

## **Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report Last Chance Grade Permanent Restoration Project**

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 1 is Lead Agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for the Last Chance Grade Permanent Restoration Project (Project). As Lead Agency under CEQA, Caltrans is issuing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) consistent with all CEQA requirements.

Caltrans is also serving as federal lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and has separately published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the ***Federal Register*** announcing its intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for this Project, pursuant to NEPA.

The purpose of this NOP is to notify agencies, organizations, and individuals of this intent, and request input on the scope and content of the proposed joint EIR/EIS.

### **Scoping Period for Receipt of Comments**

Comments must be received by 5:00 p.m. PST on **December 6, 2021**.

Please submit written comments by either of the following ways.

1. By mail to:  
**Caltrans District 1**  
**Attn: Steve Croteau**  
**1656 Union Street**  
**Eureka, CA 95501**
  
2. By email to: [ScopingComments@lastchancegrade.com](mailto:ScopingComments@lastchancegrade.com)

### **Virtual Scoping Meeting**

A virtual scoping meeting will be held on **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18** from 6:00 to 7:30 PM PST. At the meeting, Caltrans will provide a brief overview of the project and the environmental review process. Attendees will have an opportunity to ask questions. However, questions and discussion at the meeting will not be considered scoping comments. All scoping comments must be submitted by mail or e-mail. Attendance at the virtual scoping meeting is **not** necessary to submit comments.

Please visit [lastchancegrade.com](http://lastchancegrade.com) for more information about the project and to join the virtual scoping meeting via Zoom. If you wish to join by phone only, call **+1-669-900-6833** and use **Meeting ID: 898 2790 5460**.

### **Project Description**

Caltrans is the lead agency under CEQA and NEPA, as assigned by FHWA for the project. As shown in Figure 1, Last Chance Grade is the 3.5-mile-long section of U.S. Highway 101 (US 101) in Del Norte County (post mile [PM] 12.0 to 15.5) that runs between Wilson Creek to about 9 miles south of Crescent City. The Project area is almost entirely within portions of Redwood National and State Parks.

The Project would realign the highway in response to landslide and roadway failures which have caused damage for decades. The objectives of the project are to:

- Provide a more reliable connection

- Reduce maintenance costs
- Protect the economy, natural resources, and cultural resources.

A geologic study in 2000 conducted for Caltrans by the California Geological Survey mapped over 200 historical and active landslides (both deep-seated and shallow) within the corridor between Wilson Creek and Crescent City. Over the years, Caltrans has conducted a considerable number of construction projects and maintenance activities in the Last Chance Grade area to keep the roadway open. Since 1997, landslide mitigation efforts, including retaining walls, drainage improvements, and roadway repairs have cost over \$85 million. A long-term sustainable solution at Last Chance Grade is needed to address:

- Economic ramifications of a long-term failure and closure
- Risk of delay/detour to traveling public
- Increasing maintenance and emergency project costs
- Increase in frequency and severity of large storm events caused by climate change

Over the past several years, Caltrans has considered multiple alignment alternatives with input from numerous project partners in seeking a long-term feasible and sustainable solution suitable for the unique geologic and natural features of the project area. As a result of these past alternatives screening processes, Caltrans has elected to move forward with the environmental review of two build alternatives, alternatives X and F (Figure 2).

**Alternative X** would involve reengineering the existing roadway. Within a portion of Alternative X, the roadway would retreat inland (to the east) by approximately 130 feet to improve geotechnical stability and longevity. Alternative X would involve constructing a series of retaining walls (single and terraced) to minimize the potential for landslides on the roadway. Depending on feasibility, drainage improvements might also be included for this alternative.

**Alternative F** would construct a 10,000 foot-long tunnel that would diverge from the existing roadway near PM 14.06 and reconnect to US 101 near PM 15.5, thereby avoiding the portion of existing roadway most prone to landslides and geologic instability.

The EIR/EIS will also study a **No Project Alternative**, which would entail no new long-term feasible and sustainable solution for Last Chance Grade but would instead be a continuation of ongoing maintenance and repair activities needed to enable ongoing roadway operations.

