on the estimated remaining 3,883 developable parcels, a high-end increase of 8 percent, and these are generally within existing developments. Similarly with tourist accommodations, there are currently 12,399 tourist accommodation units (TAUs) in the Region, and the alternatives propose a range of up to 400 new units, a 3-percent increase.

Under all alternatives, the existing scenic thresholds and scenic review process would remain in place.

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO PROJECT

Under Alternative 1, the existing land use designations would remain the same (see Exhibit 2-4 in Chapter 2, Regional Plan Update Alternatives), the system of development regulations and incentives would not change, and the scenic environment would be expected to remain largely the same or continue to improve slowly as indicated by scenic threshold monitoring data. Under existing regulations, non-conforming structures may be repaired and maintained, but redevelopment requires compliance with height limits, setbacks, and other regulations. As such, the casino towers of the south shore and other non-conforming structures would likely remain as they are today and would not likely be redeveloped under Alternative 1, as doing so would likely result in substantial economic loss. Other existing, non-conforming structures that rise to 10 stories in Incline Village and North Stateline, seven stories in Tahoe City and on the Lake in Brockway, and six stories on the Lake at Crystal Bay, would also not likely be redeveloped in their present form as their height would not be allowed. Coverage transfer ratios whereby more coverage must be retired than transferred, and the unavailability of coverage in some hydrologically related areas (HRAs), may serve as additional impediments to redevelopment. These impediments would continue under Alternative 1.

Much of the commercial development around the Lake is comprised of one- or two-story, small, strip shopping centers with large parking lots that serve local neighborhoods and communities. Some of these centers have been redeveloped in accordance with TRPA design standards and guidelines and, as a result, create more attractive commercial areas with better designs, compatible architecture, appropriate colors and textures with visual variety providing incremental improvements to the scenic quality thresholds. However, many of these commercial centers remain unimproved and lack visual appeal.

More substantial redevelopment projects have been implemented in a few locations around the Lake, most notably at South Stateline on the California side (Heavenly Village and Embassy Suites Resort) where height incentives for new commercial development (up to five stories) and tourist accommodations (up to 9 stories) were granted, with buildings designed in stair-step fashion, adjacent to the 20-story casino structures across the state line in Nevada. This redevelopment project contributed to improved local scenic quality as indicated by TRPA scenic threshold monitoring data. Prior to the redevelopment, the roadway travel route rating in this area was 11.5. After the redevelopment project and other aesthetic improvements were implemented in the area, the rating increased to 13.5.

However, most of the developed areas of Lake Tahoe are not at this scale. Smaller scale commercial centers and single-parcel redevelopment have provided improvements in scenic quality in all areas around the Lake. The commercial centers in South Lake Tahoe such as the Ski Run Center, Ski Run Boulevard pedestrian improvements and commercial rebuilds, Tahoe City pedestrian improvements, and North Stateline pedestrian improvements have all resulted in substantial improvements to the developed community character and resulted in threshold gain. In general, these areas have encouraged improved architectural design, greatly enhanced the pedestrian environment by introducing sidewalks and landscaping, improved the visibility and function of non-automobile transportation systems, and supported regionally appropriate, compact, and functional commercial areas. The improvements recognized in the threshold evaluations as a result of these projects indicate the importance of redevelopment efforts as a tool for achieving threshold gains in scenic quality and community design.

However, many older strip commercial centers and tourist accommodations remain. While TRPA has provided incentives through the Community Enhancement Program (CEP) to encourage environmentally beneficial redevelopment of some of these areas, the allocations that were used to incentivize the CEP have largely been

allocated and are no longer available under the existing plan, so these types of projects would not continue under Alternative 1.

Existing coverage rules for redevelopment in Community Plan areas would remain the same under Alternative 1, allowing up to 50 percent coverage transferred on developed lands and up to 70 percent on undeveloped lands. Coverage transfer ratios are 1:1 into these areas and increase to a 2:1 maximum on a sliding scale up to the 70 percent maximum. Only transfer of hard coverage is permitted for commercial and tourist facilities. Under the existing plan, impervious coverage has been removed from some sensitive lands, progress has been made in restoring disturbed stream environment zones (SEZ), and limited development has been removed from the lakeshore. While these sensitive areas have been the focus for TRPA for water quality improvements at Lake Tahoe, they also provide visual benefits in terms of restored wetlands, such as at the mouth of the Upper Truckee River, Wildwood Basins in the City of South Lake Tahoe, and along SR 28 in Tahoe Vista, and removal of beach development in Kings Beach. Because goals, policies, and implementation measures would remain largely unchanged under Alternative 1, such improvement could continue at much the same pace as it has since approval of the 1987 Regional Plan, or it could be slowed because the relative lack of new allocations may hamper redevelopment.

Although new development potential of Alternative 1 would be very low, some new development could occur through remaining allocations and through transfer of existing development under existing regulations. All proposed projects would require some level of TRPA review and approval, and projects must be found to comply with the Regional Plan and related ordinances, rules, and regulations, including those that protect scenic views as well as views and landscape features identified in the TRPA inventory of scenic resources. Continued application of these design standards and guidelines in Community Plan areas, including areas where travel routes do not meet minimum scenic thresholds, will, with redevelopment, create more attractive commercial areas with better designs, better signage, compatible architecture, and appropriate colors and textures with visual variety, providing incremental improvements to the scenic quality thresholds. Because Alternative 1 would maintain existing land use designations, PASs, and Community Plans, and the system of development regulations and incentives would not change, scenic conditions would be similar to those that have occurred under the Regional Plan since 1987 and would remain largely unchanged as compared to existing conditions. Movement toward scenic threshold targets would continue. Development and redevelopment therefore would not be incompatible with the scenic values of the Region. For these reasons the impact of Alternative 1 on scenic quality would be **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 2: LOW DEVELOPMENT, INCREASED REGULATION

Regulatory measures under Alternative 2 would affect the appearance of the developed areas within the Region. Alternative 2 seeks to create three locations that would serve as urban hubs: DTZs would be established in South Stateline, Kings Beach, and Tahoe City (see Exhibits 2-5 through 2-8 in Chapter 2, Regional Plan Update Alternatives). These DTZs would be the focus of urban development where special allowances for limited height and coverage transfers would apply. The remainder of the Lake Tahoe Region would be subject to the existing system of Community Plans and PASs.

