

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is the lead California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) agency responsible for maintaining and improving the California highway system within the Lake Tahoe Basin. Caltrans proposes to implement water quality improvement measures along segments of U.S. Highway 50 (US 50) and State Route (SR) 89 in El Dorado County to comply with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements, and address planned improvements and changes that are part of the Lake Tahoe Basin Environmental Improvement Program (EIP).

To achieve the above objectives, a preliminary Program of improvements has been developed and will be refined as each project segment or element is further evaluated and designed. This CEQA document has therefore been prepared to address the overall proposed improvements in a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR). CEQA defines a program EIR as "...an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project that are related either:

- Geographically,
- A logical part in the chain of contemplated actions,
- In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or
- As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways" (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168).

The proposed Program has elements of all of the above criteria. Within the overall limits on US 50 and SR 89, segments where work is proposed have been initially defined, and water quality and highway design improvements common to all segments have been identified, at least conceptually. The design and implementation of the improvements will undergo further evaluation as field studies, design, and planning advance. This EIR, therefore, addresses the impacts of the proposed improvements as an overall program with a study area that encompasses all segments of the highways where work will take place.

1.2 LOCATION

Caltrans' responsibilities under the EIP addressed in this program-level EIR cover eight specific segments of US 50 and SR 89 located south and west of Lake Tahoe (see Figure 1-1). Detailed maps of the corridor segments are included in Appendix A.

On US 50, the Program will make improvements to three segments of the highway corridor:

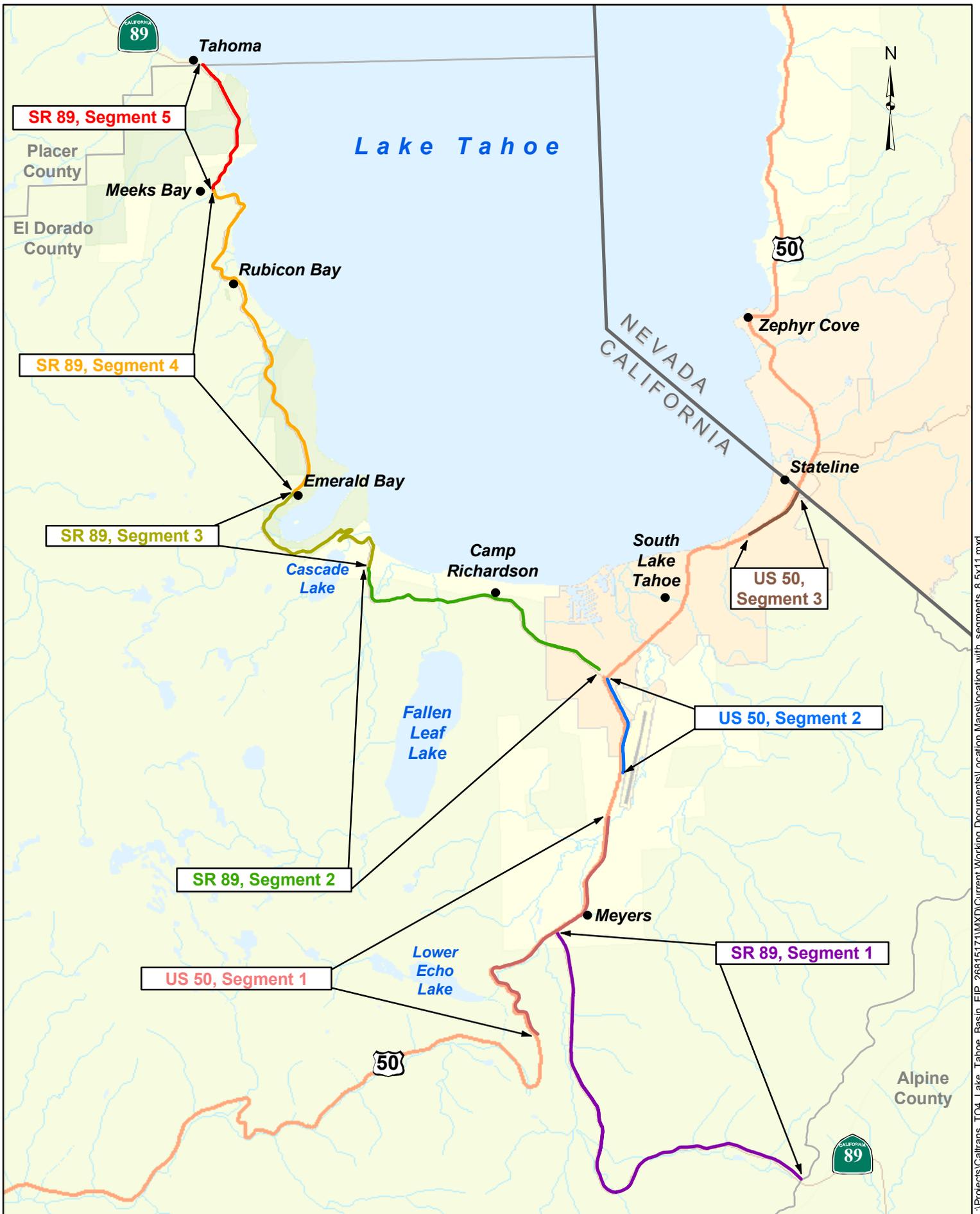
- **Segment 1: Old Meyers Road to 0.1 kilometer (km) (0.6 mile) east of Incline Road (Kilometer Post [KP] 108.8 to 117.3 or Post Mile [PM] 67.6 to 72.9).** This segment begins north of and below Echo Summit as the highway approaches the community of Meyers. It passes through steep terrain at its southern extent, transitioning to gentle slopes through the development at Meyers.

