3.15 Visual Resources

This section identifies and evaluates issues related to visual resources in the action area.

3.15.1 Affected Environment

The *Affected Environment* discussion below describes the current setting of the action area. The purpose of this information is to establish the existing environmental context, or background, against which the reader can then understand the environmental changes caused by the proposed action. The environmental setting information is intended to be directly or indirectly relevant to the subsequent discussion of environmental effects. For example, the setting identifies groups of people who have views of the action area because the action could change their views and experiences.

The environmental changes associated with the action are discussed under *Environmental Consequences.* This section identifies impacts, describes how they would occur, and prescribes mitigation measures to minimize adverse effects.

3.15.1.1 Concepts and Terminology

Visual Character

Both natural and artificial landscape features make up the *character* of a view. Character is influenced by geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreational, and urban features. Urban features include those associated with landscape settlement and development, such as roads, utilities, structures, earthworks, and the results of other human activities. The perception of visual character can vary significantly seasonally and even hourly as weather, light, shadow, and the elements that compose the viewshed change. Form, line, color, and texture are the basic components used to describe visual character and quality for most visual assessments (U.S. Forest Service 1974; Federal Highway Administration 1983). The appearance of the landscape is described in terms of the dominance of each of these components.

Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated using the well-established approach to visual analysis adopted by the FHWA, employing the concepts of vividness, intactness, and unity (Jones et al. 1975; Federal Highway Administration 1983), as defined below.

- *Vividness* is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking or distinctive visual patterns.
- *Intactness* is the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements; this factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- *Unity* is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole; it frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the artificial landscape.

Visual quality is evaluated based on the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity, as modified by its visual sensitivity. High-quality views are highly vivid and relatively intact, exhibiting a high degree of visual unity. Low-quality views lack vividness, are not visually intact, and possess a low degree of visual unity.

Visual Sensitivity and Viewer Response

The measure of the quality of a view must be tempered by the overall *sensitivity* of the viewer. Viewer sensitivity is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, the proximity of viewers to the visual resource, the elevation of viewers relative to the visual resource, the frequency and duration of viewing, the number of viewers, and the type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

The criteria for identifying importance of views are related in part to the position of the viewer relative to the resource. A *viewshed* is defined as the total visible area from a single observer position, or the total visible area from multiple observer positions. Viewsheds are accumulated seen-areas from highways, trails, campgrounds, towns, cities,

or other viewer locations. To identify the importance of views of a resource, a viewshed may be broken into distance zones of foreground, middleground, and background. Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant it is and the greater its importance to the viewer. Although distance zones in viewsheds may vary between different geographic regions or types of terrain, a commonly used set of criteria identifies the *foreground* zone as up to 0.5 mile from the viewer, the *middleground* zone as extending up to 4 miles from the foreground, and the *background* zone as extending 4 miles from the viewer to the horizon (U.S. Forest Service 1995).

Judgments of visual quality and viewer response must be made based in a regional frame of reference (Soil Conservation Service 1978). The same type of visual resource in different geographic areas could have a different degree of visual quality and sensitivity in each setting. For example, a small hill may be a significant visual element in a flat landscape but have very little significance in mountainous terrain.

Generally, visual sensitivity is higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure; people engaging in recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or camping; and homeowners. Sensitivity tends to be lower for views seen by people driving to and from work or as part of their work (U.S. Forest Service 1974; Soil Conservation Service 1978; Federal Highway Administration 1983). Commuters and nonrecreational travelers generally have fleeting views and tend to focus on commute traffic, not on surrounding scenery; thus, they are generally considered to have low visual sensitivity. Residential viewers typically have extended viewing periods and are concerned about changes in the views from their homes; therefore, they generally are considered to have moderate to high visual sensitivity. Viewers using recreation trails and areas, scenic highways, and scenic overlooks are usually assessed as having high visual sensitivity.