The DTZs are proposed to have height limits that are more restrictive than those under the existing Regional Plan. DTZs would receive transfers of development and would accommodate a relatively higher level of allowable coverage than the rest of the Region, although it would be lower than what is currently allowed. Much of the redevelopment area in South Lake Tahoe near the casino core would become non-conforming in terms of height. Height limits in the South Stateline DTZ would range from two and a half to four stories in areas greater than 1,500 feet from the Lake or on the mountain-side of US 50, and three stories in areas within 1,500 feet of the Lake or on the Lake side of US 50. In the Tahoe City and Kings Beach DTZs, three stories would be allowed in areas greater than 1,500 feet from the Lake or on the mountain sides of SR 28 and SR 89, and two stories within

1,500 feet of the Lake or on the Lake side of those highways. For South Stateline and the Ski Run area, height limits would be lower than the existing permitted height in the redevelopment area on the California side of the state line, which has existing buildings with five to nine stories. Because of the potential for loss of existing developed square footage, this limitation may discourage redevelopment of existing structures that exceed four stories on both sides of the state line.

With the exception of transfers to the DTZs, coverage transfers would be permitted only within the same HRA, as they are today. Alternative 2 would set limits on maximum allowable coverage, up to 50 percent on high-capability lands in Community Plan areas and DTZs. With the exception of coverage transfers out of SEZ, coverage transfer ratios would generally increase compared to existing conditions, which would discourage coverage transfer. Future redevelopment of existing commercial areas would have to comply with these restrictions.

Alternative 2 would result in very low growth and proposes more stringent regulations with regard to allowable coverage, coverage transfer, excess coverage mitigation, and transfers of development than those currently in effect. An additional 200,000 square feet of CFA would be authorized for use in Community Plan areas, but only after all CFA remaining from the 1987 Regional Plan is allocated and used and a commercial occupancy of 70 percent is achieved. No new TAUs would be authorized, and limits on the size of TAUs for transfer would be defined. Transfer of CFA and TAUs from the South Shore (outside DTZs) to the North Shore DTZs would be allowed at a ratio of 2:1, which would reduce the total number of tourist accommodations at the Lake. TAUs would be permitted for transfer only into DTZs, not to other areas around the Lake. Taken together, the likelihood of substantial visual changes in the commercial areas or tourist accommodations currently available at Lake Tahoe as a result of development or redevelopment would be low under this alternative, and the number of TAUs would be much the same or reduced.

Alternative 2 would authorize 2,600 new residential allocations, so the last remaining parcels would not be developed during the planning period. No new residential bonus units would be authorized and the 874 remaining from the 1987 Regional Plan would be utilized under the existing policy. Promotion of transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes of transportation would be part of this alternative.

From a visual perspective, the built environment of Lake Tahoe under Alternative 2 would likely appear much as it does today. Some new residential development would occur on building lots, which are largely within existing subdivisions. Some scenic improvements could occur through development transfers and redevelopment, but redevelopment would likely be slower than under Alternative 1. In general, regulations pertaining to development would become more stringent. Total allowable coverage in DTZs and Community Plan areas would be less, coverage transfer ratios would be higher, and existing non-conforming heights would not be allowed to remain for redeveloped buildings. These would likely serve as disincentives to redevelopment.

No project may be developed in the region without TRPA review and approval. Further, no project may be approved by TRPA unless it is found to comply with the Regional Plan and related ordinances, rules and regulations including those that protect scenic views as well as views and landscape features identified in the TRPA inventory of scenic resources. Continued application of these design standards and guidelines in Community Plan areas, including areas within the Kings Beach and South Stateline DTZs where travel routes currently do not meet minimum scenic thresholds, would create more attractive commercial areas with better designs, better signage, compatible architecture, appropriate colors and textures with visual variety providing incremental improvements to the scenic quality thresholds. Alternative 2 would permit tall buildings in certain areas within the DTZs but lower than what is currently allowed. Although Alternative 2 may create a disincentive to bring the structures into conformance with the proposed height ordinances, many of the structures were built under the current scenic regulations and were found to be in compliance with the scenic and community

design thresholds. For this reason, the impact on scenic quality of Alternative 2 is considered to be **less than significant**.

