



NOTICE OF PREPARATION and ANNOUNCEMENT OF SCOPING MEETINGS

Tahoe Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report

Release Date: June 13, 2019

To: California State Clearinghouse, California Responsible and Trustee Agencies, Other Public Agencies, and Interested Individuals and Organizations

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report

Lead Agency: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
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Consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is the lead agency under CEQA for the preparation of a program timberland environmental impact report (PTEIR) for a long-term program of wildfire risk reduction within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). CAL FIRE prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) pursuant to Section 15082 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

This NOP is intended to inform responsible, trustee, and other affected or interested agencies and the public that a PTEIR will be prepared to address potential environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the program. Agencies should comment on the elements of potential environmental effects that are relevant to their statutory responsibilities in connection with the implementation of the proposed project. Comments on this NOP should be submitted by July 15, 2019.

SCOPING MEETINGS

Two PTEIR scoping meetings are scheduled to provide additional information about the project and the environmental review process. The meetings will provide interested parties with the opportunity to offer early input into the project, as well as to comment on the scope of environmental issues, potential environmental effects, and alternatives to be considered in the PTEIR. The scoping meetings will be held in conjunction with screenings of the documentary film *Wilder than Wild: Fire, Forests, and the Future* at the following times and locations:

June 13, 2019

Beginning at 6:00 p.m.
North Tahoe Events Center
8318 North Lake Boulevard
Kings Beach, CA 96143

June 28, 2019

Beginning at 7:00 p.m.
Taylor Creek Visitor Center
3 miles north of the City of South Lake Tahoe on
Highway 89
Look for the entrance sign on the north side of the road

PROJECT LOCATION

The locations of forest management and fuel reduction activities that will be analyzed in the PTEIR will be on private, local jurisdiction, and California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) lands in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) throughout the California side of the Tahoe Basin. The project area includes public lands identified for treatment in the Lake Tahoe Basin Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), as well as other public and private lands that could be treated through agreements with property owners (Figure 1). Fuel reduction activities would be located in the City of South Lake Tahoe and in unincorporated areas of El Dorado and Placer Counties including, but not limited to: Meyers, Cascade properties near Cascade Lake, Tahoma, Homewood, Alpine Peaks, Tahoe City, Dollar Point, Carnelian Bay, Tahoe Vista, and Kings Beach.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The PTEIR will address forest management and fuel reduction on private, local jurisdiction, and Conservancy lands in the WUI throughout the California side of the Tahoe Basin. It will evaluate a long-term forest fuel reduction program that includes initial and retreatments of project areas identified in the CWPP, as well as ongoing fuel management on private lands in coordination with property owners (Figure 1). The project includes numerous forest treatment activities to reduce the risk of wildfire including mechanical thinning, manual/hand thinning, prescribed broadcast burning, 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.

CAL FIRE, Lake Valley Fire Protection District, North Tahoe Fire Protection District, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Fallen Leaf Fire Department, Meeks Bay Fire Protection District, and the Conservancy have worked for years to create fire-adapted communities, restore forest resilience, and achieve other objectives consistent with the Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy and the CWPP within the California portion of the Tahoe Basin. CAL FIRE will prepare the PTEIR to more efficiently and comprehensively evaluate the effects of forest management within the WUI, and streamline the project approval and delivery process for subsequent fuel reduction activities that are consistent with the PTEIR.

CAL FIRE has primary authority for project review and approval as the lead agency under CEQA and the Forest Practices Act. Lake Valley Fire Protection District, North Tahoe Fire Protection District, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Fallen Leaf Fire Department, Meeks Bay Fire Protection District, and the Conservancy may serve as responsible agencies in approving later activities pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168, and following California Forest Practice Rules. Most activities covered under the PTEIR would be exempt from Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) review under existing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between TRPA and the implementing agencies. Approvals from the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District and Placer County Air Pollution Control District would be required for prescribed burning that could occur with implementation of later fuel reduction activities consistent with the PTEIR. Approval from the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board would be required for later fuel reduction activities.

The project objectives are to:

- Reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires that could damage Lake Tahoe Basin forests, watersheds, habitats, and communities;
- Increase Lake Tahoe Basin forest resilience to effects of climate change--including prolonged drought, pest and disease outbreaks and increased tree mortality;
- Protect and restore meadow and riparian ecosystem processes and functions, and forest habitat quality in the Lake Tahoe Basin; and
- Develop and implement all-lands fuel reduction, forest health improvement, and restoration projects that deliver multiple community and ecosystems service benefits.

ALTERNATIVES

The State CEQA Guidelines (Section 15126.6) require that an EIR evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. A PTEIR includes a comparative analysis of the alternatives and identification of the environmentally superior alternative. A PTEIR does not need to consider every conceivable alternative to a project. Instead, it will address a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives that would meet most project objectives and provide for informed decision making and public participation. Section 15126.6(e) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires an assessment of a no project alternative, as one of the alternatives considered, to allow decision makers to compare the environmental effects of taking an action with those associated with not taking it.

