

## Notice of Preparation

**To:** Office of Planning and Research  
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**From:** California Dept. of Transportation  
1656 Union Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

**Subject:** Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

*Reference:* California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

**Project Title:** US 101/Trinidad Area Access Improvements Project

**Project Location:** US 101 in Humboldt County from post mile (PM) 99.6 and 101.1.

### Project Description:

The Cher-Ae Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria (Trinidad Rancheria) proposes a range of roadway improvements in Humboldt County along United States Highway 101 (US 101) between post mile (PM) 99.6 and PM 101.1 (project). The proposed project would include improvements to the existing US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange (PM 100.7) and on- and off-ramps; construction of a new US 101 interchange, overcrossing, and on- and off-ramps or a pedestrian overcrossing of US 101 at Cher-Ae Lane with no connection to US 101 (PM 100.0); improvements to US 101 mainline along the approximately 1.5-mile-long segment within the project limits; and construction of a new Class I Multi-Use Trail along Scenic Drive and Cher-Ae Lane, extending from Main Street to Westhaven Drive. The proposed project would also improve an approximately 1-mile-long segment of Scenic Drive west of US 101 from the Main Street/Scenic Drive intersection to just south of Cher-Ae Lane to address access issues resulting from full and/or partial road closures due to landslides and slip-outs.

The Trinidad Rancheria is a federally recognized tribe having a government-to-government relationship with the United States. The Trinidad Rancheria is not a public agency, and therefore cannot be the CEQA lead agency for this project. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 1, as the permitting agency, will be the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and will be assuming responsibilities of lead agency for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) assignment. Caltrans plans to prepare a joint environmental document—an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (known as an EIR/EA)—pursuant to CEQA and NEPA.

As required by CEQA, Caltrans is distributing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to request comments from responsible and trustee agencies and interested members of the public regarding the significant environmental issues, reasonable project alternatives, and reasonable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to be discussed in the draft EIR/EA. An Initial Study has not been prepared for this project and therefore is not attached to this Notice of Preparation. The NOP publication and distribution will initiate a

30-day public review period that begins on February 14, 2024, and ends on March 15, 2024.

## **Project Location**

The proposed project would extend from PM 99.6 to PM 101.1 along US 101; along portions of local roads at the US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange; along Scenic Drive between Main Street to just south of Cher-Ae Lane; and along Cher-Ae Lane. The proposed project is located within a portion of the city of Trinidad and within unincorporated Humboldt County. The total length of the US 101 segment is 1.5 miles and has a general northwest–southeast orientation, and the total length of the Scenic Drive segment is approximately 1 mile. Figure 1 shows the project location and vicinity.

## **Project Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the project is to:

- Provide safe and sustainable access to and from US 101 for multi-modal transportation to the surrounding communities along Scenic Drive.
- Relieve projected traffic congestion associated with planned future development.
- Reconnect Tribal lands.

This project is needed because:

- The only access to the Trinidad Rancheria and surrounding community lands from US 101 is Scenic Drive.
  - Significant portions of Scenic Drive do not meet current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) design standards with respect to horizontal and vertical geometry, traveled way width, shoulder width, and clear zone/roadway departure countermeasures. Additionally, there are not adequate provisions for pedestrians and bicyclists, who often utilize the roadway.
  - Scenic Drive encompasses a geologically unstable route, which lacks redundancy for emergency services and reliability for the traveling public and the communities along Scenic Drive.
- The current capacity at the intersections of Main Street with US 101 northbound (NB) ramps, US 101 southbound (SB) ramps, and Scenic Drive would be inadequate to accommodate projected increases in traffic due to planned future development.
- The construction of US 101 severed Tribal lands. Currently, Tribal land and housing is located east of US 101 with no direct access to essential Tribal services.

## **Project Background**

In 1962 the alignment of US 101 was shifted to the east, which eliminated dedicated access to Tribal lands and created long-standing transportation access concerns.