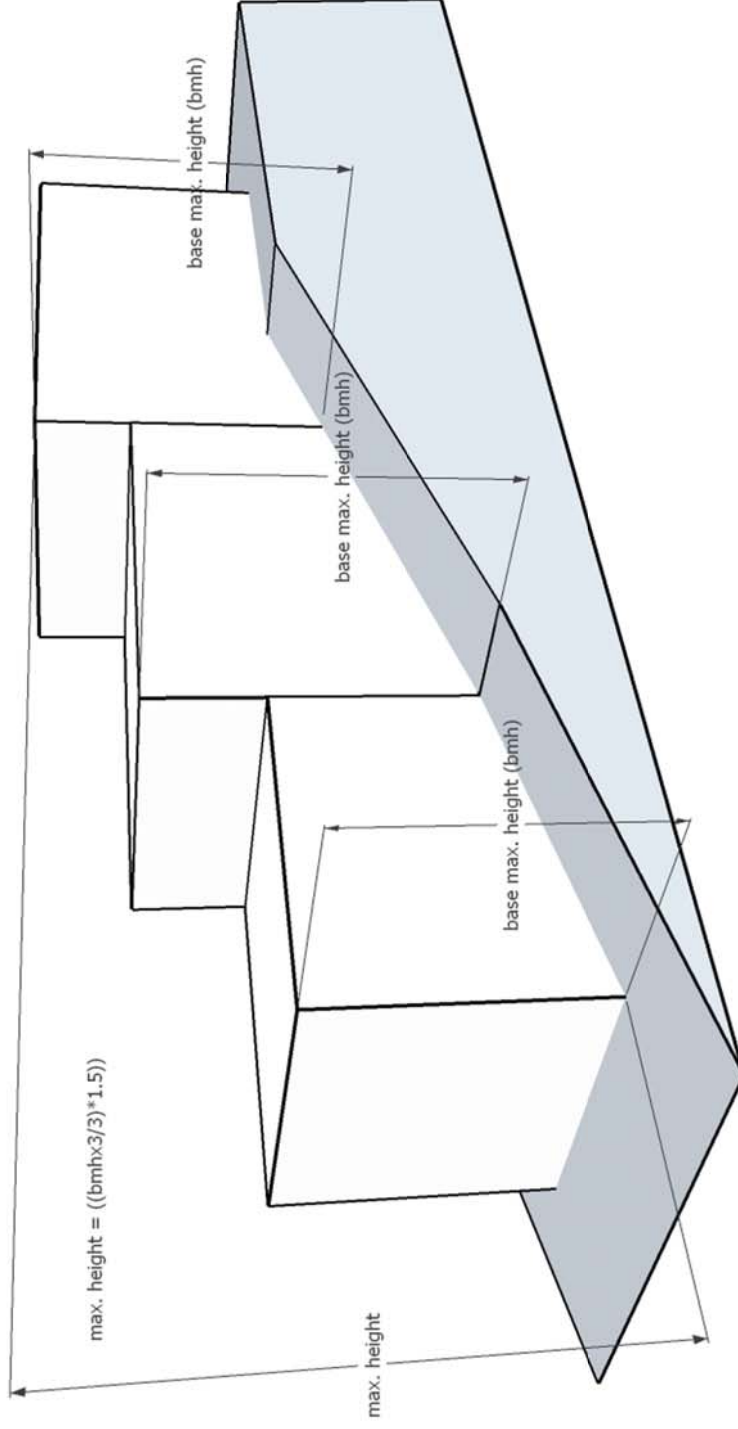
ALTERNATIVE 3: LOW DEVELOPMENT, HIGHLY INCENTIVIZED REDEVELOPMENT

Alternative 3 would establish mixed use as a new land use classification, with 10 Town Centers, a Regional Center, and a High Density Tourist District as target areas for concentrating higher intensity uses. The Town Centers would be Tahoe City, Kings Beach, North Stateline, Incline Village, Kingsbury, South Stateline, Stateline/Ski Run, City of South Lake Tahoe, South Y, and Meyers (see Exhibits 2-9 through 2-15 in Chapter 2, Regional Plan Update Alternatives). Town Centers are generally coterminous with existing Community Plan areas. The Regional Center would be an overlay designation for the tourist land use classification along US 50 from Ski Run Boulevard to the Nevada state line in California on the south shore. The Regional Center includes and expands the existing South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Demonstration Plan Special Height District (see Exhibit 2-13). The High Density Tourist District would be defined where the four hotel/casino towers exist in Stateline, Nevada. Alternative 3 includes incentives to remove coverage, TAUs, CFA, and residential units from sensitive lands within and outside these target areas. Additional transfer benefit would be awarded for development moved from lands outside these target areas into the target areas, with more benefit coming from more sensitive lands and from lands more distant from the target areas. The result would be denser, more compact community centers with taller buildings than currently allowed as well as more undeveloped, restored vacant lands in the Region.

Height limits would be four stories with a maximum height of 56 feet within Town Centers, six stories with a maximum height of 95 feet in the Regional Center, and up to 197 feet in the South Stateline High Density Tourist District. Increased heights would be permitted only in accordance with Area Plans that comply with a series of review standards and have been found in conformance with the Regional Plan. Standards for Area Plans are described in more detail below.

In addition to Area Plan opportunities, buildings that house essential public services may be granted up to 14 feet of additional height when necessary to accommodate specialized equipment. Height ordinances would be updated to promote a stair-stepping appearance of buildings on steep slopes, and methods of height measurement would be changed accordingly (Exhibit 3.9-3). Using these measurement methods, buildings up to 63 feet high (total) with individual step façades up to 42 feet would be allowed on slopes greater than 24 percent. Except for redevelopment in the High Density Tourist District, the highest point of all structures would be required to be below the forest canopy, and current scenic threshold standards would have to be met.

Redevelopment projects would be allowed the same land coverage as is currently allowed for new development: up to 70 percent coverage on high-capability lands within Town Centers, the Regional Center, and the High Density Tourist District. Coverage transfer ratios would be 1:1 (sending to receiving) from sensitive lands, while transfers from high-capability lands would occur on a sliding scale, increasing as total coverage increases. CFA, TAUs, and residential units would be allowed to transfer into these target areas from SEZ and other sensitive lands at ratios of 1:3 and 1:2, respectively. Transfers from high-capability lands would be at 1:1, and an additional transfer bonus for residential uses would be added to these ratios ranging up to 1:2 for distance from the target areas. Coverage transfers and funds generated from the Excess Coverage Mitigation Program would not be restricted to use within the same HRA but could instead be used to remove coverage in the highest priority areas. Taken together, these incentives for transfer of coverage and development would likely result in a substantial decrease in coverage and structures outside of the community centers and on sensitive lands, which would improve the visual quality of the rural areas around Lake Tahoe.



A key provision of this alternative is to allow Area Plans to be developed by local, state, and federal jurisdictions in the Region. Area Plans must be found in conformance with the Regional Plan before they take effect. They could establish building height limits that are greater than currently allowed, up to the maximum allowed by the Regional Plan, if accompanied by appropriate design guidelines. The increased height in community centers would not apply prior to approval of an Area Plan. To be approved, Area Plans for community centers would be required to comply with a series of new plan review standards, Chapter 66 scenic quality findings, and the Chapter 4 threshold findings.

New plan review standards that directly relate to scenic issues include the following.

The following thresholds findings are required for any project:

- ▲ The project is consistent with and will not adversely affect implementation of the Regional Plan, including all applicable Goals and Policies, plan area statements and maps, the Code, and other TRPA plans and programs;
- ▲ The project will not cause environmental threshold carrying capacities to be exceeded; and
- ▲ Wherever federal, state, or local air and water quality standards apply for the region, the strictest standards shall be attained, maintained, or exceeded pursuant to Article V(d) of the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact.
- ▲ To approve any amendment to the Regional Plan, TRPA shall find,...that the Regional Plan, as amended, achieves and maintains the thresholds
- ▲ To approve any amendment or adoption of the Code, Rules, or other TRPA plans and program that implement the Regional Plan, TRPA shall find,...that the Regional Plan and all of its elements, as implemented through the Code, Rules, and other TRPA plans and programs, as amended, achieves and maintains the thresholds.