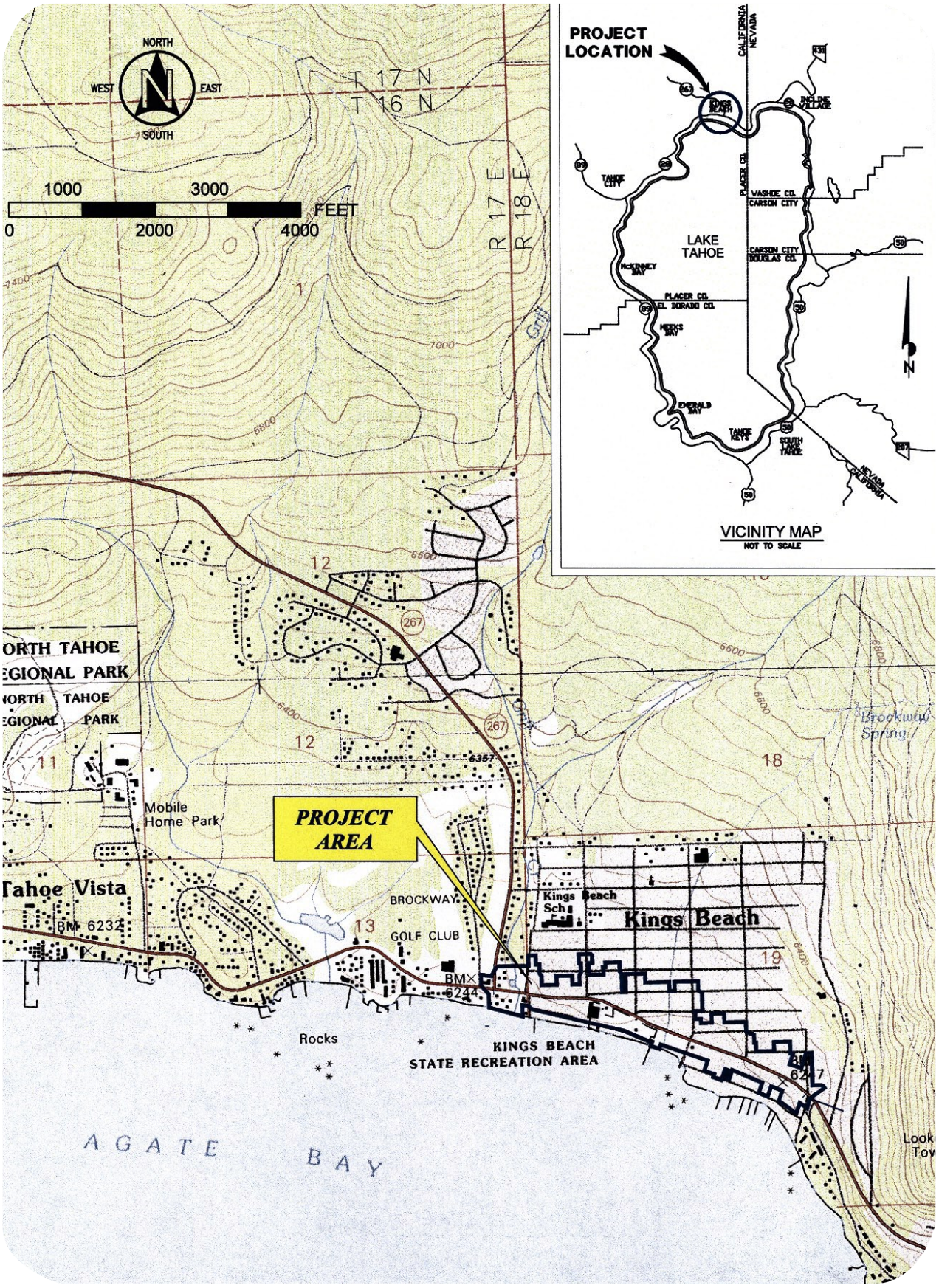
3.15.1.2 Environmental Setting

Regional Character

The project site is located along SR 28 and is the main thoroughfare in the City of Kings Beach in eastern Placer County, California (see Figure 3.15-1). In relation to nearby cities, the site is approximately 23 miles southwest of Reno, 8 miles west of Incline Village, 14 miles northwest of Carson City (Nevada's capitol), 20 miles north of South Lake Tahoe, 8 miles northeast of Tahoe City, 1.3 miles east of Tahoe Vista, and 11 miles southeast of Truckee. The project region, as discussed in this section, is considered the area within a 30-mile radius of the project location. The scenic beauty of glacier-carved Lake Tahoe and the surrounding Sierra Nevadas dominates the region. The region attracts recreationists who ski, hike, bike, golf, camp, boat, and fish in and around the snow-capped peaks surrounding the lake. The California-Nevada border roughly divides the eastern third of lake. East of that border, gamblers visit hotel-casinos in and around Reno northeast of the site, across the border along SR 28 within 1.25 miles southeast of the site, and south of the site in South Lake Tahoe. This wide array of visitors makes the region a tourist destination.

