

# Last Chance Grade Permanent Restoration Project Alternatives Analysis Methodology Workshop #1 Summary of Results

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## **Appendices**

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- Appendix A: Workshop Materials
- Appendix B: Workshop Results

## I. Introduction

### ***Workshop Purpose and Format***

The Last Chance Grade (LCG) Permanent Restoration Project is a project proposed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to find a permanent solution to the instability and roadway failure on a 3-mile segment of U.S. Highway 101 in Del Norte County. As part of the process in selecting a safe and reliable long-term solution to this problem, Caltrans is conducting an alternatives analysis to determine if any of the seven build alternatives can be eliminated from further study. An alternatives analysis tool is being developed based on criteria and performance measures for each project's major objectives, which include providing a long-term safe and reliable roadway, reducing maintenance costs, and protecting the economy and natural and cultural resources.

Caltrans is hosting a series of three workshops to solicit and refine LCG stakeholder input on the methodology and criteria. The first workshop was conducted between December 14 and 17, 2020, in order to get initial stakeholder input; based on this input, the project team is considering comments from stakeholders and refining the methodology. The team is taking into account the data needed to achieve each metric, whether another metric could serve as a proxy, or if the criterion or metric is useful in differentiating one alternative from another. The purpose of the remaining workshops is as follows:

- **Workshop 2:** The purpose of Workshop 2 is to discuss the results of the refined methodology and discuss potential further refinements. The workshop is scheduled for the week of March 1, 2021 (originally proposed to be held the week of March 15, 2021). Following the workshop, the project team will update the alternatives analysis based on stakeholder input.
- **Workshop 3:** The purpose of Workshop 3 is to share the results of the alternative analysis, and to identify the alternatives for further study. This workshop will be scheduled for late April 2021.
  - Prior to Workshop 3, the project team will complete the alternatives analysis using the refined criteria and methodology.
  - Workshop 3 Purpose—share results of final alternatives analysis as completed using refined criteria and methodology. The Workshop 3 series will be scheduled in late April 2021.

Workshop 1 was held four times for the benefit of each of the four Last Chance Grade working groups. These groups include:

- Cultural Resources Working Group: Members have responsibilities for cultural resources management.
- Biological Resources Working Group: Members have responsibilities for natural resource management and permitting.
- Last Chance Grade Partners: Members have land ownership and land management responsibilities.

- Congressman Huffman’s Stakeholder Group: Members include representatives from local governments, tribal groups, businesses, agencies, and environmental groups who provide feedback to all the partners involved.

Some organizations are members of more than one working group, and were welcome to participate in multiple meetings; however, if they were limited on time, they were encouraged to choose the group(s) in which they’d most like to share their views.

The workshops, three of which were held via Zoom and one using Webex, were designed to be interactive. Participants viewed a presentation (Appendix A) on the alternatives’ analysis process, timeline, project purpose and need, history of alternatives, and proposed criteria and performance measures.

The presentation provided an overview of the criteria that will be used to evaluate alternatives. The goal was to identify criteria that have adequate data, can be measured, and represent comprehensive objectives. Not all criteria presented will necessarily be used for evaluating which alternatives move forward in the environmental process. There was some discussion about weighting the criteria, but no decision was made in the workshops.

Following the presentation, participants were asked to review and discuss the suggested criteria and metrics for each objective, considering the following:

- Does this criterion reflect what is valued?
- Are there any gaps or duplicates?
- Do the performance measures quantify what is important to assess this criterion?
- Should any of these be weighted much higher than others?

Participants used a combination of the Zoom or Webex chat feature and spoken discussion to provide input. Their comments, along with information from the project team in response to their questions, were recorded on a digital whiteboard (Appendix B).