The following scenic quality findings are required for any projects:

- ▲ The project shall not cause a decrease in the numerical ratings assigned to roadway or shoreline units, include the scenic quality ratings of the individual resources within each unit, as recorded in the 1982 Scenic Resources Inventory and shown in Tables 13-3, 13-5, 13-8 and 13-9 of the *Study Report for the Establishment of Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities*, October 1982. The criteria for rating scenic quality as identified in the referenced study report shall be used to determine if a project will cause a decrease in the numerical ratings.
- ▲ The project shall not cause a decrease in the 1982 roadway or shoreline travel route ratings as shown in Tables 13-6 and 13-7, respectively, of the *Study Report for the Establishment of Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities*, October 1982. The criteria for rating travel routes as identified in the referenced study report and as further explained in the report entitled *A Scenic Analysis of Principle Travel Routes in The Lake Tahoe Region*, 1970, shall be used to determine if a project will cause a decrease in the numerical rating. For projects in the shoreland, Section 66.3 shall be used to determine if it will contribute to a decrease in the numerical rating for a shoreline travel route rating.
- ▲ The project shall not cause a decrease in any numerical subcomponent threshold rating or total threshold rating assigned to a scenic resource identified in the 1993 Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation. Prior to approving a project that may potentially affect an identified scenic resource, TRPA shall find that the project is consistent with applicable recommendations for preserving scenic of the affected recreation area or bicycle trail found in the 1993 Lake Tahoe Basin Scenic Resource Evaluation.

For Town Centers and the Regional Center, Area Plans must:

- ▲ Include building and site design standards that reflect the unique character of each area, respond to local design issues, and consider ridgeline and viewshed protection.
- ▲ Demonstrate that all activity within Town Centers and the Regional Center will provide or not interfere with threshold gain, including but not limited to measurable improvements in water quality.

For the High Density Tourist District, Area Plans must:

- ▲ Meet all requirements for plans containing Town Centers and the Regional Centers, and
- ▲ Include building and site design standards that substantially enhance the appearance of existing buildings in the High Density Tourist District.

Alternative 3 includes two additional building design requirements for Area Plans that relate to scenic quality:

- ▲ Area Plans that allow buildings over two stories in height shall, where feasible, include provisions for transitional height limits or other buffer areas adjacent to areas not allowing buildings over two stories in height; and
- ▲ Area Plans shall include design standards for building design and form. Within Town Centers, the Regional Center, and the High Density Tourist District, building design and form standards shall promote pedestrian activity.

The increased height limits proposed are generally subject to specific design criteria that state “building heights shall be established to ensure that buildings do not project above the forest canopy, ridge lines, or otherwise detract from the viewshed” (Community Design Subelement 2.1(B)(2); Code Section 13.5.3(D)(b)). Alternative 3 also allows a jurisdiction to adopt “substitute” community design criteria, which must be consistent with the review standards and approval findings for Area Plans.

Taken together, these approval requirements and existing scenic quality ordinances could act to protect views of the natural-appearing landscapes and unique natural features as viewed from adopted scenic corridors and recreation areas, provide a regulatory mechanism to ensure that allowances for increased height would be approved only in conjunction with limitations and design standards consistent with the Regional Plan, and not interfere with threshold gain.

Alternative 3 would authorize the same number of new residential allocations as Alternative 2 (a total of 2,600). Construction of new housing on vacant parcels could occur at a slow to modest pace over the plan period depending upon economic conditions, while new residential construction in mixed-use centers could—by virtue of the strong incentives—occur at a moderate rate through the removal of old housing and restoration of the sites. Construction of new workforce housing would be encouraged through the use of 874 existing and 600 new residential bonus units that may be used for affordable or moderate income housing.

Alternative 3 would promote transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes of transportation. The intent of Alternative 3 is to relocate and concentrate development in the community centers to promote a more sustainable development pattern with alternative transportation options and to accelerate restoration of sensitive lands.

The visible changes that Alternative 3 is intended to produce through strong incentives would involve concentration of development in Town Centers and removal of development and site restoration outside those centers. The Town Centers would be denser and permit taller buildings. Before increasing height, Area Plans would be required to adopt design standards and guidelines contained in Area Plans that specify materials, colors, textures, and building and site design appropriate to each community in order to improve local scenic

quality. The community centers would, therefore, appear more compact and, with redevelopment, would enhance scenic quality through improved site design, architecture, building treatments, and landscaping in accordance with Area Plans. Through transfer incentives, redevelopment in the community centers would be expected to replace older strip development in the areas between Town Centers because favorable coverage transfer ratios and transfer bonuses would encourage the transfer of development from outside, to within the community centers. Buildings would not be allowed to extend above the forest canopy or ridgelines, except in the High Density Tourist District where allowable building heights would be up to 197 feet (the equivalent of the highest existing structure in the District).

Under Alternative 3, projects would continue to require TRPA review and approval unless they are activities for which local governments may assume development review authority as specified in a TRPA-approved Area Plan. Further, TRPA must find that, under the Area Plan, projects would comply with the Regional Plan and related ordinances, rules, and regulations, including those protecting scenic views and the quality of TRPA-designated scenic resources. Redevelopment consistent with scenic requirements within community centers where travel routes currently do not meet minimum scenic thresholds would result in improvement of the human-made component score of the scenic quality rating system through construction of more attractive commercial areas with better designs, better signage, compatible architecture, and appropriate colors and textures. The corresponding removal of development outside the Town Centers and restoration of the former development sites would create open space and improve landscape views and scenic quality in these areas.