- **Segment 2: Airport Road to the US 50/SR 89 “Y”¹ intersection (KP 118.6 to 121.3 or PM 73.7 to 75.4).** This segment of US 50 is relatively flat. Lands along this segment are primarily divided into individual private parcels, both developed and undeveloped. The South Lake Tahoe airport is adjacent to this segment.
- **Segment 3: Ski Run Boulevard to the Nevada State Line (KP 127.6 to 129.4 or PM 79.3 to 80.4).** US 50 is increasingly developed approaching Stateline, Nevada. Within the overall Program, this segment contains the greatest proportion of development alongside the highway, including relatively extensive paved parking and roadway surfaces. Traffic use is relatively high.

On SR 89, the Program is defined in five segments:

- **Segment 1: Alpine County line to the US 50/SR 89 Intersection at Meyers (KP 0.0 to 15.76 or PM 0.0 to 8.6).** This segment of SR 89 begins at Luther Pass and descends steeply along the meadows and waterbody of Grass Lake and forested areas, to the more gradual topography at the community of Meyers and the intersection of US 50. This segment has relatively lower traffic volumes compared to other segments, but it provides important access from Meyers and South Lake Tahoe to areas past Luther Pass including Hope Valley, SR 88, and destinations outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin.
- **Segment 2: US 50/SR 89 “Y” in South Lake Tahoe to Cascade Road (KP 13.76 to 22.21 or PM 8.6 to 13.8).** This segment of SR 89 provides access to and from the South Lake Tahoe community and adjacent recreational beaches and parklands. It is generally flat within the developed city of South Lake Tahoe, the recreational and historic facilities at Camp Richardson, and the meadows and forestlands west of South Lake Tahoe. The highway provides connections to Fallen Leaf Lake and transitions to steeper slopes where it approaches Cascade Road (south of Cascade Lake). This segment has relatively higher traffic volumes and probably the greatest recreational use.
- **Segment 3: Cascade Road to north of the Eagle Falls Sidehill Viaducts (KP 22.21 to 28.97 or PM 13.8 to 18.0).** Traveling from the south, this segment of SR 89 climbs through switchbacks toward Emerald Bay and is cut into the steep, relatively unstable side slopes above the bay. Drivers can access pullovers and scenic vista points, trailheads (including to Desolation Wilderness), and the State Park facilities at Emerald Bay and the popular Vikingsholm historic home. The highway and parking areas have historic rock walls and bridges. The steep slopes on this segment limit the available area along both sides of the highway.
- **Segment 4: North of the Eagle Falls Sidehill Viaducts to Meeks Creek (KP 28.97 to 39.80 or PM 18.0 to 24.9).** This segment descends from Emerald Bay and travels north to the community of Meeks Bay. The southern half of this segment travels through undeveloped National Forest lands and is adjacent to or crosses through the northern extent of Emerald Bay State Park and D.L. Bliss State Park.

¹ The intersection of US 50 and SR 89 in South Lake Tahoe is commonly referred to as the “Y.”



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- **Segment 5: Meeks Creek to the Placer County Line (KP 39.80 to 44.1 or PM 24.9 to 27.4).** The northern and southern ends of this segment travel near or above the shoreline of Lake Tahoe, through the residential land uses at Meeks Bay and Tahoma. Between these two communities, the segment crosses through Sugar Pine State Park. Terrain is moderate and existing community development within Meeks Bay and Tahoma restricts availability of right-of-way in some areas.

1.3 PURPOSE

The purpose of the Program is to implement NPDES requirements and water quality elements of the Lake Tahoe Basin EIP that relate to US 50 and SR 89 within the designated segments. In meeting this purpose, the Program will apply current design standards.