Currently, Scenic Drive is the only roadway that provides access to the main parcel of the Trinidad Rancheria and surrounding areas. Scenic Drive's geotechnical instability, with slides and slip-outs commonly occurring, causes partial or complete road closures (typically during winter months), which limits access to the properties along Scenic Drive, essential government services provided on the main parcel of the Trinidad Rancheria, and emergency access and evacuation options. The Trinidad Rancheria has commissioned planning studies to investigate alternatives that would provide improved access addressing the current and future needs of the people of the Trinidad Rancheria, Humboldt County, and the city of Trinidad. The following completed planning studies and outreach efforts provide the basis for the project need:

- *Trinidad Rancheria Access Improvement Feasibility Study*, Winzler & Kelly, May 2002
- *Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Transportation Plan 2006-2026*, Winzler & Kelly, March 2006
- *Trinidad Rancheria Highway 101 Interchange Community Design Fair, Local Government Commission*, June 2009
- *Trinidad Rancheria Comprehensive Community-Based Plan*, Trinidad Rancheria, December 2011
- *Trinidad Area Freeway Master Plan Study*, Omni-Means, Ltd., February 2014
- *Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Transportation Safety Plan*, Trinidad Rancheria, June 2014

The proposed project would affect the Caltrans right-of-way associated with US 101; the Humboldt County right-of-way associated with Scenic Drive; the City of Trinidad right-of-way associated with Main Street, Westhaven Drive, Patrick's Point Drive, Trinidad Frontage Road, and Scenic Drive; and the Trinidad Rancheria Trust and Fee properties and private properties situated along US 101 and along Scenic Drive. The proposed project would address the project need by providing safe and sustainable multi-modal access from and across US 101 and along Scenic Drive for Tribal members, residents, emergency service providers, and the traveling public, as well as access to the essential governmental functions and services located on the main parcel of the Trinidad Rancheria for Tribal members living in the community of Westhaven, the city of Trinidad, and other areas of the North Coast. The proposed project would improve existing roads and alter future traffic patterns in a manner that would accommodate future planned growth addressing potential operational deficiencies on the local road network. The construction of US 101 severed Tribal lands. Currently, Tribal land and housing is located east of US 101 with no direct access to essential Tribal services. The proposed project would reconnect Tribal lands separated by the 1962 relocation and reconstruction of US 101 along its current alignment.

## **Project Description**

The proposed project would include interchange and local road improvements to provide safe, sustainable, and redundant access to the Trinidad Rancheria and surrounding

communities located along Scenic Drive. Up to 12 alternative designs, including the No-Build (No Action) Alternative, were considered at the Project Initiation phase. Three project alternatives have been identified for the proposed project---the No-Build Alternative, Alternative 3D, and Alternative 5C. The No-Build Alternative would make no changes to the existing roadways and would not achieve the purpose and need for the proposed project.

Alternative 3D proposes a new interchange at PM 100.0, adjacent to Tribal lands; a new Class I Multi-Use trail connecting Tribal lands east and west of US 101; and improvements to Scenic Drive and Cher-Ae Lane. Alternative 3D would result in the construction of a new US 101/Cher-Ae Lane interchange (PM 100.0) with an overcrossing about 0.7 mile south of the existing undercrossing at the US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange (PM 100.7), improvements to US 101 mainline from PM 99.6 to PM 100.6, improvements to Scenic Drive from 200 feet south of Cher-Ae Lane to Main Street, and improvements to Cher-Ae Lane.

Construction of Alternative 3D would be sequenced over two phases. Construction of the improvements along US 101 and the existing US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange (PM 100.7) northbound off-ramp and southbound on-ramp, the new interchange at Cher-Ae Lane (PM 100.0), and the Cher-Ae Lane roadway extension is anticipated to start in 2028 and be the first phase of project construction. The second phase of the sequenced construction program would require closure and reconstruction of Scenic Drive (between Main Street and Cher-Ae Lane) in segments. The new interchange at Cher-Ae Lane would provide access to Scenic Drive south of where the construction activities would be occurring. The existing US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange would provide access to Scenic Drive north of where the construction activities would be occurring, thereby always maintaining access for residents along the impacted portion of Scenic Drive.