Alternative 3 would expand existing allowances for buildings of up to four stories in the Town Centers and buildings up to six stories in the Regional Center. The visual impact of such buildings would depend on several factors, including the building design, viewer location, setbacks from the roadway, view backdrop, and the landscape setting (including surrounding forest trees and other buildings). The maximum allowable height would be 56 feet in Town Centers and 95 feet in the Regional Center. These height allowances could increase the number of taller buildings in the Town Centers and Regional Center, which could increase the overall visible mass, height, and scale of the built environment, despite the corresponding opportunities for improved design noted previously. If a taller and more massive building is located between important viewer locations and the Lake, it could interfere with Lake views. Important viewer locations include TRPA travel routes, public recreation areas and bike trails. If such a building is located near a designated scenic resource, the scenic quality of the designated resource could be adversely affected. Designated scenic resources are listed in the inventory maintained by TRPA and include specific views and certain physical features of the landscape. Because the tree canopy is approximately 100 feet high throughout the Basin, it is unlikely that buildings in the Town Centers or Regional Center would extend above the forest canopy. Taller buildings would have the potential to interrupt ridgeline views where such views exist, depending on the size of the building and its relationship to the ridge and the viewer; however, application of existing standards for setbacks, building design, and site design would minimize ridgeline view impacts. Although aesthetically sensitive redevelopment design would create the opportunity for scenic benefits, permitting heights up to 56 feet in the Town Centers and up to 95 feet in the Regional Center could result in buildings that are incompatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the Region because of their size, depending on building design, local site conditions, the landscape setting, and proximity to public viewing locations. Despite existing scenic quality ordinances, building and site design standards, and new approval requirements for increased building height that require more stringent height limitations and/or other supplemental design standards, the impact of allowances for increased height in community centers would be **potentially significant**.

Alternative 3 includes a building height limit of 197 feet in the High Density Tourist District, which is equivalent to the tallest existing high-rise casino towers (Harrah's and Harvey's casino hotel towers). The other existing towers in the High Density Tourist District, MontBleu and Horizon are approximately 172 feet and 149 feet in height, respectively, and an additional hotel building at Horizon is eight stories high. This policy would permit development of new buildings up to 197 feet and redevelopment of the existing high-rise towers up to that

height under current and new design and development standards and guidelines aimed at improving the aesthetic characteristics of the buildings.

Redevelopment of the casino towers and surrounding area in the High Density Tourist District would produce improvements in scenic quality through improved site design, architecture, building surface colors and treatments, and street-level scenic improvements. The scenic quality at street level could be improved by enhancement of the local streetscape, increased building setbacks from US 50, restoration of paved surface parking with landscaped open space, new strategies for casino signage, and other improvements. Also, incentives to transfer development rights from existing properties outside the High Density Tourist District to support redevelopment within the District would create the opportunity for scenic benefits through restoration of the previously developed properties. With aesthetically sensitive design of redevelopment projects, the roadway travel route rating of the Casino Area could be improved, potentially to the degree that the scenic threshold standard is attained.

Although Alternative 3 would provide the opportunity for scenic improvement through redevelopment incentives and the application of TRPA design standards, the height allowance of 197 feet in the High Density Tourist District could result in an increase in the number of tall buildings and overall mass and scale of structures. Building height has been regulated by TRPA for the primary purpose of protecting scenic quality, and it is recognized that tall buildings or other structures that extend higher than the forest canopy or above ridgelines, as viewed from public locations, scenic corridors, and designated scenic resources, may be incompatible with the scenic values of the Region. For example, TRPA's SQIP for Roadway Travel Unit 31 (views from Rabe Meadow) includes as a recommendation for improving scenic quality that "[a]dditional highrise development in the casino area at Stateline should be discouraged due to the cumulative effect that additional building mass would have on the scenic quality as viewed from this unit." However, the SQIP also recognizes that the casino area contains strip development, inadequate setbacks, and poor quality architecture, which causes views that are visually cluttered and confusing, and fail to take advantage of nearby scenic values. The SQIP outlines a number of recommendations for improving scenic quality and community character in the casino area, including: upgrading the overall architectural style, quality, materials and colors to complement Tahoe's natural setting; prohibiting new high-rises outside the casino area; and form, line, color, and material conformance of any new high-rise to the surrounding area. These recommendations are designed to avoid adding to the cumulative visual impact, in part, by requiring that building heights do not interfere with views of prominent scenic features and are compatible with the scale of surrounding buildings.

Because of their height, form, and mass, the group of existing high-rise casino towers is visually prominent and forms a distinctive skyline. The buildings are visible from many points within the Region, including Rabe Meadow, Baldwin Beach, El Dorado Beach, and Van Sickle Bi-State Park, and from great distances such as the Echo Summit entry to the Region, points on the west shore, portions of the Tahoe Rim Trail, and the surface of the Lake, as well as some places within the Desolation Wilderness. At existing heights, towers in the casino area protrude above the tree canopy, as viewed from Roadway Travel Unit 31, Baldwin Beach, Lake Tahoe, and many distant viewpoints. From near-ground public viewpoints, the buildings block ridgeline views. Examples of the visibility and scenic impacts of the existing casino towers are shown in Exhibit 3.9-4.

Allowance of new or redeveloped towers in the High Density Tourist District that are greater in visible height and mass than the existing buildings would increase the mass of tall structures from many near-ground and distant viewpoints, particularly where buildings extend above the tree canopy. Affected viewpoints could include nearby public recreation areas and parkland (e.g., Baldwin Beach, El Dorado Beach, Van Sickle Bi-State Park), multiple viewpoints along US 50 as travelers approach the District from either direction, many viewpoints from the Lake surface, and distant scenic vistas overlooking the Region (e.g., Echo Summit/US 50 entrance to the Region, Tahoe Rim Trail). The existing casino towers already have visual prominence, and the additional height allowance would depend on (1) adoption of design standards before any opportunity is available for increased

height or mass and (2) findings that identified scenic views would not be adversely affected. In spite of these factors, allowance of additional visible building height and mass could render new and redeveloped towers even more prominent in the Region, resulting in increased visual intrusion and adverse effects on the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the Region. Therefore, this impact is **potentially significant**.



View from El Dorado Beach



View from Rabe Meadow

Exhibit 3.9-4.

