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# Introduction to the Land Management Plan

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## Purpose

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The purpose of this Land Management Plan – also known as the Forest Plan – is to provide strategic guidance to the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) for forest management over approximately the next 15 years. This plan guides the restoration or maintenance of the health of the land, to promote a sustainable flow of uses, benefits, products, services, and visitor opportunities.

The plan provides a framework for informed decision making, while guiding resource management programs, practices, uses, and projects. It does not include specific project and activity decisions. Those decisions are made later, after more detailed analysis and public involvement. The Forest Plan is adaptive in that it can be amended when appropriate, to update the management direction based on new knowledge and information.

The Forest Plan is strategic in nature and does not attempt to prescribe detailed management direction to cover every possible situation. While all components necessary for resource protection and restoration are included, the plan also provides flexibility needed to respond to uncertain or unknown future events and conditions such as fires, floods, climate change, changing economies, and social changes that may be important to consider at the time decisions are made for projects or activities.

## The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU)

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The Lake Tahoe Basin is situated on the eastern side of the Sierra Crest and extends across the state line between California and Nevada. Lake Tahoe is 12 miles wide and 22 miles long, with a maximum depth of 1645 feet. The lake is fed by 63 streams, but only one stream, the Truckee River, flows out. Elevation ranges from approximately 6,225 feet at lake level to 10,891 feet at Freel Peak. The basin topography is dominated by steep mountainsides with smaller areas of relatively flat land near the lake.

The LTBMU was established in 1973, to facilitate consistent management of National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Lake Tahoe Basin watershed. These lands were previously managed by three separate national forests: the Tahoe, the Eldorado, and the Toiyabe.

While the LTBMU is small in comparison to most National Forests, as the Tahoe Basin's largest land manager, its issues, resources and values are (in comparison) very large. The Forest Service manages 78% of all lands in the Lake Tahoe Basin; National Forest ownership in the Lake Tahoe Basin has grown from 35,000 acres in the 1950s to over 154,000 acres. NFS lands include 3,366 urban parcels on sensitive lands acquired through the Santini-Burton Act.

Natural resource management on the LTBMU is focused on restoring watershed and forest health and resiliency, fire and fuels management, providing ecosystem conditions that support native plant and animal communities, and protecting special status plant and animal species. All projects include erosion control components to maintain and improve water quality in lakes and streams. Many common forest activities such as mining, grazing, and timber harvesting are either not a part of LTBMU management or play a very small role.

The road and trail system provides access to the forest for natural resource management, including wildfire suppression, and enables forest visitors to access Lake Tahoe beaches and the surrounding backcountry areas.

Lake Tahoe is a destination of regional, national and international significance, with over 5.7 million annual visits. Visitors are primarily from California and Nevada (76%), with the remaining 24% from other parts of the United States and abroad. LTBMU staff members inform forest visitors about recreation opportunities and the natural environment through a variety of media at multiple locations throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin. Recreation and sightseeing opportunities are available in a wide range of alpine settings, from highly urbanized to remote environments. But while it is possible to find solitude, the LTBMU as a whole is far from isolated - approximately 5 million people live within a 4-hour drive, 25 million live within a 1-day drive, and public air and ground transportation is also available.

Approximately 56,000 permanent residents choose to live at Tahoe because of the breathtaking scenery and wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities. The LTBMU contributes to the tourist-based economy through provision of recreation opportunities including skiing and other winter sports, hiking, beach access, camping, and sightseeing. Ongoing conservation education programs inform residents and visitors of all ages about the natural environment in which they live, work, and play.

The Lake Tahoe Basin is a mix of forested landscapes and urban communities surrounding the deep clear water of Lake Tahoe. The work of the Forest Service supports (and is supported by) many partners. Other federal, state, and local agencies, and members of the public, work together with the LTBMU to conserve and restore natural and cultural resources, and enhance the recreational values of Lake Tahoe.