Although growth in the region is limited by the steep terrain of the Sierra Nevadas as well as water bodies and public parks, development continues to pressure rural areas such as scrub land and pastureland, especially north and south of Reno. Reno has also experienced a central revitalization along the Truckee River running through the downtown. Smaller towns and cities surrounding Lake Tahoe also experience similar pressures of growth. This is changing the visual character from rural to suburban in some areas and from urban sprawl to denser urban centers in other areas.

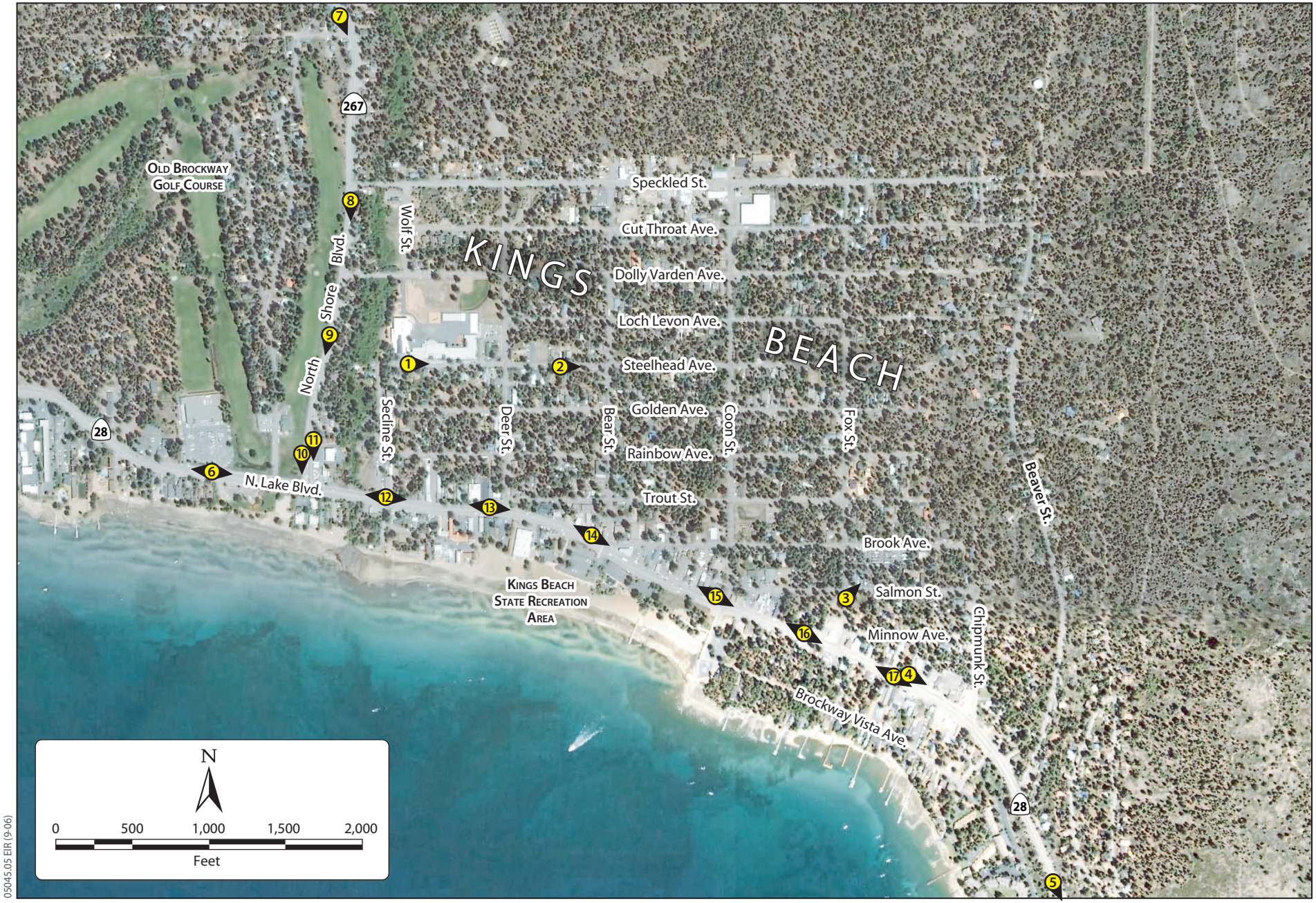
Reno is in high desert, but the Sierra Nevadas and the area immediately surrounding the action area are surrounded by more alpine tree cover. The dominant plant community in the general action area consists of upper montane coniferous forest. Water features in the greater region include Washoe Lake, Lake Tahoe, Loon Lake, Hell Hole Reservoir, French Meadows Reservoir, Donner Lake, Boca Reservoir, Truckee River, and Carson