Views of the Existing Casino Towers

Alternative 3 includes a provision to promote a stair-stepping appearance of buildings on steep slopes, which has the potential to result in buildings up to 63 feet high (total) with individual step façades up to 42 feet on sloped sites throughout the Region and without any supplemental approval requirements. The additional height would allow more visual massing than is allowed today and potentially result in a situation of visual dominance on the parcel. Previous evaluations have cited structures on steep slopes with little articulation as a potential impact to scenic travel routes. Therefore, the increased height permitted by this provision would be **potentially significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 4: REDUCED DEVELOPMENT, INCENTIVIZED REDEVELOPMENT

Alternative 4 would rely on different strategies to encourage redevelopment at Lake Tahoe. By using the transect-based zoning system described in Section 2.8.4, Alternative 4, in Chapter 2, Regional Plan Update Alternatives, TRPA would promote development in 12 pedestrian- and transit-oriented development (PTOD) overlay areas around the Lake (see Exhibits 2-16 through 2-24 in Chapter 2, Regional Plan Update Alternatives). Transect districts would allow a mix of land uses and housing types and result in a distribution of uses. Each transect district would include specific measures that would regulate the physical form of the built environment to produce desired relationships between buildings and outdoor public areas, including streets. Characteristics such as massing, design, and permissible uses would be designated for each district. Through community plans, districts would be further divided into Character Areas, which would have unique land use and design standards.

Heights ranging from three to six stories would be permitted in the PTOD overlay areas, depending on the transect district. Mixed use would be encouraged in the PTODs and minimum densities of 8 units per acre would apply for residential and tourist accommodations. Like Alternative 3, these areas would allow coverage up to 70 percent of high capability lands for redevelopment projects. Over time, this alternative would result in compact, high-density, four-story urbanized areas with intensive uses that support transit, bicycles, and pedestrians, transitioning at the outer edges to restored and undeveloped land that would make up the rural transect areas. Alternative 4 includes incentives for removal of coverage on sensitive lands, including those in rural areas.

Alternative 4 would authorize 4,000 residential allocations, 400,000 square feet of CFA, and 200 additional TAUs. The incentives to remove and transfer coverage, CFA, and TAUs would not be as great as in Alternative 3, but greater than in Alternatives 1 or 2. The existing non-conforming height in the casino core area would be recognized. TAU conversions would allow for larger units. Older, small motel units could be removed, and with the additional allocations of TAUs, the total number of units could increase Region-wide. Density regulations that prohibit condominiums in PTOD areas would be amended. The mixed-use, high-density PTOD districts are intended to be vital urban cores with commercial, residential, and tourist accommodation uses.

The coverage transfer incentives would be 1:1 for sensitive lands and 2:1 for high-capability land. Coverage transfer across HRAs from those that are impaired to those that are not impaired would be permitted. Transfer of CFA and TAUs would be at 1:1, and bonus units would be available as a match for development in the most urbanized transect districts. Based on these incentives, it is expected that older existing development would be removed and restored and development and redevelopment of the most urbanized centers would occur, but to a lesser degree and at a slower pace than under Alternative 3.

The visible changes that could result from implementing Alternative 4 include new development and redevelopment in the 12 PTOD districts and removal and restoration of development outside those districts. These actions would be encouraged through incentives. The PTOD districts would be denser, permit taller buildings, appear more compact, and, through redevelopment, have the opportunity to enhance their scenic quality. Redevelopment would occur under revised design standards and guidelines addressing building form and site design as well as building materials, colors, textures, and landscaping. Redevelopment in the PTOD districts would be accompanied by a reduction in development in areas outside the districts. Buildings would not be allowed to extend above the forest canopy or ridgelines except the existing high-rise structures in the Nevada South Stateline Tourist Center District, which would be allowed to be redeveloped at their existing heights.

No project may be approved by TRPA unless it is found to comply with the Regional Plan and related ordinances, rules and regulations including those that protect scenic views as well as views and landscape features identified in the TRPA inventory of scenic resources. Continued application of these design standards and guidelines in Community Plan areas, including areas within 10 of the 12 PTODs where travel routes currently do not meet minimum scenic thresholds, would be expected to create more attractive commercial areas with better designs, better signage, compatible architecture, appropriate colors and textures with visual variety providing incremental improvements to the scenic quality thresholds. The corresponding removal of development outside the PTODs and restoration of the former development sites would create open space and improve scenic quality in these areas, a **beneficial** impact.

Alternative 4 would increase allowable building height in Town Centers and Neighborhood Centers to accommodate a greater range of use types and would allow existing towers in the South Stateline Casino Core Tourist Center to redevelop at their existing heights. These policy changes could, depending on local site conditions, setting, and viewing locations, result in buildings that are incompatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the Region. For this reason, the impact on scenic quality from increased allowable building height in Town Centers would be **potentially significant**.

Allowance for redevelopment of the existing towers in the South Stateline Casino Core Tourist Centers to their existing height could, depending on local site conditions, setting, and viewing locations, result in buildings that are incompatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the Region. Because of their height, form, and mass, the group of existing high-rise casino towers is visually prominent and forms a distinctive skyline. The buildings are visible from many points within the Region, including Rabe Meadow, Baldwin Beach, El Dorado Beach, and Van Sickle Bi-State Park, and from great distances such as the Echo Summit entry to the Region, points on the west shore, portions of the Tahoe Rim Trail, and the surface of the Lake, as well as some places within the Desolation Wilderness. At existing heights, towers in the casino area protrude above the tree canopy,

as viewed from Roadway Travel Unit 31, Baldwin Beach, Lake Tahoe, and many distant viewpoints (Exhibit 3.9-4). From near-ground public viewpoints, the buildings block ridgeline views. Redevelopment of the existing towers would result in improvement of the human-made component score of the scenic quality rating system through construction of more attractive commercial areas with better designs, better signage, compatible architecture, and appropriate colors and textures. However, the location and siting of any redeveloped tower may potentially result in impacts to identified scenic resources by resulting in view blockage or degrading a high-quality scenic resource. Therefore, the impact of redeveloping up to the existing height in the South Stateline Casino Core Tourist Center would be **potentially significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 5: SIMILAR RATE OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATORY STRUCTURE TO THE 1987 REGIONAL PLAN

This alternative would retain the incentives and regulations of the existing 1987 Regional Plan, and would authorize an additional 600,000 square feet of CFA, 400 TAUs, and 5,200 new residential allocations. This represents more new development than any of the other alternatives, and a similar amount authorized under the 1987 Regional Plan. Minor regulatory changes would be made to reflect new information and technology, but none would have a substantial effect on the way the Region would be redeveloped.

