

1 INTRODUCTION

This Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report (PTEIR or Tahoe PTEIR) evaluates the environmental impacts of the proposed Tahoe timberland program (proposed program). It has been prepared according to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.), the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR], Title 14, Section 15000 et seq. [14 CCR Section 15000 et seq.]), Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act (FPA) (PRC Section 4511 et seq.), and the California Forest Practice Rules (CFPR) (14 CCR Section 1092.01) under the direction of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). CAL FIRE is the CEQA lead agency. Members of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) including the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy), Lake Valley Fire Protection District, and North Tahoe Fire Protection District are CEQA responsible agencies that would implement later activities under the Tahoe PTEIR. These responsible agencies collaborated with CAL FIRE in the preparation of this PTEIR.

1.1 PROJECT REQUIRING ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The proposed program consists of forest management and fuel reduction activities and associated environmental protections that would occur within the approximately 17,490-acre program area (Figure 2-1) to reduce wildfire risks to communities and improve forest health through vegetation management activities primarily in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The proposed program would be implemented through a long-term series of later activities for forest fuel reduction that includes initial treatments and retreatments of project areas. The proposed program includes a variety of forest treatment activities to reduce the risk of high severity wildfire, including mechanical thinning, manual/hand thinning, prescribed understory burning, pile burning, sale and transport of merchantable timber, and the transport and use of biomass for energy generation and wood pulp products. Herbicide treatment is not proposed. Additional detail on the proposed program is provided in Chapter 2, "Program Description."

1.2 SCOPE OF THIS DRAFT PTEIR

This PTEIR includes an evaluation of the following 15 environmental issue areas, as well as other CEQA-mandated topics (e.g., cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, significant unavoidable impacts, alternatives):

- ▶ Aesthetics;
- ▶ Agricultural and Forestry Resources;
- ▶ Air Quality;
- ▶ Biological Resources;
- ▶ Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resources;
- ▶ Energy;
- ▶ Geology, Soils, and Land Capability;
- ▶ Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change;
- ▶ Hazards and Hazardous Materials;
- ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality;
- ▶ Noise and Vibration;
- ▶ Recreation;
- ▶ Transportation;
- ▶ Wildfire; and
- ▶ Mandatory Findings of Significance.

This PTEIR also includes an evaluation of social and economic effects, consistent with guidance provided by CAL FIRE and the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board and CAL FIRE 2014). The State CEQA Guidelines Section 15131 also provides guidance related to inclusion of social and economic effects of a project into an EIR, but states that “[e]conomic or social effects of a project shall not be treated as significant effects on the environment.”

Under the CEQA statutes and the State CEQA Guidelines, a lead agency may limit an EIR’s discussion of environmental effects when such effects are not potentially significant (PRC Section 21002.1[e]; State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15128 and 15143). Information used to determine which impacts would be potentially significant was derived from review of the proposed program; review of applicable planning documents and CEQA documentation; feedback from public and agency consultation; and comments received on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) (see Appendix C of this Draft EIR). The effects that were determined to not be significant, and thus do not warrant detailed review in this PTEIR are described in Section 1.8, “Effects Not Found to be Significant,” and include land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, and utilities and service systems.

1.3 PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

As identified above in Section 1.3, “Scope of this Draft EIR,” in accordance with CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, an NOP was distributed on June 13, 2019, to responsible agencies, interested parties and organizations, and private organizations and individuals that could have interest in the program. The NOP was available on the Tahoe PTEIR website at <https://www.ntfire.net/tahoepteir> and availability of the NOP was advertised in the Sierra Sun and Tahoe Daily Tribune. The purpose of the NOP was to provide notification that a PTEIR for the proposed program was being prepared and to solicit input on the scope and content of the document. Two public scoping meetings were held during the scoping period at the following times and locations:

- ▶ June 13, 2019, 6:00 pm at the North Tahoe Events Center in Kings Beach, CA
- ▶ June 28, 2019, 7:00 pm at the Taylor Creek Visitor Center near the City of South Lake Tahoe, CA

The NOP and responses to the NOP are included in Appendix C of this Draft PTEIR.

This Draft PTEIR is being circulated for public review and comment for a period of 45 days. During this period, comments from the general public as well as organizations and agencies on environmental issues may be submitted to the lead agency. Copies of the Draft EIR may be reviewed online at, or downloaded from, <https://www.ntfire.net/tahoepteir>. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hard copies will not be made readily available for review. Individuals that are unable to access the Draft PTEIR at the website listed above should contact North Tahoe Fire Protection District at TahoePTEIR@ntfire.net or 530-584-2344 to obtain a copy.

A public webinar on the Draft PTEIR will be held on June 17, 2020, at 5:30 p.m. Instructions on attending the webinar are available at the following link <https://www.ntfire.net/tahoe-pteir>. The purpose of the webinar is to present the findings of, and receive comments on, the Draft PTEIR.