Source: Caltrans adapted from Mactec Engineering file.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-1
Project Location



05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-2
Key Viewpoints

River. The region has various urban and suburban areas amid pleasing scenic views as well as more natural environments surrounding Lake Tahoe. Because of the diversity of topography, vastness and clarity of the lake, and expanses of forested slopes, the visual quality of the project region is very high in vividness; however, intactness and unity are considered to be moderately high to high based on the visibility of developed features and infrastructure.

Action Area Character

For the purposes of this analysis, the project vicinity is defined as the area within 0.5 mile of the project site. The project site is characterized primarily by commercial properties with some views of the lake along SR 28 in Kings Beach between SR 267 and Chipmunk Street. Representative key viewpoints are shown in Figure 3.15-2 and the site photographs in Figures 3.15-3 through 3.15-14. The highway is currently a four-lane road with no turning lane, with street parking on the north and south sides. There is minimal striping for pedestrian crossings at most intersections. Traffic signals are currently only at the intersection of Coon Street and SR 28 and the intersection of SR 28 and SR 267.

North of the Project Site

North of the project site is a grid of Kings Beach residences and some public buildings such as a library and elementary school. The neighborhood has dense mature coniferous and deciduous trees interspersed with power lines. Most neighborhood roads lack curbs and slope directly into simple dirt-covered properties that range from moderately low to moderately high visual quality (see Figure 3.15-3, Viewpoints 1 and 2; Figure 3.15-4, Viewpoint 3).

East of the Project Site

A steep ridgeline marks the east end of Kings Beach (see Figure 3.15-4, Viewpoint 4). Single-family residences line either side of Beaver Street, Bend Avenue, and Park Lane north of SR 28. Views become much more natural at the eastern end of the project vicinity along SR 28, curving around the ridgeline to the southeast (see Figure 3.15-5,

Viewpoint 5). Although power lines are visible on the north side of the highway, scenic views of Lake Tahoe are readily apparent over the wood and brown metal guardrail south of the highway. Single-family residences and condominiums are perched out of site down the hill toward Lake Tahoe south of SR 28. The visual quality east of the project site is moderate to moderately high.