CAL FIRE is soliciting input on the range of alternatives to be considered in the PTEIR. In addition to the proposed program, the PTEIR could include alternatives that incorporate various combinations of the following approaches:

- No active forest management activities would be implemented, but active fire suppression would occur. This would be a variation of a “no project” alternative.
- Continuation of current fuel reduction efforts within the PTEIR project area, which would provide another variation of the “no project” alternative.
- Treatments that emphasize mechanical and hand thinning, with no broadcast burning and limited pile burning.
- Treatments that would rely less on hand thinning, mechanical thinning, or biomass energy generation; and rely more on prescribed burning.
- Increased or reduced number of acres treated each year.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

CAL FIRE has identified the types of environmental impacts that may result from implementation of the program. The potential environmental effects that will be addressed in the PTEIR include impacts on the following resource areas:

- **Aesthetics:** The analysis in the PTEIR will address the short-term and long-term effects of the project on views from scenic vistas, Lake Tahoe, public viewpoints, and along State Route 89 in El Dorado County, a designated scenic highway.
- **Agriculture and forestry resources:** The PTEIR will analyze whether the proposed treatments, when implemented over the long-term would convert forest land to non-forest uses.
- **Air quality:** The analysis in the PTEIR will address the potential air pollutant emissions from the treatment activities, including emissions associated with prescribed burns, use of off-road equipment, and vehicle trips.
- **Archaeological, historical, and tribal cultural resources:** The PTEIR will assess the potential for degradation of historic, archaeological, and tribal cultural resources from proposed forest treatment activities, including felling, skidding, prescribed burning, hauling, and any ground disturbance associated with preparing skid trails, landings, and access routes.
- **Biological resources:** The PTEIR will assess the potential adverse and beneficial effects on terrestrial and aquatic biological resources, including long-term changes in vegetation communities and habitat quality; direct and indirect disturbances to sensitive habitats within or adjacent to treatment areas; disturbance or loss of special-status plant and animal species; risk of introduction and spread of invasive plants; and effects on fish and wildlife movement corridors.
- **Energy:** The PTEIR will assess the potential energy use of the project, including from the consumption of energy by worker commute trips, haul truck trips, and motorized equipment used during treatment activities, as well as the potential for the use of biomass to generate electricity.
- **Geology, soils, and land capability:** The analysis in the PTEIR will address the effects on soil conditions or contribution to excessive soil erosion from project activities, stream crossings, road maintenance, vegetation removal, and heavy equipment operation.
- **Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change:** Although forested lands can remove carbon dioxide, the most prominent greenhouse gas, from the atmosphere and sequester it in soil and vegetation, severe wildfire can cause these lands to emit more carbon dioxide than they store. The PTEIR will assess the potential impacts related to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change from the forest management activities proposed by the project, as well as long-term changes in carbon sequestration.
- **Hazards and hazardous materials:** The analysis in the PTEIR will address hazards from the proposed forest management and fuel reduction activities, including the potential for accidental release or exposure of people to hazardous materials resulting from the use of motorized vehicles, heavy equipment, small motorized equipment.
- **Hydrology and water quality:** The PTEIR will assess the potential impacts on streamflow patterns, groundwater hydrology, and water quality from project activities, including vehicle access, use of landings, road maintenance, timber yarding, and transport of forest products.
- **Noise:** The PTEIR will analyze these potential noise and vibration impacts from the project. The project activities will include the use of mechanized equipment and hauling activity that could result in

temporary noise. Additionally, some mechanical thinning operations could have the potential to produce ground vibration.

- **Recreation:** The PTEIR will assess the short-term and long-term potential effects on recreation, including effects on quality of recreational experiences, temporary displacement of recreational uses and special events, and changes in the public accessibility of treated sites.
- **Social and economic effects:** PTEIRs may consider the social or economic effects of the project where it is related to a physical change. The PTEIR will provide a high-level analysis of social and economic effects of treatment activities.
- **Transportation:** The analysis in the PTEIR will address the potential for vehicle trips associated with worker commutes and haul trips transporting biomass or sawlogs to contribute to exceedances of level of service standards and/or vehicle miles traveled standards. The PTEIR will also address the potential for traffic from treatment activities to exceed the capacity of neighborhood streets or present a safety hazard to local residents.
- **Wildfire:** A primary objective of the project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires that could damage Lake Tahoe Basin forests, watersheds, habitats, and communities. The PTEIR will evaluate the effects on wildfire and associated hazards, including the potential for impairment of emergency response or evacuation plans, exacerbation of wildfire risks, exposure of people or structures to significant risks associated with post-fire conditions. The PTEIR will also evaluate potential risks associated with prescribed fire operations.