Following the discussion, participants were asked to respond to a series of polling questions to gauge their level of support. First, they were asked to identify their level of support for the overall alternatives analysis process as described during the workshop (highly supportive, somewhat supportive, neutral, somewhat unsupportive, or do not support). Then they were asked to respond to the following polling question in relation to each objective: **to what degree do you support the revisions as discussed?** (highly supportive, somewhat supportive, neutral, somewhat unsupportive, or not supportive – revisions do not address my concerns). It was emphasized that this was not intended to be a binding vote, but simply a way to get a sense of the general level of support for the revisions that were discussed. The polling results are also included in Appendix B.

### ***Workshop Attendance***

In addition to Caltrans District 1 and project team staff, the following organizations were represented at the four workshops:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Cultural Resources Working Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ California State Parks</li> <li>▪ Redwood National and State Parks</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Partner Working Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ California State Parks</li> <li>▪ Elk Valley Rancheria</li> <li>▪ Green Diamond Resource Company</li> <li>▪ Redwood National and State Parks</li> <li>▪ Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation</li> <li>▪ Yurok Tribe</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Biological Resources Working Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ California Coastal Commission</li> <li>▪ California Department of Fish and Wildlife</li> <li>▪ California State Parks</li> <li>▪ Elk Valley Rancheria</li> <li>▪ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration</li> <li>▪ National Park Services</li> <li>▪ State Water Resources Control Board</li> <li>▪ Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation</li> <li>▪ US Army Corps of Engineers</li> <li>▪ US Environmental Protection Agency</li> <li>▪ US Fish and Wildlife Service</li> </ul> | <p><b>Huffman Stakeholder Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crescent City-Del Norte Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>▪ Del Norte County Board of Supervisors</li> <li>▪ Del Norte Local Transportation Commission</li> <li>▪ Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)</li> <li>▪ Friends of Del Norte</li> <li>▪ Green Diamond Resource Company</li> <li>▪ Humboldt County Association of Governments</li> <li>▪ Humboldt County Board of Supervisors</li> <li>▪ Office of Representative Jared Huffman</li> <li>▪ Redwood National and State Parks</li> <li>▪ Resighini Rancheria</li> <li>▪ Save the Redwoods League</li> </ul> |

**II. Key Findings**

A summary of stakeholders’ comments from across the four workshops is provided below. The project team will consider all comments received in their preparation for the next round of workshops.

**A. Objective: Long-Term Safe, Reliable Roadway**

- It is crucial to consider economic and social impacts on the communities for both road closures and traffic mobility.

**Criterion: Road Closure**

- All groups are comfortable with this metric and agreed that it makes sense.
- Avoiding long-term road closure is extremely important to preserve access to schools, businesses, tribal offices, and public safety / health services.
- What is the duration of closure used in the metric? It might be useful to differentiate between short-term and long-term closures.
- Closures should be kept as brief as possible, ideally less than one week; longer than that is a significant concern.

**Criterion: Traffic Mobility**

- All groups agreed that they had no concerns regarding this as a useful metric.
- This criterion is key to identifying the most sustainable alternative that will avoid the likelihood of lane reduction and the associated impact on travel time. The frequency of

traffic mobility impact is important to consider. An additional performance metric might be the percentage of time that lane reductions would be likely. This impacts the ongoing maintenance and economic objectives as well.

- Consider whether alternatives are in landslide areas since most lane reductions occur due to landslides. This metric is related to natural resource impacts due to associated sediment which may impact watersheds.

## ***B. Objective: Reduce Maintenance Costs***

### **Criterion: Maintenance Cost**

- All groups agreed this was a good and important performance measure to be used moving forward.
- Current maintenance costs should be a baseline.
- Maintenance cost is also affected by the traffic mobility criterion for the Long-Term Safe, Reliable Roadway objective.

## ***C. Objective: Protect the Economy***

- “Protect the economy” seems like an odd way to characterize the objective; it’s more related to feasibility of the project and responsible stewardship of resources.

### **Criterion: Capital Costs**

- All groups agreed that this is a useful and straightforward metric.
- Consider adding the duration of construction as a metric.