South of the Project Site

The vicinity south of SR 28 along the eastern side of the project site includes single-family and condominium residences on either side of Brockway Springs Drive, which are directly behind the commercial structures along SR 28. Some mature coniferous and deciduous trees can be seen on the eastern end of Brockway Springs Drive, while more dense foliage surrounds the residences on the western end. Several of these residences south of the street have direct private beach access. Farther west and south of SR 28, about mid-way along the project site, is the Coon Street Boat Launch and the Kings Beach State Recreation Area stretching close to a quarter mile. Farther west and south of SR 28, Brockway Vista provides access to lakefront properties behind the commercial properties along SR 28. Farther west, running north to south and paralleling Secline Street is Griff Creek, which empties into Lake Tahoe at a small public park. Farther west and immediately south of the intersection of SR 28 and SR 267 is Secline Beach with the Sweetbriar condominiums along the highway. The visual quality south of the project site varies from moderate to moderately high.

West of the Project Site

The properties farther west and south of SR 28 within the vicinity of the project site are primarily condominiums with access to Lake Tahoe. On the west edge of the project vicinity, Snow Creek runs north to south, emptying into Lake Tahoe. The area north of SR 28 around Snow Creek and farther east appears relatively unspoiled with a mixture of tall, mature evergreen and deciduous trees but also flanked by wooden power lines and basic shoulder treatment along the highway. Generally northwest of the intersection of Highways 28 and 267 are a few commercial properties including a Safeway grocery

Viewpoint 1. Looking east on Steelhead Avenue. The Kings Beach Elementary addition is visible at left.

Viewpoint 2. Looking east at the residential neighborhood along Steelhead Avenue.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-3
Viewpoints 1 and 2

Viewpoint 3. Looking northeast from Fox Street at mobile homes.

Viewpoint 4. Looking east along Highway 28 toward the intersection with Chipmunk Street.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-4
Viewpoints 3 and 4

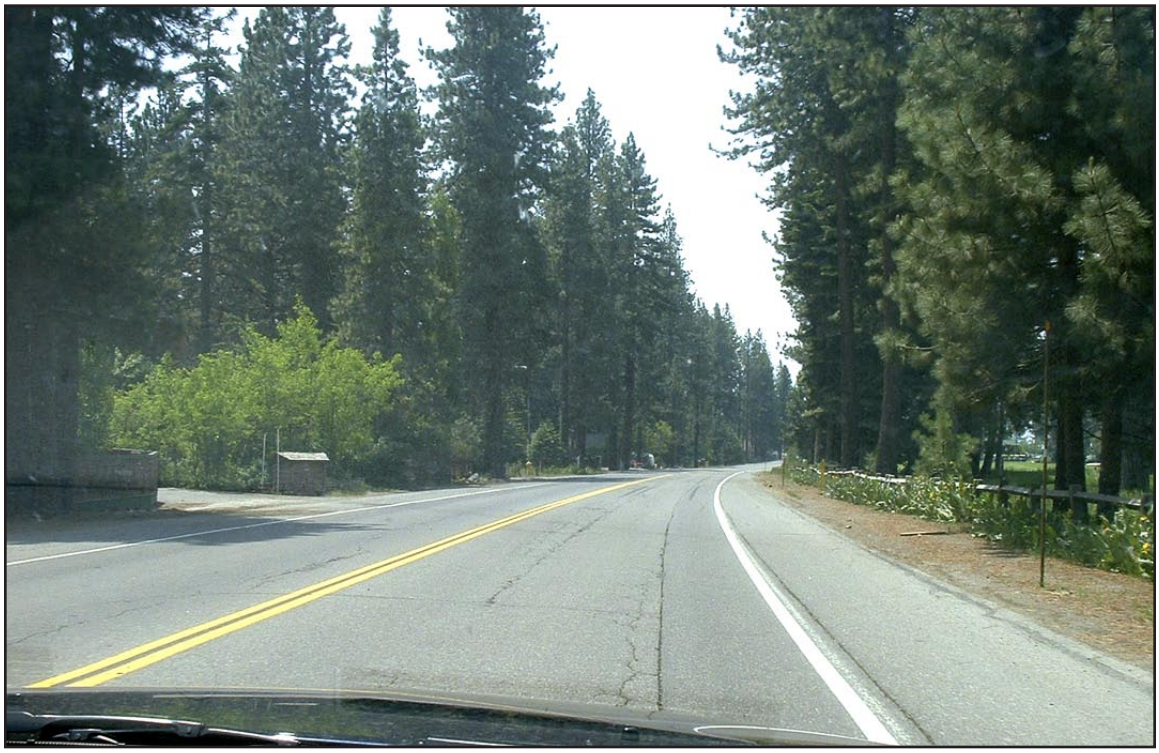
Viewpoint 5. Looking southeast from Highway 28, southeast of the intersection with Beaver Street.