The PTEIR will identify mitigation measures to be implemented that would avoid, minimize, or compensate for potentially significant impacts.

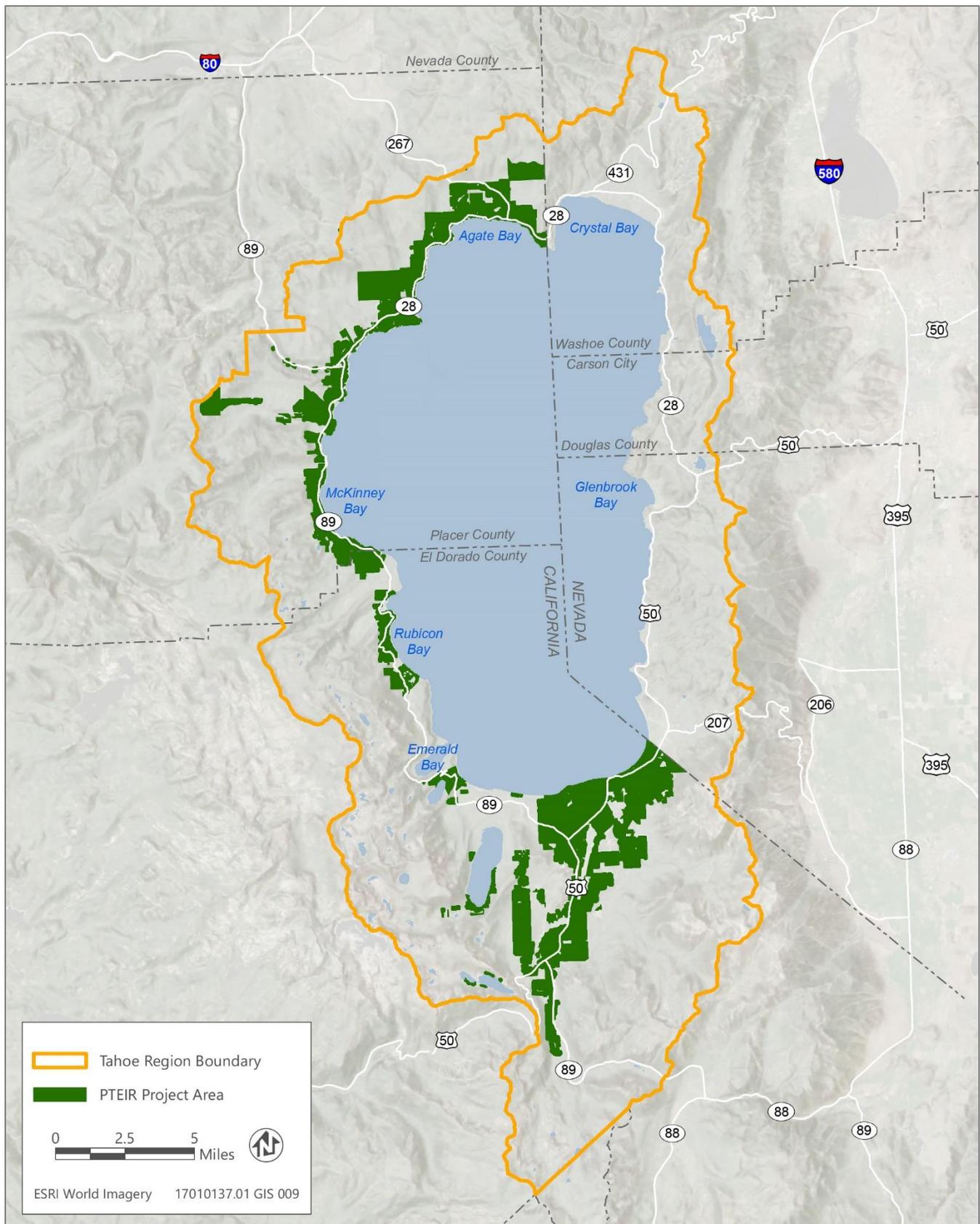
RESPONSES TO THIS NOP

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, responses to the NOP must be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than July 15, 2019. Please send your written responses, including the name of a contact person, to:

North Tahoe Fire Protection District
ATTN: Tahoe PTEIR
PO Box 5879, Tahoe City, CA 96145

Contact: Eric Horntvedt
TahoePTEIR@ntfire.net

As they are made available, additional project information and materials associated with the PTEIR and CEQA environmental review process will be posted to this website: <https://www.ntfire.net/tahoepteir>.



Source: Data received from CTC in 2012, Tahoe Resource Conservation District in 2018, and TRPA in 2011; adapted by Ascent in 2018

Figure 1

PTEIR Project Area