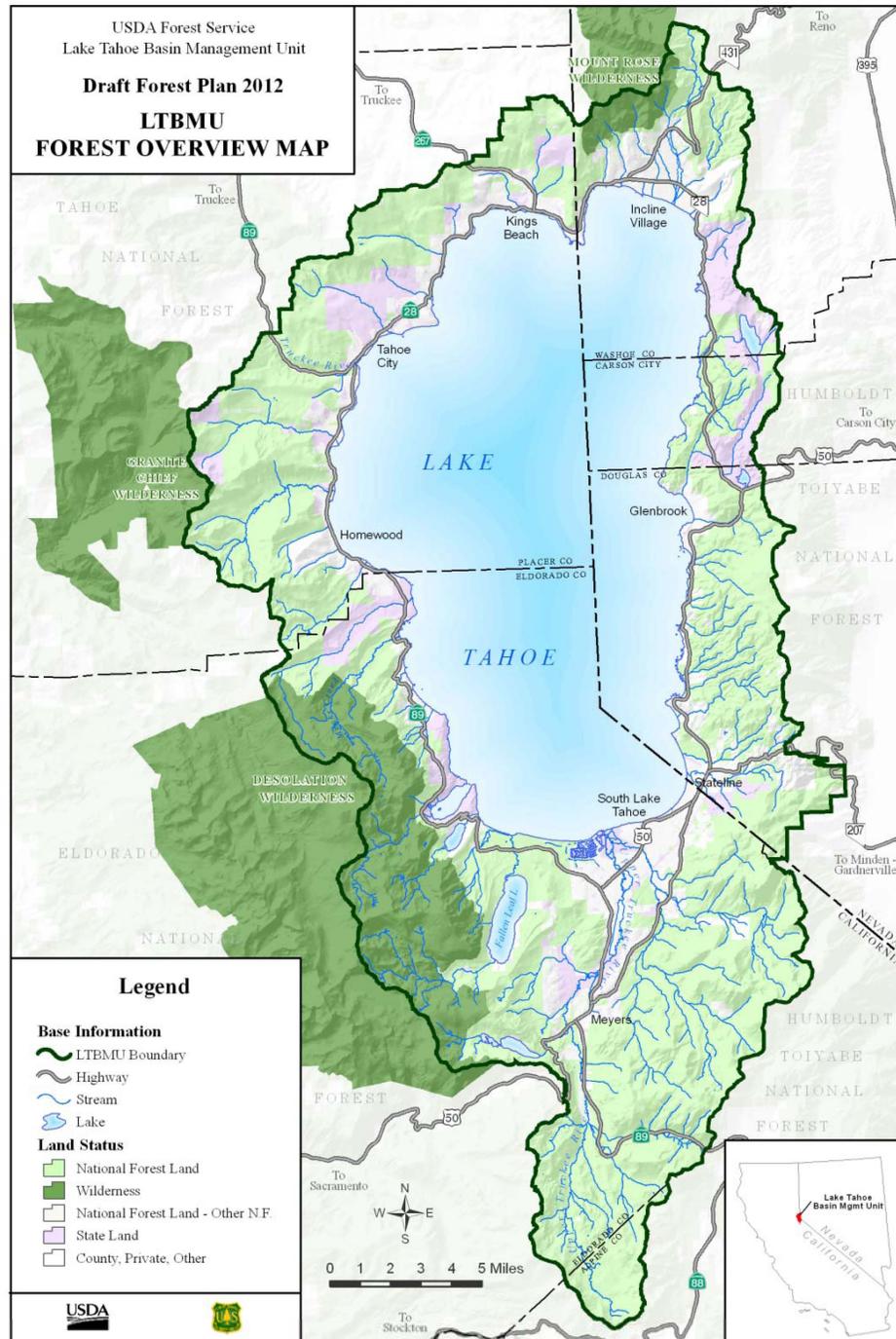


Figure 1. Map of Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit – Forest Overview

## Planning for Sustainability

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The goal of this Forest Plan is to guide management of NFS lands in the Lake Tahoe Basin for sustainable multiple uses, so that NFS lands continuously provide ecosystem services and contribute to social and economic sustainability .