Viewpoint 6. Looking west at Safeway right-of-way.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-5
Viewpoints 5 and 6

Viewpoint 7. Looking south along Highway 267 before power lines go underground to the south.



Viewpoint 8. Looking south along Highway 267 after power lines go underground to the south.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-6
Viewpoints 7 and 8

Viewpoint 9. Looking south along Highway 267 with golf course visible to the right.

Viewpoint 10. Looking south along Highway 267 toward interesection with Highway 28, with Lake Tahoe visible beyond.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-7
Viewpoints 9 and 10

Viewpoint 11. Looking south toward Highway 28 from Highway 267 in 1986.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-8
View of Intersection of Highways 267 and 28 in 1986
(courtesy of TRPA)

Match Line

Viewpoint 12W. Looking west toward the intersection with Secline Street and Highway 267 beyond.

Match Line

Viewpoint 12E. Looking east from the intersection with Secline Street.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-9
Viewpoint 12

Match Line

Viewpoint 13 W. Looking west from the intersection with Deer Street.

Match Line

Viewpoint 13E. Looking east toward the intersection with Deer Street.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-10
Viewpoint 13

Match Line

Viewpoint 14W. Looking west from the intersection with Bear Street.

Match Line

Viewpoint 14E. Looking east toward the intersection with Bear Street.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-11
Viewpoint 14

Match Line

Viewpoint 15W. Looking west from the intersection with Coon Street and Brockway Vista Avenue.

Match Line

Viewpoint 15E. Looking east toward the intersection with Coon Street and Brockway Vista Avenue.

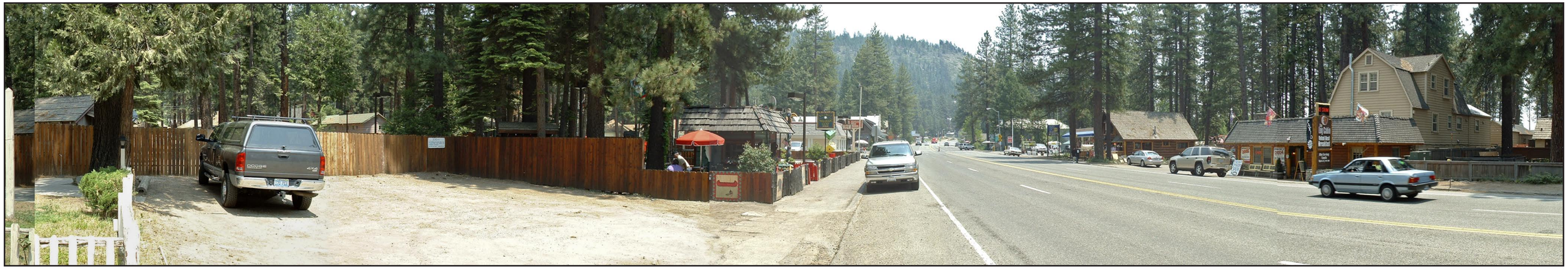
05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-12
Viewpoint 15

Match Line

Viewpoint 16W. Looking west toward the intersection with Coon Street and Brockway Vista Avenue.

Match Line



Viewpoint 16E. Looking east east toward the intersection with Fox Street.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-13
Viewpoint 16

Match Line

Viewpoint 17W. Looking west toward the intersection with Fox Street.

Match Line

Viewpoint 17E. Looking east toward the intersection with Chipmunk Street.

05045.05 EIR (9-06)

Figure 3.15-14
Viewpoint 17