

Chapter 1: Existing Conditions

Throughout the history of the area, the Truckee River has provided a source for jobs, recreation and the daily needs for food and water. The town began along its banks. In 1863, an early settler, Joseph Gray, erected a stage station, where water was available, in anticipation of the transcontinental railroad passing through the river basin. Lumbermen followed, providing material for construction, telegraph poles, railroad ties and fuel. The first lumber mill located at the river edge in 1867. Others quickly followed and by 1868, fourteen mills operated in the immediate vicinity of the river.

Ice production followed as a major industry in the region. The Truckee River basin supplied most of the ice used in the west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ice ponds were established throughout the region, and a major one was located at Trout Creek.

Hydroelectric power also drew upon the river. One facility was located on East River Street. And, of course, many residential neighborhoods grew up along the river and its tributary creeks, drawing upon the convenient water supply.

A. Cultural Resources

Remnants of this history still survive in the area and represent tangible links to the past. These include many historically significant buildings, particularly along West River Street, East River Street and Riverside Drive. Others are on the south side of the river. Most of these resources are described in the *Town of Truckee Historic Resources and Architectural Inventory*; they include buildings, structures and objects. These properties add to the aesthetic qualities of the area and their preservation is a high priority. Many remain in the original families' ownership and thus they reflect a physical connection with earlier residents. Some of the buildings in this area are in poor condition, while others have undergone reha-



West River Street, river banks: Sheet flow run-off in this area enters the river with little filtration.

A. Cultural Resources...



Looking south across the Truckee River to the Hilltop area above and residential neighborhood below.



East River Street, looking west.

West River Street, looking north across the railroad tracks from Opportunity Site E-1. The visual connection to the historic structures in the Brickelton area should be considered in the redevelopment on Site E-1 and E-2.

bilitation. Any development that occurs along the river edge should consider the appropriate treatment of these resources and should facilitate their preservation. Design guidelines for development in the Downtown Overlay District are included in Volume 3 of the *Downtown Specific Plan* and would be applicable to development in much of the river revitalization area.

The downtown segment of the river also contains sites of historic and prehistoric habitation, which are known to have archeological resources. Early commercial and industrial activity along the river is well-documented and some sites, such as the ice pond, are well-known. A survey of cultural resources in 2003 indicates that many other archeological sites are likely to be along the river.

B. Truckee River and Environs

The Middle Truckee River, which runs through downtown, ranges in elevation from approximately 6,200 feet at the Lake Tahoe outlet to 5,000 feet at the state line. The drainage area for this portion covers more than 400 square miles. This segment is also fed by Donner Creek as it descends from Donner Lake.

Water flows are regulated by long-standing contracts: As part of a 1935 operating agreement between the federal government, Sierra Pacific Power Company, Truckee-Carson Irrigation District and Washoe County Water Conservation District, a minimum flow of between 300 and 500 cubic feet per second must be maintained at the state line.

The State has identified the Truckee River and a number of its tributaries as “Impaired” for sedimentation/siltation and/or organics under Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act. “Impaired” means water bodies that do not or are not expected to meet water quality standards after applying existing required controls.

Road construction and maintenance, railroad construction, forestry, recreation uses, land management and development practices, are among the factors that have caused sediment production, increased runoff and degradation of riparian and aquatic habitats in the watershed.



Natural Features and Wildlife

The dominant vegetation type in the watershed is mixed conifer forest, with Great Basin sage scrub in lower elevation areas. Riparian vegetation – primarily cottonwood, quaking aspen, dogwood, willow, sedges and grasses – grows along the Truckee River, its tributaries, and the margins of wetland areas.