Ecological, social, and economic systems are interdependent and cannot be ranked in order of importance. However, there is a difference in how the Forest Plan approaches these elements. Forest Plan management direction provides guidance to *maintain or restore* elements of ecological sustainability, and *guide the LTBMU's contribution* to social and economic sustainability. This is because the Forest Service has more influence over the factors that impact ecological sustainability on NFS lands (biodiversity, forest health, water quality, etc.) than it does for social and economic sustainability (employment, income, community well-being, etc.). National Forest System lands can provide valuable contributions to economic and social sustainability, but that contribution is just one in a broad array of factors that influence the sustainability of social and economic systems.

Climate change will influence local natural resource management and the ecological, social, and economic environments, and is thus a factor considered in planning for sustainability. Ecosystems will be managed for resiliency to prepare for uncertain future outcomes with approaches that support adaptation to changing future conditions.

The Forest Service is developing national policy for addressing the uncertainties associated with management in the face of a changing climate. The LTBMU climate change assessment and strategy will be updated as additional guidance is provided by the agency. The major adaptive management strategies for addressing climate change in this Forest Plan are:

- Building resistance to climate-related stressors such as drought, wildfire, insects, and disease.
- Increasing ecosystem resilience by minimizing the severity of climate change impacts, reducing vulnerability and/or increasing the adaptive capacity of ecosystem elements.

## Plan Format and Content

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This plan was prepared under the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA, 16 U.S.D. 1604, et seq.) and the provisions of the 1982 planning regulations (36 CFR Part 219). The use of the provisions of the 1982 regulations is allowed under the “transition provisions” of the 2000 planning rule (36 CFR Part 219.35, revised 2004). The 2012 planning regulations currently in effect allow use of the previous regulations for plan revisions initiated before the 2012 regulations took effect (36 CFR 219.17 (b) (3), 2012).

While this Forest Plan was drafted to comply with the 1982 NFMA planning regulations, nothing in the Forest Plan (or EIS) should be construed as incorporating any portion of the regulations themselves.

This Forest Plan does not grant, withhold, or modify any contract, permit or other legal instrument, and does not authorize projects or activities. Decisions to approve or authorize specific projects are considered separately from the plan when the time is ripe to make such decisions. Project decisions must be consistent with the applicable plan management direction.

NEPA compliance is required for any project level decision that may have an impact on the environment. Project level decisions must be informed by site-specific analysis through an open, public process. This allows the latest science and public input to be employed at the time decision is to be made.

## Three-Part Format of the Forest Plan

One of the goals of this revision process is to create a strategic plan that is in step with contemporary planning theories and practices while adhering to the provisions of the 1982 planning regulation.

The Revised Forest Plan includes management direction (36 CFR 219.3, 1982), and explanatory material. The management direction is the Plan content that must be followed in planning and implementing management activities, and is also referred to as the Plan components.

Management direction in the Draft Forest Plan includes:

- Desired Conditions
- Objectives
- Management Area and Suitability of Area direction
- Designated and Recommended Special Area guidance
- Standards and guidelines

The explanatory material includes introductory text, definitions (glossary), and other material. It also includes the Program Strategies, which describe the preferred means of accomplishing work to move the Plan area toward the desired conditions.

While some of the management direction applies to all NFS lands within the Lake Tahoe Basin, other direction applies only to specific areas, such as designated special areas or areas shown on the resource overlay maps. Relevant laws and regulations always take precedence over any Forest Plan direction.

The Draft Forest Plan is organized in three parts, described below.

### Part 1: Vision

This section describes the aspirational picture for the future of the LTBMU. The **Desired Conditions** comprise the multiple-use goals (36 CFR 219.11(b), 1982). A desired condition is a description of specific ecological, social, and/or economic attributes toward which management of the land and resources should be directed. Desired conditions are specific enough to allow progress toward their achievement to be determined, but do not include completion dates.