Alternative 5C proposes improvements to the existing US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange, a new Class I Multi-Use trail connecting Tribal lands east and west of US 101, including a new pedestrian overcrossing at PM 100.0, and improvements to Scenic Drive. Alternative 5C would result in the reconstruction of the US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange with a roundabout on the west side of US 101 at the SB off-ramp, Patrick's Point Drive, Scenic Drive, and SB on-ramp intersection and an offset intersection on the east side of US 101 at the NB off-ramp, Westhaven Drive, Trinidad Frontage Road, and NB on-ramp crossing; improvements to US 101 mainline from PM 100.3 to 101.1; improvements to Scenic Drive from Cher-Ae Lane to Main Street and improvements to Cher-Ae Lane.

Construction of Alternative 5C would be sequenced over three phases. Construction of the new pedestrian overcrossing (PM 100.0) and improvements to Cher-Ae Lane is anticipated to start in 2028 and be the first phase of project construction. The second phase would include improvements along US 101 and reconstruction of the existing US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange (PM 100.7), including the adjacent intersections. During this second phase, closure of the ramps, intersections, and Main Street-Westhaven Drive roadway connection would be required in stages. The newly constructed pedestrian overcrossing and Cher-Ae Lane would temporarily provide

vehicular access across US 101 between Scenic Drive and Westhaven Drive so access is maintained to the City of Trinidad and the Westhaven community. The third phase of the sequenced construction program would require closure and reconstruction of Scenic Drive (between Main Street and Cher-Ae Lane) in segments. The pedestrian overcrossing would continue to temporarily provide vehicular access across US 101 to Scenic Drive south of where the construction activities would be occurring. The newly reconstructed US 101/Trinidad-Main Street interchange would provide access to Scenic Drive north of where the construction activities would be occurring, thereby always maintaining access for residents along the impacted portion of Scenic Drive. Upon completion of the Scenic Drive improvements, the pedestrian overcrossing would be modified with removal of vehicular access and modification to be an expanded Class I Multi-Use trail that can also function as an emergency access/evacuation route in the long term.

### **Potential Environmental Effects**

The proposed project is expected to result in temporary and permanent environmental effects. A thorough analysis of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects will be conducted. The draft EIR will determine what resources would be affected, the level of significance of these impacts, and feasible avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to lessen the impacts. Based on preliminary surveys and information, the following subject areas in Appendix G: Environmental Checklist Form will be the focus of the analysis in the draft EIR:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture / Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology / Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology / Water Quality
- Land Use / Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population / Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities / Service Systems
- Wildfire

The scope of environmental analysis could be modified based on input from this Notice of Preparation and project scoping. The potential environmental effects of the proposed project are further outlined below.

### ***Aesthetics***

The current visual quality within the project area is highly scenic. This section of US 101 has been found eligible for scenic highway designation on the California Scenic Highway System. The proposed project could alter the existing visual character of the project area. A Visual Impact Assessment will be prepared to evaluate the proposed project's potential visual impacts and identify feasible avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

### ***Agriculture / Forestry Resources***

The project area could contain farmland and/or forestry resources. The Community Impact Assessment being prepared for the project will determine whether there are project-related impacts to farmlands / forestry resources.

### ***Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions***

Construction and operation of the project could result in impacts to air quality. Short-term construction related impacts and long-term operational project related impacts to air quality will be evaluated through preparation of an Air Quality Study.

### ***Biological Resources***

There are several sensitive species, communities, and other resources within the project area, including Pacific tailed frog, northern red-legged frog, foothill yellow-legged frog – North Coast DPS, southern torrent salamander, and American peregrine falcon. Sensitive species, environmentally sensitive habitat areas, jurisdictional waters, and wetlands will be studied and evaluated for this project. These potential impacts will be evaluated through the Aquatic Resource Delineation Report, Botanical Survey Report, and Natural Environment Study.

### ***Cultural Resources***

The project area is of high sensitivity for prehistoric and historic resources. Surveys and studies for cultural resources within the project limits will be completed.

### ***Geology and Soils***

The EIR will evaluate potential impacts related to geology and soils within the project area. A preliminary geotechnical report will be prepared, and appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be identified for the proposed improvements.

### ***Greenhouse Gas Emissions***

Construction and operation of the project could result in impacts related to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Short-term construction related impacts and long-term operational project related impacts to GHGs will be evaluated through preparation of an air quality study.