### **Criterion: Mitigation Costs**

- Important to focus on mitigation, which may be a make-or-break for the process. More mitigation creates less litigation, which may equal quicker implementation.
- Crucial to ensure that this metric will not be used to avoid the full cost of mitigation, and therefore incentivize doing minimal mitigation, which would put the cost on the environment.
- Consider how to measure mitigation costs beyond fiscal concerns, including socioeconomic, environmental and cultural impacts. Some alternatives may include extra mitigation costs or challenges due to impacts such as old growth tree loss that are difficult to assign a dollar amount to or to mitigate. It may be necessary to consider how remaining resources might help mitigate for the loss of natural resources.
- Consider avoiding cultural resources to greatest extent possible rather than mitigation.
- Additional costs that should be included in calculating mitigation costs include: purchase of off-site land to mitigate for loss of wetlands; the cost of monitoring any mitigation; removing or creating new uses for the existing roadway, and maintenance costs for these new uses.

## **Criterion: Litigation Costs**

Please note that the following is documentation of the discussion by working group members and do not necessarily represent Caltrans' position.

- Litigation is an important consideration that is complex and difficult to predict or adequately estimate. How will litigation costs be gauged (based on historic cases or on projections)? Ranking alternatives as high / medium / low risk for litigation may be a sufficiently meaningful criterion for this objective.
- In addition to the cost of the litigation itself, delays caused by litigation would also escalate construction costs over passing years, increase time for project completion and therefore affect project feasibility as well.
- Mitigation and litigation may not be mutually exclusive. Although there are other criteria that may determine or influence litigation, must consider that minimal mitigation may cause the project to wind up in court; substantial mitigation planned at the start (as possible under the CEQA process) will help avoid litigation delays.
- Continuing the current inclusive, trusted process, with good communications, meaningful consultations with tribes, making and fulfilling front-end agreements (where geology allows) may help avoid litigation. All stakeholders want a project that happens sooner rather than later and works for all.

## **D. Objective: Protect Natural Resources**

- Need to specify considering impacts on water / aquatic resources. Criteria might include number of stream crossings; cut-and-fill volumes and associated risk of sedimentation; potential to fill wetlands. Must also consider impact on aquatic habitats, whether directly, through downstream impacts, or through risk of sediment delivery to stream system from watercourse crossings. This is a complex measure that is influenced by many factors.
- Consider amounts of cut and fill material to be deposited within project area or moved elsewhere, and the associated impacts, including environmental, wildlife habitat and connectivity, edge effects, construction traffic, and air quality.
- Natural resources are part of the cultural resources for tribes. Must consider each impacted area's significance to tribes and its link to cultural resources.

## **Criterion: Trees/Forests**

- Should measure acres directly impacted.
- This criterion also affects habitat for plants and animal species.

### ***Performance Measure: Old growth redwood forest (acres)***

- This criterion will be the biggest driver of controversy that could derail the project. It will also be a primary metric for habitat and other impacts.
- Impacts and a qualitative assessment of the old growth redwood forest to be impacted must be considered beyond just acreage. This includes size of trees (since the public is responsive to big trees regardless of age); whether the acres are continuous; long-term impacts to the health of trees located along the edges of new roads; effects on water quality and habitat; and loss of carbon sequestration. Characteristics of old growth forest that are lost or impacted will need to be compared to any candidate "old growth" forest

that may be considered as mitigation habitat. It will likely be necessary to measure and assess every tree.

- Old growth redwood wood from removed trees should be given to the tribes.

***Performance Measures: Young growth / mixed forest (acres); Mature mixed coniferous forest (acres); Other types, i.e. coastal scrub (acres)***

- How is the distinction between young and mature forest defined?
- Mixing forest type and habitat types is confusing; suggest capturing “mature forest” in habitat acres only.

### **Criterion: Habitat**

- Important to consider impacts on multiple species, both animals and plants, particularly sensitive species; might be missing something by focusing only on specific protected species. Consider whether some umbrella species can be identified to capture habitats that are essential to many different species.
- Environmentally sensitive habitat areas must be protected. Will need to make qualitative assessments beyond just acreage to determine habitat value for different species. Mitigation may include adding protections such as purchasing lands with similar habitats.