## Part 2: Strategy

The Strategy section describes how the Forest intends to move the Plan area toward the desired conditions. This part of the Plan includes the Program Strategies and Objectives, the Management Emphasis Areas and Suitable Uses, and descriptions of the Designated and Recommended Special Areas on the LTBMU.

The **Objectives** are specific goals to be accomplished in a specified time period (36 CFR 219.11 (b), 1982). Objectives represent milestones on the path to achievement of the desired conditions. Objectives are based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.

The **Management Area** and **Suitability of Areas** sections provide broad guidance about the kinds of activities and uses that are appropriate in a given area. Resource overlays (see Forest Plan maps), such as the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) or the Protected Activity Centers (PACs) for goshawks and California Spotted Owls focus the scope of appropriate activities and uses while Standards and Guidelines provide more specific boundaries and constraints on activities and uses. This body of prescriptive direction (36 CFR 219.11(c), 1982) guides management towards attainment of objectives and desired conditions.

**Designated and Recommended Special Areas** are lands within the National Forest System that receive special management consideration because of their unique or special characteristics, such as wilderness, research natural areas, historic sites, or national scenic trails. While most of the management direction for these areas is found in the Forest Service Manual, Handbooks, and site-specific management plans, the Forest Plan also includes specific management direction (desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines) that applies to designated special areas.

In addition to the above management direction, the LTBMU Draft Forest Plan also includes **Program Strategies**, which describe the principal management approaches the responsible official is inclined to use in implementing the Forest Plan. This explanatory material provides clarification and informs the project managers and decision makers.

## Part 3: Design Criteria

Design criteria are the sideboards and safeguards that guide activities and uses. Standards and guidelines (36 CFR 219.11c) establish constraints and boundaries for management activities.

A **Standard** is a mandatory constraint on project and activity decisionmaking, established to help achieve or maintain the desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet applicable legal requirements.

A **Guideline** is a constraint on project and activity decisionmaking that allows for departure from its terms, so long as the intent of the guideline is met. Guidelines are established to help achieve a desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet applicable legal requirements.

Where a project or activity has the potential to result in a temporary setback to a desired condition, the Design Criteria set limits and prescribe actions intended to preserve the opportunity of attaining the desired condition in the future.

It is important to note that the Design Criteria are not intended to cover every management circumstance, but provide a basic set of resource protections. Individual projects or activities often require additional resource protection measures in the decision document, contract provisions, or special use permit requirements to account for unique or site-specific conditions and maintain consistency with the Forest Plan, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

Some of the most frequently used management direction found in public laws, regulations, Forest Service manuals, and handbooks is referenced in this section as “Other Sources of Information,” but the direction itself is generally not repeated in this Plan, nor does this section provide an exhaustive list of all applicable law and regulation