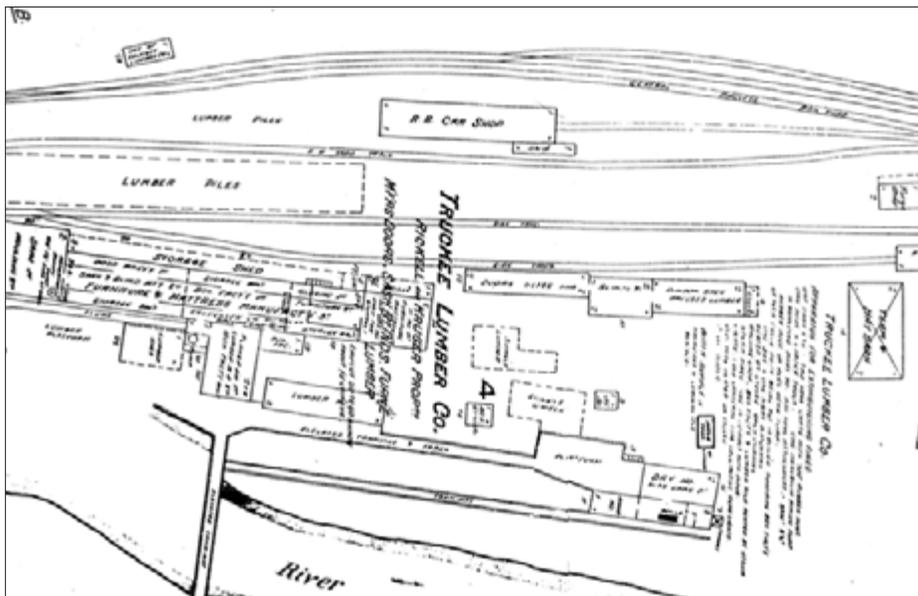
The Middle Truckee River provides habitat for both native and non-native fish species. Native species include mountain whitefish, Paiute sculpin, Lahontan redbreasted sunfish, Tahoe sucker, and mountain sucker, as well as the listed cui-ui and Lahontan cutthroat trout. Introduction of non-native species, beginning in the 1800s, resulted in major populations of rainbow and brown trout. These are supplemented with hatchery-reared fish in certain areas to improve recreational fishing.

The Middle Truckee River is host to a number of other special status species or species of concern, including the Lahontan cutthroat trout, California spotted owl, Northern goshawk, and willow flycatcher; marten, fisher, wolverine and Sierra Nevada red fox; foothill yellow-legged frog and mountain yellow-legged frog; and plant species including the Dog Valley lilies, Donner Pass buckwheat, Long-Petaled Lewisia and others.

Because meadow/riparian zones link land with water, they are extremely important for most wildlife species and they support proportionally larger densities and varieties of species than other habitat zones. They are also used for recreation, grazing, water development and other activities. As a result, riparian zones are identified by many river advocates as critical habitat for conservation and restoration.

Floodplain

The 100-year floodplain of the Truckee River varies in width and location. In some places it is contained within the river banks, but in many places, it reaches inland as much as three hundred feet. The floodplain is slightly entrenched in the glaciated channel in the well-confined alluvial valley. There are several broad



B. Truckee River...



New residential along East River Street: Other improvements in Opportunity Sites F and H should complement these uses.

Goal

Truckee Trails and Bikeways Master Plan

“New development should provide for trail alignment reservations, dedications, and/or construction when trail corridors are identified within the plan through these private lands.”

The Truckee Lumber Company once occupied a substantial amount of land at the west end of Riverside Drive. A bridge connected to some of the operations which lay on the south side of the river. (ca. 1885)

B. Truckee River...

Goal

Truckee Trails & Bikeways
Master Plan

“The trail and bikeway system should be planned to minimize land use and user conflicts to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for the user.”



Housing on the south side of the Truckee River, above the existing pedestrian bridge #1: Development on the north side should be conceived to complement this use.



Power substation

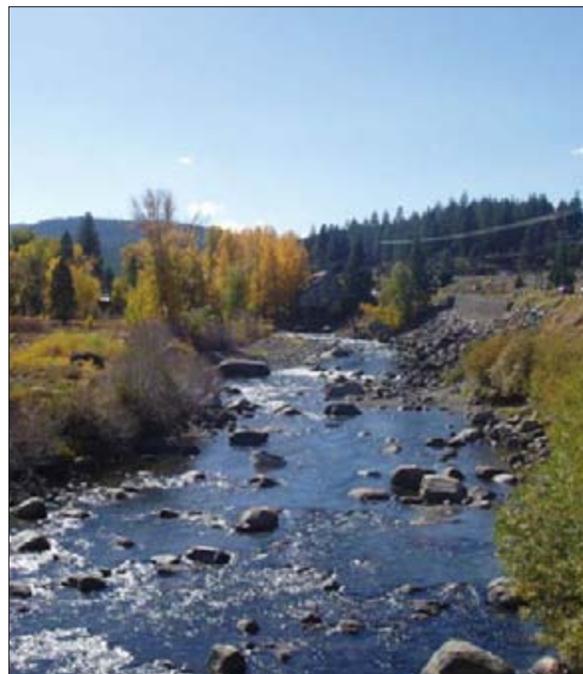
The edge of the Truckee River at the western edge of Opportunity Site E-1. The curve in the river is an area where cutting into the road is a concern, Site E-4.