Redevelopment would be expected to continue as it has under the 1987 Regional Plan, and with authorization of a similar number of allocations, generally at the same rate. The intent of Alternative 5 would be to use the same systems that are currently in place for the Region, and to allow for the full build-out of commercial areas, tourist accommodations and residential construction during the approximately 20-year life of the plan. Residential build-out of the Region could occur faster than in any of the other alternatives, because the authorized residential allocations would exceed the number of remaining development rights. Excess allocations could be used for multi-residential units on existing developed lots, up to the maximum of 874 multi-residential bonus units allowed under all alternatives. This means that if the demand occurs over the next 20 years, redevelopment of the same nature and rate that occurred under the existing Regional Plan could proceed with the incentives and allocations provided.

No changes to existing coverage transfer ratios would occur or to the regulations that permit transfer of coverage only within HRAs. The 1987 land use designations would remain, thus discouraging the kinds of mixed-use, higher density community centers envisioned in Alternatives 3 and 4. Special programs could be developed such as the community enhancement program, for example, to further incentivize redevelopment, but this would not be a clearly stated goal of this alternative.

No project could be approved by TRPA unless it is found to comply with the Regional Plan and related ordinances, rules and regulations including those that protect scenic views as well as views and landscape features identified in the TRPA inventory of scenic resources. Continued application of these design standards and guidelines in Community Plan areas, including areas where travel routes do not meet minimum scenic thresholds, would create more attractive commercial areas with better designs, better signage, compatible architecture, appropriate colors and textures with visual variety providing incremental improvements to the scenic quality thresholds. Because Alternative 5 would maintain existing land use designations and the system of development regulations and incentives would not change, changes in scenic conditions would be similar to those that have occurred since 1987 under the existing Regional Plan. New development and redevelopment would be required to comply with existing development standards and design guidelines and scenic thresholds would continue to apply. Development and redevelopment therefore would not be incompatible with the scenic values of the region. Changes to the visual environment over the planning period under Alternative 5 would not be substantial, and roadway travel route ratings would continue to improve. For these reasons the impact of Alternative 5 on scenic quality would be **less than significant**.

MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation is required for Alternatives 1, 2, or 5.

The following mitigation measures are required for Alternatives 3 and 4.

Mitigation Measure 3.9-1a: Comply with Specific Findings and Performance Standards for Additional Building Height

To mitigate for potentially significant scenic impacts resulting from three- or four-story buildings in the 10 Town Centers (Alternative 3) and 12 PTODs (Alternative 4), and from three- to six-story buildings in the Regional Center (Alternative 3), TRPA will apply the applicable TRPA Code of Ordinances, Chapter 37, Height Standards; Section 37.7, Findings for Additional building Height; or equivalent findings established in an Area Plan.

Mitigation Measure 3.9-1b: Permit Redevelopment of the High Density Tourist District/South Stateline Casino Core Tourist District of Existing Buildings within Existing Visual Prominence

To mitigate for potentially significant scenic impacts resulting from buildings up to 197 feet in the High Density Tourist District (Alternative 3) and redevelopment of the existing high-rise buildings in the South Stateline Casino Core Tourist District (Alternative 4), TRPA will require that any proposed development in the High Density Tourist District (Alternative 3) or the South Stateline Casino Core Tourist District (Alternative 4) achieve the following performance standard:

- › The height and visual mass of any redeveloped existing high-rise structures projecting above the forest canopy shall not increase the visual prominence over baseline conditions as viewed and evaluated from key scenic viewpoints, including, but not limited to, views from the Van Sickle Bi-State Park, scenic roadway units, scenic shoreline units, and public recreation areas. When considering visual prominence, the following factors will be considered: building mass, contrast, location, articulation, color, materials, and architectural style; and the quality of landscape features and views that are blocked or revealed.

Mitigation Measure 3.9-1c: Reduce Ground Floor Height for Stepped Buildings on Slopes

For Alternative 3, for the purposes of measuring the height of proposed stepped buildings on sloping sites with a cross slope of 10 percent or greater, TRPA will amend the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 37, Height Standards, to require that the maximum height of the ground floor segment not exceed 28 feet.

Significance After Mitigation

Because buildings with additional height in the Town Centers, Regional Center, and PTOD areas would be constructed so as to minimize visibility, visual magnitude, and interference of views, and existing buildings in the High Density Tourist District/South Stateline Casino Core Tourist Center would be redeveloped to improve scenic quality and not increase the visual prominence over baseline conditions, implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.9-1a and 3.9-b would reduce Impact 3.9-1 of Alternatives 3 and 4 to a **less-than-significant** level.

Because buildings on slopes greater than 10 percent are required to cap the maximum height of the lowest portion of a building to 28 feet, implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.9-1c would reduce Impact 3.9-1 of Alternative 3 to a **less-than-significant** level.

Impact 3.9-2 **Visual Character.** All five alternatives allow for changes in the built environment. Such changes could adversely affect visual character if the appearance of the development that would result is not in accord with the desires of the local community. Potential impacts from development and redevelopment on visual character in the Tahoe Region are currently mitigated through environmental review and existing TRPA regulations. Because Alternatives 1 and 5 would maintain existing design standards and guidelines and limits on building height, the impact on visual character would be **less than significant**. Because Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 specify that local planning instruments would be updated or developed to include design and development standards that represent the vision and desire of the local community for visual character, the impact would be **less than significant**.

Landscape character can be defined as the visual and cultural image of a geographic area. It consists of the combination of physical, biological, and cultural attributes that make each landscape identifiable or unique (USFS 1995). Visual character may range from predominantly natural to heavily influenced by human development. Examples of both occur in the Lake Tahoe Region. In developed areas, visual character is greatly influenced by the physical and visual attributes of the built environment. Attention to physical planning and design within developed areas provides the means to control and direct visual character.