Permits and approvals from the following agencies may be required but are not limited to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), the California Coastal Commission, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

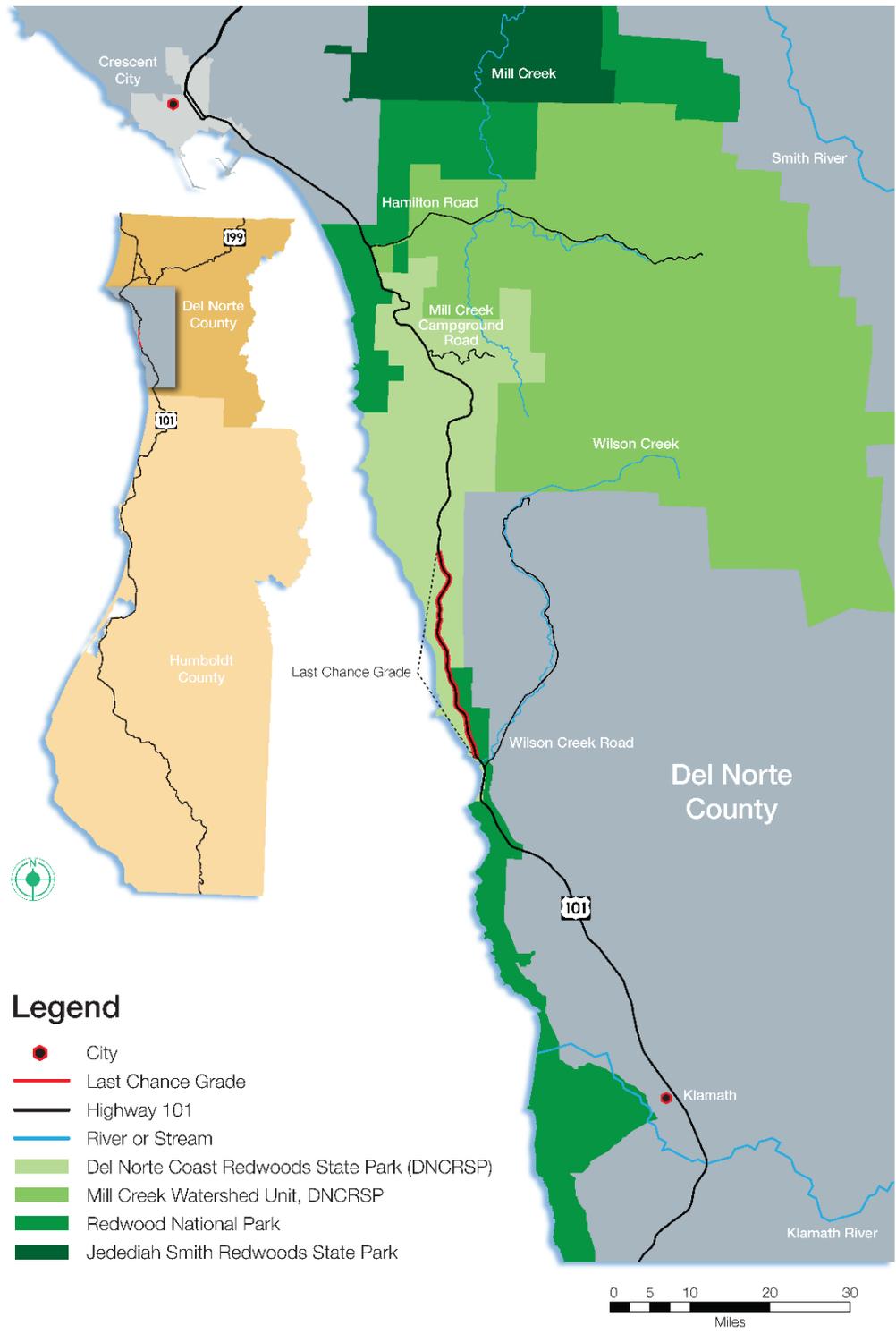
#### **Potential Environmental Effects/Topics to Be Evaluated**

Based on preliminary surveys and information, Caltrans identified the following main subject areas for analysis in the EIR/EIS. The EIR/EIS will consider impacts associated with construction and ongoing operation. The scope of environmental analysis could be modified based on input from this NOP, the NOI, project scoping, or the project development process.