Upon completion of the public review and comment period, a Final Tahoe PTEIR will be prepared that will include both written and oral comments on the Draft Tahoe PTEIR received during the public-review period, responses to those comments, and any revisions to the Draft Tahoe PTEIR made in response to public comments. The Draft Tahoe PTEIR and Final Tahoe PTEIR will comprise the Tahoe PTEIR for the program.

Before approving the proposed program, the CAL FIRE is required to certify that the PTEIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA and the CFPR, that the decision-making body reviewed and considered the information in the PTEIR, and that the PTEIR reflects the independent judgment of the lead agency (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15090 and 14 CCR Section 1092.02).

1.4 DRAFT PTEIR ORGANIZATION

This Draft PTEIR is organized into chapters, as identified and briefly described below. Chapters are further divided into sections (e.g., Chapter 3, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures” and Section 3.2, “Aesthetics”):

- ▶ “Executive Summary”: This chapter introduces the Tahoe PTEIR; provides a summary of the environmental review process, effects found not to be significant, and key environmental issues; and lists significant impacts and mitigation measures to reduce significant impacts to less-than-significant levels.
- ▶ Chapter 1, “Introduction”: This chapter provides a description of the lead and responsible agencies, the legal authority and purpose for the document, and the public review process.
- ▶ Chapter 2, “Program Description”: This chapter describes the location, background, and goals and objectives for the proposed program, and describes the program elements in detail.
- ▶ Chapter 3, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures”: The sections within this chapter evaluate the expected environmental impacts generated by the proposed program, arranged by subject area (e.g., Land Use, Hydrology and Water Quality). Within each subsection of Chapter 3, the regulatory background, environmental setting, analysis methodology, and thresholds of significance are described. The anticipated changes to baseline conditions after implementation of the program are then evaluated for each subject area. For any significant or potentially significant impact that would result from project implementation, mitigation measures are presented and the level of impact significance after mitigation is identified. Environmental impacts are numbered sequentially within each section (e.g., Impact 3.2-1, Impact 3.2-2, etc.). Any required mitigation measures are numbered to correspond to the impact numbering; therefore, the mitigation measure for Impact 3.2-2 would be Mitigation Measure 3.2-2.
- ▶ Chapter 4, “Social and Economic Effects”: This chapter includes analysis of the social and economic effects of the program in accordance with *Guidance in the Preparation and Review of PTEIRs* (Board and CAL FIRE 2014).
- ▶ Chapter 5, “Cumulative Impacts”: This chapter provides information required by CEQA regarding cumulative impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed program together with other past, present, and probable future projects.
- ▶ Chapter 6, “Alternatives”: This chapter evaluates alternatives to the proposed program, including alternatives considered but eliminated from further consideration, the No-Program Alternative, and three alternative program options. The environmentally superior alternative is identified.
- ▶ Chapter 7, “Other Sections Required by Statute”: This chapter evaluates growth-inducing impacts and irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources, and discloses any significant and unavoidable adverse impacts.
- ▶ Chapter 8, “Report Preparers”: This chapter identifies the preparers of the document.
- ▶ Chapter 9, “References”: This chapter identifies the organizations and persons consulted during preparation of this Draft EIR and the documents and individuals used as sources for the analysis.

1.5 STANDARD TERMINOLOGY

The following are key terms used in this PTEIR to describe important components of the proposed program:

- ▶ “Project proponent” refers to a public agency proposing to implement a treatment project which could include CAL FIRE, the Conservancy, fire districts, or other public agencies or landowners with land ownership and/or management responsibilities seeking to implement individual treatment activities using this PTEIR for CEQA and/or FPA compliance.
- ▶ “Project implementer” refers to the entities that would be carrying out treatment activities under the Tahoe PTEIR and could include Licensed Timber Operators, forestry contractors, or public agency field crews, such as the California Conservation Corps, Conservancy Forestry Crews, or Fire District Crews.

- ▶ “Program area” is the 17,490-acre area within which later treatment activities under the Tahoe PTEIR could be implemented (refer to Section 2.2 of Chapter 2 “Program Description” for additional description).
- ▶ “Later treatment activity” is a future proposed fuels treatment project that is consistent with the treatment methods described in this PTEIR, would not result in new or substantially more severe significant effects relative to those identified in this PTEIR, and would otherwise be considered within the scope of this EIR pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c)(2).
- ▶ “Treatment activity” includes manual treatments, mechanical treatments, prescribed understory burning, and pile burning (each is described in Section 2.4 of Chapter 2 “Program Description”); any of these activities could be used in various combinations to comprise a later treatment activity.