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO PROJECT

Current design standards and guidelines and limits on building height would be maintained. Any new development or redevelopment project would be subject to TRPA approval, including public input and environmental review. As a result, the existing visual character of the region would remain largely unchanged and levels of scenic quality would be maintained or continue to improve slowly as indicated by TRPA scenic threshold monitoring data. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 1 on visual character would be **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 2: LOW DEVELOPMENT, INCREASED REGULATION

Alternative 2 would promote the removal of development from certain areas and concentrate it through development transfers within the Tahoe City, Kings Beach, and South Stateline DTZs. These actions would affect the visual character of the areas involved. The DTZs would experience the greatest change. The land use planning system would continue to use PASs, Community Plans, Redevelopment Plans, master plans, and specific plans. Currently, desired community character is articulated in all these documents but is outdated. Community Plans and PASs would be updated and would include implementation of new design standards that reflect local vision for visual character leading to improvements in scenic quality and meeting scenic threshold targets. These would serve to guide the character of development in a desirable manner as physical changes occur over time. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 2 on visual quality would be **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 3: LOW DEVELOPMENT, HIGHLY INCENTIVIZED REDEVELOPMENT

Alternative 3 seeks to consolidate most development in the Lake Tahoe Region within 10 Town Centers, a Regional Center, and a High Density Tourist District through transfers of existing development from locations outside these 12 areas. As these actions are carried out, they would affect the visual character of the areas involved. A new land use planning system would be used based on the concept of Area Plans, codes, and zoning prepared by local governments in compliance with the regional plan. Certain design requirements would be included in the local plans for site design, building design, landscaping, lighting, transitional height limits, and signage. Further, Area Plans could restrict building heights to something less than that allowed in the regional plan. The plans would thus guide the character of development and redevelopment as it occurs to be consistent with the desires of the local community; however, development and redevelopment are expected at a greater

rate than with Alternatives 1, 2, 4, and 5 as a result of built-in transfers and environmental redevelopment incentives. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 3 on visual character would be **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 4: REDUCED DEVELOPMENT, INCENTIVIZED REDEVELOPMENT

Alternative 4 seeks to consolidate development in the Lake Tahoe Region within 12 PTOD districts. It would also establish a transect zoning system that would allow for a mix of land uses and housing types, and would regulate development based on the physical form of the built environment. These actions would affect the visual character of the areas involved. The greatest change would likely occur within the 12 PTOD districts. Design standards for new development and redevelopment would be implemented for the PTOD districts that reflect community input. These would serve to guide the character of development in a desirable manner as physical changes to the built environment occur over time. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 4 on visual character would be **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 5: SIMILAR RATE OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATORY STRUCTURE TO THE 1987 REGIONAL PLAN

Alternative 5 would retain existing requirements and types of incentives for development and redevelopment. It would allow more allocations as incentives for new development than the other alternatives, although they would be allocated based on the ratios and rules of the existing Regional Plan. Current design standards and guidelines and limits on building height would be maintained. Any new development or redevelopment project would be subject to TRPA approval including public input and environmental review. As a result, the existing visual character of the region would remain largely unchanged and levels of scenic quality would be maintained or continue to improve slowly as indicated by TRPA scenic threshold monitoring data. For these reasons, the impact of Alternative 5 on visual character would be **less than significant**.

MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation is required for any of the alternatives.

Impact 3.9-3	Adversely Affect Nighttime Views In the Region. Outdoor lighting in developed areas is necessary for public safety and security. If not properly controlled, it has the potential to illuminate the night sky and adversely affect nighttime views. The impact of outdoor lighting on nighttime views is considered to be less than significant under Alternatives 1 and 5 and beneficial for Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 because specific measures to control stray light and minimize off-site spillage of light would be required under those alternatives.
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The intent of all alternatives is to set specific requirements for exterior lighting location, height, and shielding to satisfy public safety requirements but minimize off-site spillage and, to the extent feasible, reduce light pollution coming from within the Region. Existing lighting standards currently require only that lights be directed downward and do not specifically require the use of cutoff shields. Changes to Chapter 36.8 of the Code of Ordinances to require the use of cutoff shields would apply to Alternatives 2, 3, and 4. As new development and redevelopment occur, these lighting standards would be implemented. Some light pollution and stray light is now coming from outside the Region, notably from night skiing lights at Squaw Valley Resort; however, control of these sources is outside the authority of TRPA and the scope of this EIS.

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO PROJECT

The existing outdoor lighting standards described in Chapter 36.8 of the Code of Ordinances would continue for Alternative 1 and are applicable throughout the Region. For this reason, the impact of Alternative 1 on nighttime views and dark skies would be **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE 2: LOW DEVELOPMENT, INCREASED REGULATION

For Alternative 2, outdoor lighting standards would be developed for each proposed land use classification, minimizing stray or unnecessary lighting. For this reason, the impact of Alternative 2 on nighttime views and dark skies would be **beneficial**.

ALTERNATIVE 3: LOW DEVELOPMENT, HIGHLY INCENTIVIZED REDEVELOPMENT

In Alternative 3, lighting standards would be adopted, including cutoff shields to minimize light pollution and stray light to protect dark sky views. For this reason, the impact of Alternative 3 on nighttime views and dark skies would be **beneficial**.

ALTERNATIVE 4: REDUCED DEVELOPMENT, INCENTIVIZED REDEVELOPMENT

In Alternative 4, lighting standards for each transect district would be adopted, including the use of low-intensity lights and/or cutoff shields to minimize light pollution and stray light. For this reason, the impact of Alternative 4 on nighttime views and dark skies would be **beneficial**.

ALTERNATIVE 5: SIMILAR RATE OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATORY STRUCTURE TO THE 1987 REGIONAL PLAN

The existing outdoor lighting standards described in Chapter 36.8 of the Code of Ordinances would continue for Alternative 5 and are applicable throughout the Region. For this reason, the impact of Alternative 5 on nighttime views and dark skies would be **less than significant**.

MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation is required for any of the alternatives.