valley terraces associated with the floodplain within the river reach. The channel itself has riffle/pool sequences and limited meandering within the floodplain. The river has down cut head-ward through a Pleistocene expansion bar. A huge outwash event deposited a very large series of gravel, cobble and boulder bars from the point that the canyon expands (near 89 and West River Street) all the way down to Teichert and TTSA. Then the river cuts back through this bar, leaving a fairly steep channel. The channel has a large cobble bed with a mixture of boulders and coarse gravels.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board regulations do not allow buildings or parking lots to be constructed within the 100-year floodplain. However, projects necessary for public recreation and projects to mitigate sources of erosion may be allowed with appropriate environmental mitigation for any adverse impacts resulting from such projects. Environmental efforts could include such measures as construction of facilities that control erosion, maintenance of existing in-stream sediment within the river, enhancement of in-stream or terrestrial habitat, and wetland or riparian enhancement. However, no improvements should be constructed until a geomorphic assessment of the river is performed and an analysis of the function of the habitat and plant communities is undertaken and completed. Please refer to the “Hydrology and Stream Report” (in Appendix B) for more information. The river lacks cover for aquatics and streamside vegetation and woody debris should be considered as part of the habitat improvements for the River.

Flooding

While flooding issues are known, there is not a detailed analysis of specific areas of need. The flood of January 1997 caused significant flooding in the downtown Truckee area, even though the flooded areas were not shown in the 100-year floodplain. The 1997 flood caused severe bank erosion along West River Street.



Drainage

Drainage in the downtown Truckee area is provided by a number of courses that eventually, through man-made or natural means, are directed into the Truckee River or Trout Creek. The majority of these drainage courses do not include water treatment facilities prior to discharge into the Truckee River or Trout Creek. All Town facilities and new development is required to treat its water.

Urban development adjacent to surface waters has created a significant concern for hazardous

substance spills and stormwater discharges. Most of the existing industrial properties in this area do not utilize a centralized runoff treatment facility. More recently approved industrial users employ grease and oil traps/separators, while older users drain stormwater runoff directly to the Truckee River. Drainage from the south side of the Truckee River flows directly over or through the ground and into the river.

The East River Street residential area and the Hilltop area also drain directly into the Truckee River. As a result there is the potential for trace amounts of toxic substances to be washed into it.

River Health

The river is currently listed in the EPA Clean water Act section 303 (d) as impaired due to sediment similar to other rivers in the Eastern Sierra Nevada. Evaluations are ongoing to determine if there might be other impairments. This is not unusual and sediment standards are still being developed. This is a non-point source issue, which refers to pollution caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground, picking up and carrying away natural and human-made pollutants and depositing them into bodies of water. This impairment could range from requiring maintenance of the sediment for any River features to simply impacting fishery hatches.

Erosion/ Bank Stabilization

Another concern is that portions of the watershed are highly erosive. River banks in the downtown area are unstable in some areas and are subject to significant erosion activities during high run-off periods.

C. Land Patterns & Uses

Neighborhood Context

This river revitalization strategy area is framed with these adjoining neighborhoods (see map on page 2 in Chapter 2: The Strategy Framework):

Downtown Core

The Downtown Core includes commercial and residential properties along Donner Pass Road and adjoining blocks.

West River Street

West River Street contains a mix of commercial, residential and industrial properties. Portions lie within the Downtown Historic Preservation Overlay District, where higher concentrations of historic buildings exist.

Hilltop

The Hilltop area includes residential and commercial uses and has development potential. It offers broad views of the river.

B. Truckee River...

Goal

The Town of Truckee
Downtown Specific Plan

“Phase out industrial land uses located along the Truckee River corridor, and ensure that new riverfront development protects the scenic and environmental quality of the river through development of strict design standards. Provide industrially zoned lands within appropriate locations in the downtown study area which could accommodate those industrial uses relocating off the river.”



Pedestrian connection to downtown



Willows along the river



Steps connect a trail segment to a ledge on the south bank.

C. Land Patterns...

Goal

Truckee Trails & Bikeways Master Plan

“The trail and bikeway design should adhere to a consistent design format to promote the development of a safe and recognizable and uniform system in keeping with the mountain character of Truckee.”