This PTEIR uses the following terminology to describe environmental effects of the proposed program:

- ▶ “No impact” means no change from baseline conditions (no mitigation is needed).
- ▶ “Less-than-significant impact” means no substantial adverse change in the physical environment within the area affected by the program (no mitigation is needed).
- ▶ “Potentially significant impact” means an impact that might cause a substantial adverse change in the environment, although it is uncertain whether the impact would occur (mitigation is recommended because potentially significant impacts are treated as significant).
- ▶ “Significant impact” means an impact that would cause a substantial adverse change in the physical environment within the area affected by the program (mitigation is recommended).
- ▶ “Significant and unavoidable impact” means an impact that would cause a substantial adverse change in the physical environment and that cannot be avoided, even with the implementation of all feasible mitigation.
- ▶ “Mitigation measure” is a modification to the proposed program or an additional action that would:
 - avoid the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;
 - minimize impacts by limiting the degree of magnitude of the action and its implementation;
 - rectify the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
 - reduce or eliminate the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and/or
 - compensate for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments, including through permanent protection of such resources in the form of conservation easements (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15370).

1.6 EFFECTS NOT FOUND TO BE SIGNIFICANT

The CEQA Guidelines (Section 15128) allow an EIR to identify environmental effects that were determined to not be significant and to briefly describe the reasons. Such effects can be dismissed from detailed review in the PTEIR. The proposed program would not result in significant effects related to the topics described below and are dismissed from detailed review in this PTEIR. These issue areas are organized below to address the topics in the State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G Environmental Checklist Form.

- ▶ **Land Use and Planning:** Forest management and fuel reduction activities are allowed in all land use and zoning districts in each of the Area Plans, Plan Area Statements, and applicable local jurisdiction zoning within the program area. Treatment activities would be located in forested areas within and outside of developed communities. Activities would be short-term and temporary, thus implementation of the Tahoe PTEIR would not divide an established community. Some treatment activities could occur on discrete lots within communities, but would not result in any temporary or permanent land use changes or any actions that would result in physical division of an established community. Therefore, the proposed program would not affect land use and planning.

- ▶ **Mineral Resources:** The proposed program would include temporary forest management and fuel reduction activities that would not preclude the use of a state or locally important mineral resources. Additionally, mining activities are not an identified allowable use in the Tahoe Basin (Chapter 21, "Permissible Uses," in the TRPA Code of Ordinances). Thus, the proposed program would not result in loss of a known mineral resource or a locally important mineral resource recovery site.
- ▶ **Population and Housing:** The proposed program would occur on forested land that is primarily in public ownership and would not displace people or existing housing. The proposed program could result in an increase in workers to implement fuel reduction treatments. Employee demand generated by the proposed program would be met by Licensed Timber Operators, other forestry contractors, or public agency field crews, such as California Conservation Corps, Tahoe Conservancy Forestry Crews or Fire District Crews. The demand for employees would be a small incremental increase over existing regional job demands, and workers would be expected to come from the existing local workforce or could result in some people relocating to near or within the program area. Implementation of the Tahoe PTEIR would not result in substantial unplanned population growth such that construction of additional housing would be required. Implementation of the Tahoe PTEIR would also not include the extension of roads or other infrastructure that could indirectly induce substantial unplanned population growth in the program area.
- ▶ **Public Services:** The proposed program would not generate an increased need for public services, such as fire or police protection, schools, or parks, because there would be no substantial changes in population or any new housing resulting from the proposed treatments. The proposed program would not result in the need for new or altered governmental facilities and would, therefore, not affect public services.
- ▶ **Utilities and Service Systems:** Implementation of the proposed program would not result in new permanent structures or uses that would generate demand for electricity or natural gas, or solid waste that would be disposed of in landfills. Biomass generated from treatment activities would not be disposed of in landfills. Issues related to stormwater runoff are addressed in Section 3.11, "Hydrology and Water Quality."
 - For treatment activities that may occur for a long period of time (i.e., more than a few days), portable restrooms may be used by project implementers. This would be the only source of wastewater generated by the proposed program. Portable restrooms would be cleaned periodically, and the waste would be hauled off site to a wastewater treatment facility for disposal. This service is typically provided by an independent contractor permitted to handle, haul, and dispose of sanitary sewage. Pursuant to 40 CFR Section 403.5, hauled waste must be disposed of at a designated publicly owned treatment facility. Typically, publicly owned treatment facilities are responsible for implementing permit programs for hauled waste and ensure that adequate treatment capacity exists. Because the use of portable restrooms would be incrementally greater than currently occurs, the demand for wastewater treatment would be minimal. Therefore, wastewater treatment demand would not exceed the capacity of any wastewater treatment provider.
 - Water trucks could be used for dust suppression during manual or mechanical treatments. Water trucks may also be stored on the treatment site for fire suppression during prescribed burning or pile burning activities. Water would be supplied (from surface or groundwater by a municipal water source) via nearby fire hydrants or other municipal sources. In some instances where it is infeasible for water trucks to access a site, water drafting from surface water sources located close to treatment sites could occur. Because treatment activities occur for a temporary duration with limited water demand, local municipal water suppliers would have sufficient water supplies to serve the level of water use associated with implementation of the proposed program.

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