### ***Hazardous Waste & Materials***

Potentially hazardous materials that are known to occur within roadways and associated infrastructure include, but are not limited to, aerially deposited lead, asbestos-containing materials, lead-containing paint, treated wood waste, and yellow thermoplastic traffic stripe. An Initial Site Assessment will be prepared to evaluate the presence of potentially

hazardous materials that occur within the limits of the project site and develop proper protocols for their handling and reuse or disposal. Appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be identified to ensure proper handling and treatment of hazardous materials.

### ***Hydrology / Water Quality***

McConnahas Mill Creek, Cher-Ae Creek, and several other unnamed drainages and mapped wetland features are located within the project area and could be affected by the construction and operation of the proposed project. Erosion, sedimentation, and pollution discharge resulting from rain events, material exposure, and stormwater runoff are the most common threats to water quality during construction. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan will be prepared for the project. The proposed construction activities would be required to comply with construction best management practices, and the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures identified in the plan would be implemented.

### ***Land Use / Planning***

The General Plans, Local Coastal Plans, and other relevant planning documents for Humboldt County, the City of Trinidad, and California Coastal Commission will be evaluated. There are numerous policies related to the protection of aesthetic, biological, recreational, community, and water resources that need to be considered for the proposed project.

### ***Noise***

The proposed project has the potential to create short-term noise and vibration impacts during construction. In addition, traffic along project roadways may result in an increase in vehicle-related noise in the project area. A noise study will be prepared to evaluate the potential increase in noise and vibration associated with the proposed project and identify avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to lessen noise exceedances.

### ***Recreation***

During construction, the proposed project has the potential to affect access to nearby public parks and recreational facilities such as Trinidad State Beach and Trinidad Head Trail due to proposed lane closures along US 101, Westhaven Drive, Patrick's Point Drive, Trinidad Frontage Road, Main Street, and Scenic Drive. Potential impacts will be evaluated in the EIR.

### ***Transportation***

The proposed project has the potential to result in temporary lane and/or partial roadway closures along US 101, Main Street, Westhaven Drive, Patrick's Point Drive, Trinidad Frontage Road, Scenic Drive, and Cher-Ae Lane during construction. A construction-period traffic management plan will be developed and implemented to provide information on closures and provide detours with consistent access for vehicles and bicycles. The

EIR will evaluate the potential for increases in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) attributable to the project.

### **Utilities / Service Systems**

Roadway improvements along US 101, Main Street, Westhaven Drive, Patrick’s Point Drive, Trinidad Frontage Road, Scenic Drive, and Cher-Ae Lane could require temporary relocation of utilities. Additionally, any lane closures could affect access for emergency providers. The EIR will evaluate potential impacts to Utilities and Service Systems and identify feasible avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to lessen impacts on service providers and users.

### **Scoping Process**

The scoping process for the project includes early consultation with public agencies and the general public. A public scoping meeting is planned for February 20, 2024, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at The Heights Casino – Bingo Hall, 27 Scenic Drive, Trinidad, California. The meeting will be held to provide interested parties the opportunity to learn about the proposed project and to submit comments to assist the project team in the Draft EIR development process. Caltrans is accepting written comments until March 15, 2024, by mail and/or email at the addresses below.

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### **Potential Responsible and Trustee Agencies**