The confluence of Donner Creek with the Truckee River: view looking south, from the bridge over West River Street. River restoration work is a high priority in this area.



Pedestrian bridge with marker.

The Truckee River in the West River Street area: habitat restoration along the river edges should be included in improvement work for this area.

South East River Street

This residential enclave overlooks a portion of the river. Public access is somewhat restricted.

Future College Campus

A community college is anticipated to be developed on lands to the north of the railroad and west of the downtown core, in an area known as “Hippie Hill.”

Regional Park

Park lands on the south side of the river include active and passive recreation areas.

Regional Trail

The regional trail system runs through many of the properties on the south banks of the river. Some segments are incomplete, but the Trails and Bikeways Master Plan calls for their ultimate construction.

Public Places

The Town of Truckee has grown in the past decade. During that period, the community has worked to provide increased community services, including parks and recreation facilities. Some places for meetings and community gatherings have been created as a part of these initiatives. However, the town still lacks a central “place,” that could be considered a central civic space. It also lacks sufficient places where the public can gain access to the river safely and legally.

Downtown Truckee serves as the core of the community in terms of dining, specialty retail and some entertainment, but it doesn’t provide sufficient public places where citizens can gather to meet the community’s needs. The community needs more gathering places for events and celebrations that are centrally located. Historically, the river played more of a role in social activities than it presently does. It had several public focal points, including the ice palace.

Recreation

Limited opportunities exist to engage in compatible recreational activities along the river in downtown Truckee. There are no formal places for boating, fishing or simply observing the river from safe, appropriately-designed public places.



Existing recreation includes fly fishing, rafting and kayaking; there are no commercial rafting outfitters in the project area. The flows of the Truckee River in the Downtown area are variable and seasonal, with higher flows ending around July. The flows are supplemented by releases from Lake Tahoe, and these releases are controlled by very specific decrees. The releases are not managed for recreation, but rather for water supply (to Reno) and some fisheries' needs. Releases were controlled by ditch decree.

Existing Property Use

The properties along the north side of the river are more developed than those on the opposite bank. East and West River Streets both contain houses, as well as some commercial and industrial buildings. Riverside Drive is a narrow lane that is primarily residential, but some artist studios also are in the area.

Physically, the north side is more clearly integrated into the town's street system. Many residential lots abut the river, and these have houses that face the street. Back yards overlook the river. Many of these properties have historic significance. Some encroach into the floodplain.

Some existing industrial uses have potential negative effects on environmental quality and occupy large expanses of land. There are also visual impacts in some areas, where outdoor storage and use areas negatively impact valued scenic areas.

A mobile home park exists at the western end of West River Street, at the edge of the strategy area.



C. Land Patterns...

Goal

The Town of Truckee
Downtown Specific Plan

West River Street Industrial
Area:

- Relocate industrial uses off the river.
- Upgrade industrially-zoned areas.
- Increase landscape buffers on West River Street.
- Convert industrial lands adjacent to the Truckee River to residential and commercial uses.



A portion of the Old County Corp yard site E-1 is now owned by the town.

View looking northeast from the Hilltop area: The residential neighborhood along South East River Street is in the center of the image and the Railyard is in the background.

C. Land Patterns...

Goal

Truckee Trails & Bikeways Master Plan

“The trail and bikeway system should link the Town’s historic downtown, residential and commercial areas, and recreational, educational, natural, and historical resources utilizing public and private lands as necessary and appropriate.”



West River Street, just east of the confluence with Donner Creek: looking to industrial properties on the north side of road. This area is under-utilized and may be a good “receiving site” for some uses that would be relocated from the south side of the road at Opportunity Site C-1.

Goal

The Town of Truckee Downtown Specific Plan

“Provide open space to accommodate a Town Square, outdoor pond/ice skating rink, public access to the Truckee River, protection of the historic “Ice Palace” site and protection of the historic Hilltop Ski Area. Provide an integrated pedestrian and bicycle network that links these open spaces and other destination points within the downtown study area.”

Some existing buildings along Riverside Drive could provide live-work opportunities. Artist studios would be an appropriate use to consider.

Land Ownership

Ownership varies widely along the river corridor. The largest single holding is that held by the Department of Fish and Game along the southern river bank. Other large holdings are the Bright property, which lies adjacent to the Fish and Game lands, and the Arnold property on the north shore. In addition, the town owns right-of-way for streets and the railroad owns right-of-way flanking the tracks.