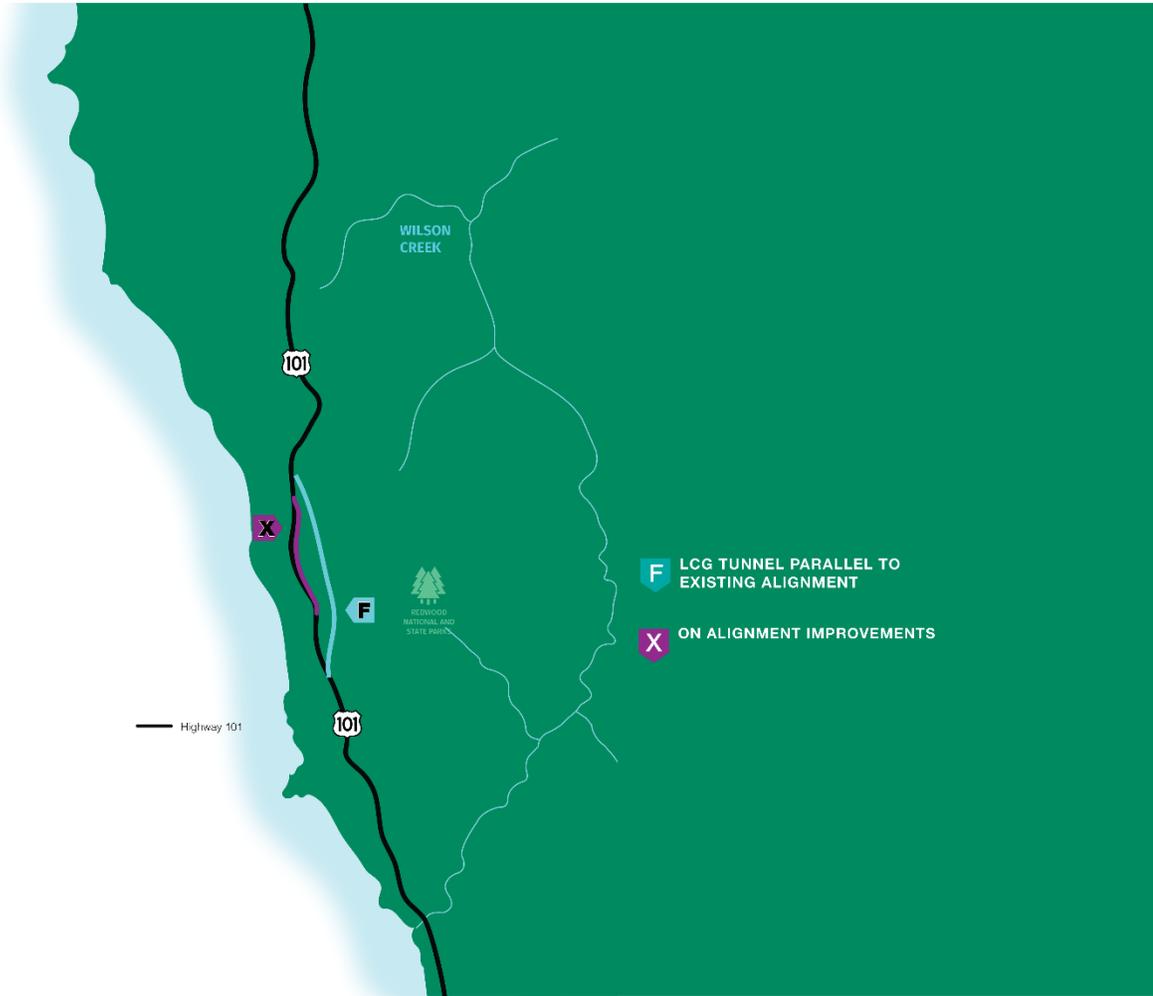
Environmental effects anticipated for study include, but are not limited to:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources ((including trees, plants, animals, and wetlands/aquatic features))
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology /Soils (including paleontology)
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology / Water Quality
- Land Use / Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population / Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities / Service Systems
- Wildfire
- Cumulative Impacts

The EIR/EIS also will address NEPA-required issues such as compliance with applicable federal executive orders (e.g., Environmental Justice) and federal regulations (e.g., Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act).



**FIGURE 1 – Location Map**



**FIGURE 2 –Build Alternatives to be Considered in the Draft EIR/EIS**