***Performance Measure: Marbled murrelet habitat (acres); Northern spotted owl habitat (acres)***

- No comments specific to these performance measures.

***Performance Measure: Marten/fisher habitat (acres)***

- These two species have different habitat requirements, so they should be considered in separate performance measures.

### **Criterion: Wildlife Connectivity**

- Connectivity is an important criterion.
- Consider the ability of each alternative to incorporate migration corridors or wildlife crossing features, and its impacts on permeability for wildlife movement, which may vary across species. Also remember to consider water habitat connectivity.

### **Criterion: Recreational Resources**

- Important to maintain access and connectivity to these resources. Include consideration of impacts to amenities such as vista points and parking lots and to tribal / culturally valuable routes.
- This criterion is easily mitigated, providing many opportunities to improve access and recreational facilities, leaving the impacted resources better than before.



## ***E. Objective: Protect Cultural Resources***

### **Criterion: Cultural Resources**

- Determining impacts on cultural resources requires close coordination with the tribes within the Cultural Resources Working Group.
- Not all sites have equal value, and their value is influenced by many factors. Possible approaches include categorizing or ranking sites by high / medium / low risk but must go deeper than standard archeological information to assess ethnographic significance. Tribal input is required to clarify cultural resource values, which may include holistic significance of sites and how sites relate to one another; access and connectivity to sites and cultural trails; oral history and connections to specific locations; cultural significance of natural resources (e.g., plant species, fisheries). May not be able to specify precise considerations of cultural value.
- Again, this is strongly related to mitigation and its potential costs. High / medium / low assessment of risk may not provide enough detail to assess mitigation. Consider avoiding cultural resource impacts as much as possible rather than mitigation.

## ***F. Comments on Overall Process and Methodology***

- The “big nasties” that are most likely to be controversial and “blow up” the project—e.g., impacts to old growth redwoods—must be heavily weighted as drivers for decision making. Doing so may help clearly eliminate some alternatives.
- Consider the most sustainable alignment with least resource impacts, but must factor in cost to build, since a low-impact but very high-cost alternative might not be feasible.
- Concerned about the lack of updated information regarding the geotechnical risks; it is difficult to assess criteria, impacts and needs or eliminate alternatives without this.
- Additional metrics and criteria suggested included:
  - Consider time needed to adjust if running into complications once project is started. This will impact several of the objectives and associated criteria, including traffic mobility and capital costs.
  - Consider how well alternatives would accommodate multi-modal travel (e.g., bike travel), as this relates to equity.
- Questions asked regarding the following: when the number of alternatives for further study may be reduced; getting more information on other working groups’ activities and input; opportunities for accelerating process.

## ***G. Polling on Level of Support***

Before the close of each meeting, participants were asked to identify their level of support for the overall process and the revisions to the criteria and performance measures that were discussed. The polling was not considered a binding vote but was intended as feedback on the direction provided to the project team.

The level of support for the overall process as described was neutral or greater across all four workshops, with the exception of a single “somewhat unsupportive” response from Congressman Huffman’s Stakeholder Working Group. There were no responses of “do not

support.” In each case, the percentage of those who were either highly or somewhat supportive was greater than the percentage of those who were neutral. The highest level of agreement was among members of the LCG Partners Working Group, who were 100% highly supportive.

The level of support for the revisions to objectives as discussed for participants across all four groups was much the same: neutral or greater, with the exception of a single “somewhat unsupportive” response for revisions discussed to the Objective: Protect the Economy from Congressman Huffman’s Stakeholder Group. There were no responses of “not supportive – revisions do not address my concerns.” In all cases, the percentage of those who were either highly or somewhat supportive was equal to or greater than the percentage of those who were neutral. Again, the highest level of agreement was among members of the LCG Partners, who were 100% highly supportive of the revisions discussed for all five objectives.