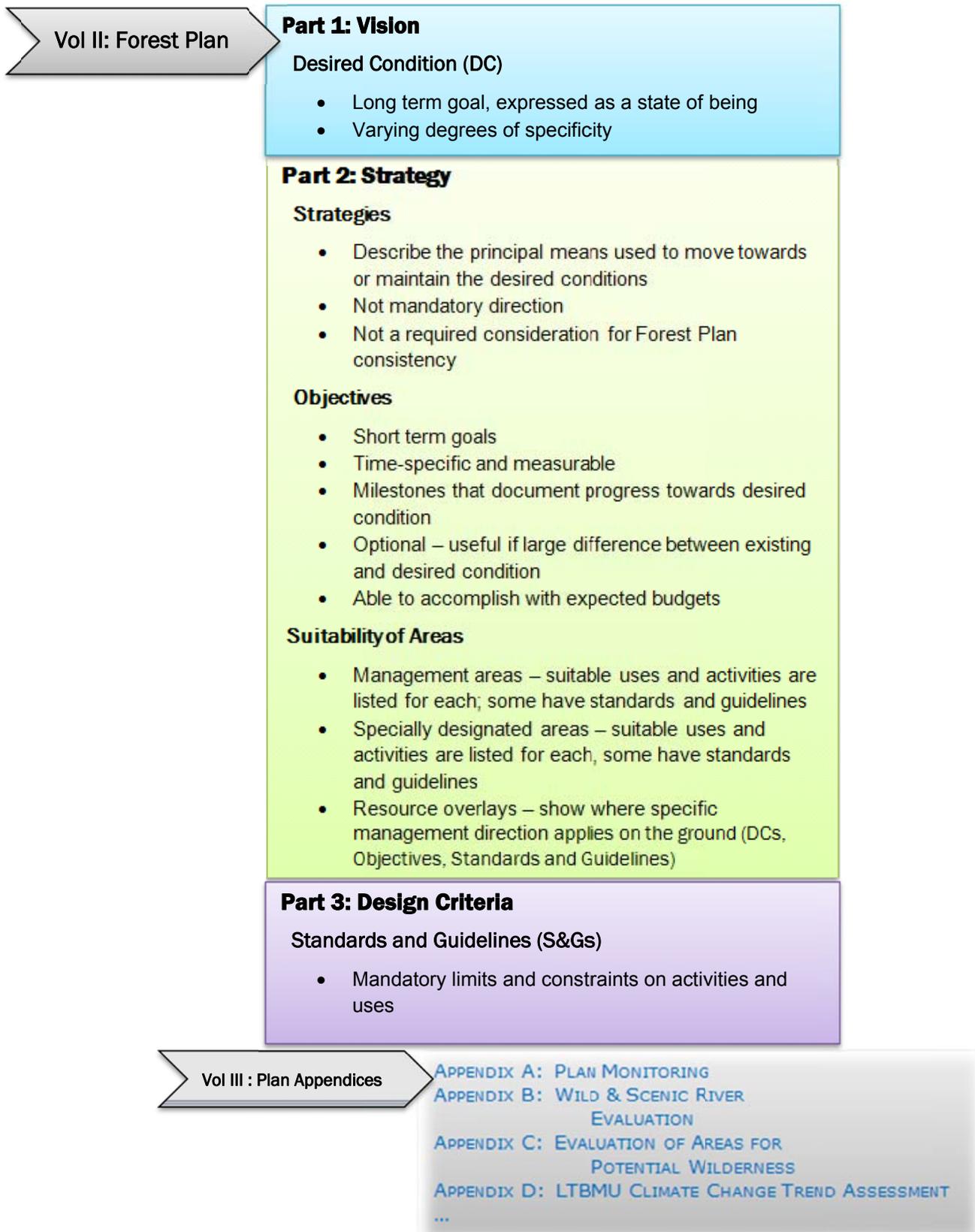


Figure 2. Draft Plan Content and Structure

## Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

The Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (Appendix A) utilizes status and trend monitoring and effectiveness monitoring to measure the degree to which on-the-ground management is maintaining or making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives for the plan. The monitoring plan will be adjusted as needed to respond to new information and unanticipated changes in conditions.

The Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Plan is a subset of the monitoring for the LTBMU. Additional, project-specific monitoring may be required for some projects. While inventories and implementation monitoring are important and will continue to be implemented, they are not included in this monitoring plan because they only indirectly inform progress towards the objectives and desired conditions in the Forest Plan. Inventories describe how much or how many of a given resource is present, while implementation monitoring describes how well management direction and intent was followed in projects and activities.

## Forest Plan Consistency

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As required by NFMA and the planning regulations, all projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service must be consistent with the Forest Plan (16 USC 1604 (i); 36 CFR 219.10(e), 1982). A project or activity must be consistent with the Forest Plan by being consistent with the desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines, and suitability of areas management direction. A Forest Plan consistency analysis is completed for each project and activity during the planning process. The following paragraphs describe how a project or activity is consistent with Forest Plan management direction.

**Desired Conditions:** A project or activity is consistent with the desired conditions if it contributes to attainment or maintenance of the applicable desired condition or does not foreclose the opportunity for maintenance or attainment of the applicable desired conditions over the long term.