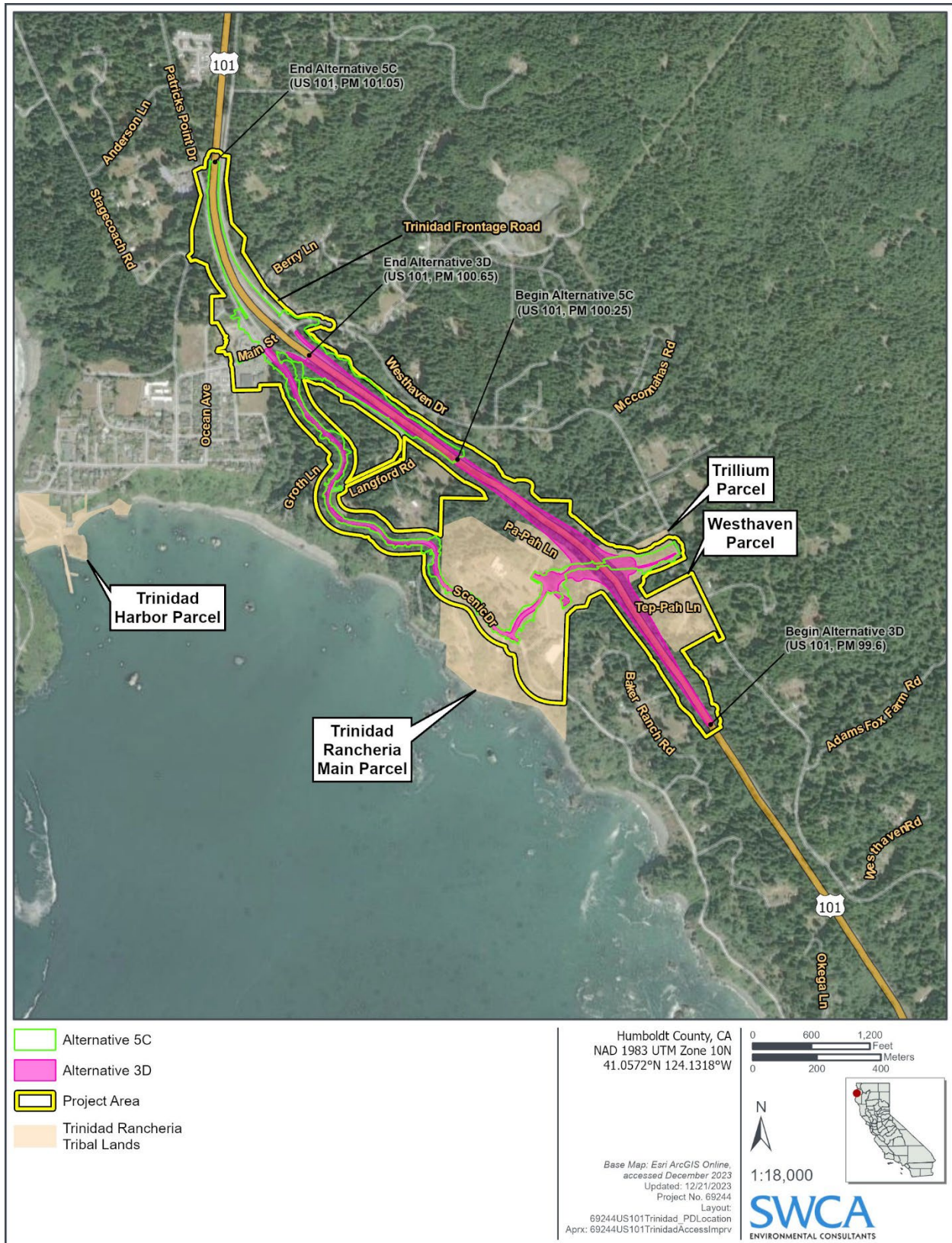
This Notice of Preparation serves as a request for comments from the responsible and trustee agencies listed in the following table regarding environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and reasonable mitigation measures that need to be discussed in the Draft EIR in order to address each agency’s specific concerns in their areas of responsibility.

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications (PLACs) are anticipated to be required for project construction:

<b>Agency</b>	<b>PLAC</b>
California Coastal Commission (CCC)	Certification of City and/or County Local Coastal Program amendment(s).
City of Trinidad	Coastal development permit, encroachment permit, grading permit, and design review
County of Humboldt	Local Coastal Program Amendment
County of Humboldt	Coastal development permit, encroachment permit, and grading permit



Agency	PLAC
County of Humboldt	Freeway agreement to add a new public road connection to U.S. 101
Caltrans	CEQA/NEPA approvals; encroachment Permit
California Transportation Commission (CTC)	Consent to new freeway agreement with County of Humboldt.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Clean Water Act Section 404: Permit for Placement of Fill Material into Waters of the United States
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (NCRWQCB)	Clean Water Act Section 401: Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements, and Construction General Permit
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	Section 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement and CDFW Consistency Determination with National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion
National Marine Fisheries Service	Biological Opinion
State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Coordination for potential impacts to Section 4(f) properties (if needed).



**Figure 1. Project Location Map.**