1.4 NEED FOR THE PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

1.4.1 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) was created with the authority to plan, oversee, and regulate development within the bi-state Tahoe region, which includes the state highways. Environmental threshold carrying capacities were established for Lake Tahoe by Public Law 96-551 and adopted for the Lake Tahoe Region in 1982. The Tahoe Regional Planning Compact charges the TRPA with attaining and maintaining these environmental threshold carrying capacities to protect the unique values of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The nine categories of environmental thresholds are as follows:

- Water Quality
- Wildlife
- Vegetation
- Soil Conservation
- Fisheries
- Noise
- Recreation
- Air Quality/Transportation
- Scenic Resources/Community Design

The TRPA's *Regional Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin: Goals and Policies* (TRPA 2004) establishes the overall approach to meeting the threshold standards. Various elements of the Regional Plan address specific environmental and planning topics, and the TRPA's Plan Area Statements and Community Plans identify goals for specific land use areas throughout the Tahoe Basin. The plans and policies are ultimately implemented through the TRPA's Code of Ordinances, which regulates all proposed projects and activities.

1.4.2 Executive Order and State and Regional Commitments

Presidential Executive Order 13057, issued on July 26, 1997, declared the Lake Tahoe Region an area of national environmental concern. Executive Order 13057 created a federal partnership of five cabinet-level agency secretaries and called for a Memorandum of Agreement between the federal partnership, the States of California and Nevada, the TRPA, and the Washoe Tribal Government to facilitate coordination and cooperation. The Memorandum of Agreement was

subsequently signed by the Governor of California, and it affirmed a commitment to manage and protect Lake Tahoe's natural resources; to achieve and maintain the previous environmental thresholds; and to adopt, fund, and implement the EIP. The \$908 million EIP was adopted by the TRPA in February 1998. Continued state funding for the EIP since 1999 reaffirms California's commitment to protecting and restoring the environmental quality of Lake Tahoe.

The EIP identifies restoration, capital improvement, and operational modification work in eight of the nine environmental threshold areas. Approximately 83 EIP projects involve California highways in the Tahoe Basin. Caltrans has capital funding involvement with approximately 28 projects and is the lead agency for 20 projects. The Program incorporates elements of several EIP projects: EIP numbers 9, 993, 995, and 1012.

1.4.3 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit Requirements

In 1987, the Clean Water Act (CWA) was amended to include Section 402(p), which established a framework for regulating municipal and industrial stormwater discharges under the NPDES. Caltrans was issued a statewide NPDES permit (Order No. 99-06-DWQ, NPDES No. CAS000003; Statewide Permit) from the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) on July 15, 1999. The Statewide Permit incorporates the provisions of the Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region (Basin Plan), which contains additional requirements that have historically applied to Caltrans permits. The Basin Plan includes numerical effluent limitations for stormwater discharges within the Lake Tahoe Hydrologic Unit. In addition, Caltrans must comply with requirements in the Tahoe Construction NPDES General Permit (Board Order No. R6T-2005-0007) or Waste Discharge Requirements for Construction of Small Projects – Lake Tahoe Basin (Board Order No. 6-91-31) for projects of less than 1 acre.

The Statewide Permit requires that stormwater/urban runoff collection, treatment, and/or infiltration disposal facilities be designed, installed, and maintained for the discharge of stormwater runoff from all impervious surfaces generated by the 20-year, 1-hour design storm within the Lake Tahoe Hydrologic Unit. According to the permit, all Caltrans facilities within the Lake Tahoe Hydrologic Unit must be retrofitted to comply with this requirement by 2008. If site conditions do not allow for adequate on-site disposal, all site runoff must be treated to meet applicable Effluent Limits and/or Receiving Water Limitations specified in the Basin Plan. The Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) Executive Officer may approve alternative mitigation measures.

Caltrans developed and the SWRCB approved a Storm Water Management Plan that identifies appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) to be implemented on projects as site conditions allow. The *Storm Water Quality Handbooks: Project Planning and Design Guide* (Caltrans 2007a) was developed to give additional guidance to designers in considering and implementing these BMPs on all projects. The Program would improve stormwater quality by implementing source control and treatment BMPs as approved in the *Storm Water Quality Handbooks: Project Planning and Design Guide*. Source controls include, but are not limited to, preservation of existing vegetation, use of flow conveyance systems, and slope/surface protection systems (vegetated and hard surfaces). Treatment controls to be considered include, but are not limited to, infiltration basins, sand traps and vaults, and biofiltration strips and swales. Additional drainage systems will be constructed as part of the Program to augment these BMPs.