It is not possible to make progress towards every desired condition on every project. For example, a desired condition for aspen is irrelevant in a project area with no aspen or suitable habitat for aspen.

Additionally, many projects by their nature may emphasize some desired conditions over others. To illustrate this point, a fuels reduction project might result in temporary disruptions to recreation activities. Specific trails or areas may be temporarily closed to enhance public safety while heavy equipment is in use. These activities would again resume when the fuels reduction work is complete. So the desired conditions for recreation in the project area would be temporarily compromised to accomplish the fuels reduction work.

**Objectives:** A project or activity is consistent with the objectives if it contributes to or does not prevent the attainment of one or more applicable objectives.

**Management Areas and Suitable Uses:** The project or activity must be suitable for the proposed location as follows:

1. **Management area suitable uses and activities** - A project or activity would occur in an area that the Plan identifies as suitable for that type of project or activity, or for which the plan is silent with respect to its suitability for that type of project or activity.
2. **Management area standards and guidelines** – The project or activity complies with any applicable standards and guidelines for the management area.
3. **Management direction for specially designated areas** – If there are any specially designated areas within the proposed project or activity area, the project must be consistent with the management direction (Desired Conditions, Objectives, Standards and Guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures) for the specially designated area.
4. **Management direction related to resource overlays** – The project or activity must be consistent with the management direction related to the applicable resource overlays. For example, if there is a Protected Activity Center (PAC) for California spotted owls or northern goshawks in the project area, the project must be consistent with the Desired Conditions, Objectives, Standards and Guidelines, and Standard Operating Procedures related to PACs. It is important to note that locations of features and areas shown on the resource overlay maps are approximate and often must be verified on the ground.

**Standards:** The project or activity complies with applicable standards.

**Guidelines:** The project or activity:

- Is designed to comply with applicable guidelines as set out in the plan; or
- Is designed in a way that is as effective in carrying out the intent of the applicable guidelines in contributing to the maintenance or attainment of relevant desired conditions and objectives, avoiding or mitigating undesirable effects, or meeting applicable legal requirements.

**Other Plan Content:** Projects and activities need not be consistent with other material in the Plan, but responsible officials may consider this content in a decision. Examples include program strategies and emphasis, background information, introduction, and glossary.

**Previous Decisions:** This plan identifies previous decisions that remain in place (Appendix K). Projects and activities must be consistent with the applicable previous decisions that remain in place.

**Ensuring Project or Activity Consistency with the Forest Plan:** Where a project or activity as proposed would not be consistent with the Forest Plan as described above, the Responsible Official has the following options:

1. Modify the proposal so that the project or activity will be consistent;
2. Reject the proposal or terminate the activity;
3. Amend the plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity is consistent with the plan as amended. The amendment may be specific to the project or activity or may apply more broadly to a portion of the plan.

**Consistency Requirements for Management Indicator Species (MIS) and Species Viability:** MIS status and species viability are monitored at the bioregional level. There is no requirement for monitoring or evaluation of MIS and species viability at the project level. A project or activity is consistent with the Forest Plan with respect to MIS and species viability if it is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines.

## Relationship to Plans of Other Agencies

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### Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Regional Plan

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) is a land use planning and regulatory entity that works toward the achievement of environmental thresholds within the context of a regional plan and corresponding code of ordinances. TRPA policies cross political boundaries and encompass the entire watershed within the Lake Tahoe Basin. The TRPA regional plan is available online at [www.trpa.org](http://www.trpa.org).

Public Law 96-551, the revised Tahoe Regional Planning Compact, established the TRPA. Often referred to as the Bi-State Compact, it is the agreement between the States of Nevada and California on goals for the Lake Tahoe Basin. Findings in the Compact reaffirmed that the Lake Tahoe region has outstanding environmental and recreational values that are being threatened by increasing urbanization. Congress originally gave consent to the compact through PL 91-148 in 1969. Weaknesses in that agreement brought about the revision in 1980.