This diversity of ownership is an important factor in contemplating improvements. It influences the types of redevelopment strategies that may be used, and also has an effect upon the ways in which properties may be maintained.

D. Economic Conditions

An analysis of economic conditions indicates that some lands are currently underutilized and that market conditions exist which would support more intense development. Key findings are:

Market Opportunities

Overall, a strong private development market exists (particularly for-sale residential with an increasingly stronger commercial and industrial market) which is projected to continue in the near future.

Generally, real estate market support exists for private sector development of uses consistent with the vision, goals and objectives of the *Downtown River Revitalization Strategy*. Such development may be accomplished through: 1) rehabilitation of existing buildings; 2) rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings; and/or 3) selective new infill development.

Residential

- Demand exists for additional single-family ownership housing – both low density detached single-family housing units on individual lots and detached/attached higher density single-family ownership housing (i.e. town homes, condominiums).



- Live-work units also are an appropriate housing/mixed use development product for the Truckee River Corridor, particularly in those areas where new infill development would be adjacent to existing service commercial or light industrial uses.
- There also is a need for additional affordable multi-family rental units within the Town of Truckee and including these in the area should be considered.

Office

- New office occupants would be either professional or high-tech related users; with users occupying 1,000 to 5,000 square feet.
- Potential office development may be small suites (i.e. 5,000 square feet) one to two stories, with total building size approximately 5,000 to 10,000 square feet.
- Office space could be developed as part of vertical mixed use buildings with office stacked over retail space or with office on the ground floor and residential units above.
- Appropriate on-site parking (either dedicated and/or joint use) must be provided to support the occupancy of any new office development.

Retail

- Potential demand also exists for additional service retail, specialty retail and restaurant space that complements existing downtown Truckee businesses.
- Service retail, specialty retail and/or restaurant space could serve residents, businesses and visitors (including users of the Truckee River), with users occupying 1,000 to 2,500 square feet and restaurants occupying slightly larger space.
- Potential retail development in small one to two story buildings (i.e. 5,000 square feet) would be viable.
- Retail space could be developed as part of vertical mixed use buildings with retail space on the ground floor and either residential or office space stacked above.
- An appropriate amount of on-site parking must be provided to support any new service retail, specialty retail and/or restaurant space.



D. Economic Conditions...



Some existing industrial buildings can be incorporated into the redevelopment of Opportunity Site A-3 on the north side of West River Street.



The East River Street residential area.



The residential enclave along Fox Mead Lane would remain.

View looking north from Site E-1: The railroad tracks are in the center of the image.

D. Economic Conditions...



West River Street (CC Construction Building): This parcel could be included in the redevelopment of Opportunity Site E-1.

Lodging

- Potential demand exists for additional hotel rooms in the Truckee area beyond that met by recent additions (Hampton Inn & Suites and Cedar House) to the hotel market.
- The potential hotel product type could be a boutique hotel with 50 to 100 rooms, with the hotel oriented to the Truckee River.
- The hotel project could include ancillary retail (focused on services to hotel guests, visitors, river users and businesses) and/or restaurant space – also oriented toward Truckee River.
- Timing for the additional rooms should be considered in the context of other planned/approved hotel rooms (i.e. Gray's Crossing), so the market can absorb the additional hotel room nights.

Development Constraints

There are some constraints that could affect the developability of certain properties that will need to be addressed. These constraints include:

- Acquisition and assembly of property, in order to create sites appropriate for planned private and/or public development, may be difficult because of ownership patterns.
- Financing assistance for installation of public infrastructure and improvements (streets, water sewer, drainage, parking, etc.) to serve planned private and/or public development activities will be needed in some cases.
- Assistance in remediating any existing contamination in order to make sites suitable for development also may be needed.

In essence, development may be impeded by fragmented ownership patterns, site mitigation expenses and new infrastructure costs. In addition, it is important to address the ongoing operation and/or relocation of industrial businesses. To the extent that such uses are incompatible, the Town of Truckee should work with the existing business owners/tenants to address appropriate physical and economic measures to relocate them to areas of Truckee designated for industrial uses. This relocation should occur in a manner that avoids negative effects on business operations and overall financial conditions of the businesses.



View looking northwest from the Hilltop area: The Old County Corp Yard is in the center of the image.