Directed by the compact, the TRPA established Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities (Thresholds) for the Basin. The Compact defines Thresholds as “an environmental standard necessary to maintain a significant scenic, recreational, educational, scientific or natural value of the region or to maintain public health and safety within the region.” (Article V.b.) The TRPA has established Thresholds for nine resource areas: water quality, air quality, scenic resources, soil conservation, fish habitat, vegetation, wildlife habitat, noise, and recreation. The Compact also directs the TRPA to prepare a Regional Plan implemented through agency ordinances, rules and regulations that “achieves and maintains the adopted Thresholds.” (Article V.c.)

Under Article X. Sec. 2 of the Compact, “The Secretary of Agriculture and the heads of other appropriate agencies are authorized, upon request of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, to cooperate with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in all respects compatible with carrying out the normal duties of their agencies.” The Federal role in the Lake Tahoe Basin is further defined by Executive Order 13057 (July 26, 1997) and the subsequent *Agreement of Federal Departments and Agencies on Protection of the Environmental and Economic Health of the Lake Tahoe Region* and *A Memorandum of Agreement Between the Federal Interagency Partnership on the Lake Tahoe Ecosystem, the States of California and Nevada, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency*. This Executive Order directs federal agencies having principal management or jurisdictional authorities in the Lake Tahoe Region to establish a Partnership that will, among other things, “support appropriate regional programs and studies needed to attain environmental threshold standards.” E.O. 13057 Section 1-101, 103(d).

The Executive Order also directs the Forest Service (as a party to the Tahoe Federal Interagency Partnership) to establish a Memorandum of Agreement (also referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)) with the TRPA that facilitates coordination and documents areas of mutual interest and concern and opportunities for cooperation, support or assistance. The current MOU defines, at the project analysis level, the cooperative framework between the Forest Service and the TRPA and how findings regarding Threshold attainment will be applied. The

1988 MOU (as amended in 2009) will remain in effect until a revised MOU is adopted that reflects this Forest Plan and the TRPA Regional Plan.

The Forest Service will continue to work cooperatively with the TRPA in the attainment and maintenance of applicable thresholds. The Forest Service expects that over time, the achievement of the desired conditions through the application of the strategies and management direction identified in the Forest Plan will contribute to the attainment and maintenance of applicable thresholds.

## **Lahontan Water Quality Control Board, Basin Plan**

The primary responsibility for the protection of water quality in California rests with the *State Water Resources Control Board* (State Water Board) and nine *Regional Water Quality Control Boards* (Regional Boards). The State Water Board sets statewide policy for the implementation of state and federal water quality laws and regulations. The Lahontan Regional Board (LRWQCB) adopts and implements water quality standards and control measures for surface and ground water, including the *Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region* (Lahontan Basin Plan). The Lahontan Basin Plan outlines water quality conditions, actual and potential beneficial uses, and water quality problems associated with human activities, including those within the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Basin Plan designates beneficial uses for water bodies and establishes water quality objectives, waste discharge prohibitions, and other implementation measures to protect those beneficial uses. Water quality control measures include *Total Maximum Daily Loads* (TMDLs), which may be adopted as Basin Plan amendments. The Forest Service's Land Management Plan is consistent with the Basin Plan and addresses TMDLs established in the Lake Tahoe Basin, including the California Lake Tahoe TMDL, approved by EPA on August 16, 2011.

## **Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, Nevada Administrative Code**

The *Nevada Administrative Code* outlines the responsibilities of the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) for cooperating with federal agencies in managing public land and quantifying existing water rights, monitoring water use, distributing water, reviewing water availability for new development, reviewing the construction and operation of licensed facilities, reviewing flood control projects, monitoring water resource data and records, and providing technical assistance to the public and governmental agencies. The Forest Service cooperates with NDEP on projects in Nevada. The Forest Service's Land Management Plan is consistent with the Basin Plan and addresses TMDLs established in the Lake Tahoe Basin, including the Nevada Lake Tahoe TMDL Report, approved by EPA on August 16, 2011.