

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) (Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.) is one of California's most important environmental laws. It requires state and local agencies to disclose and consider the environmental implications of their actions. It further requires agencies to avoid environmental impacts when such avoidance is feasible. In furtherance of these goals, six objectives are identified:

- disclose to decision makers and the public the significant environmental effects of proposed activities;
- identify ways to avoid or reduce environmental damage;
- prevent environmental damage by requiring implementation of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures;
- disclose to the public reasons for agency approvals of projects with significant environmental effects;
- foster interagency coordination; and
- enhance public participation.

CEQA procedures are guided by the legislative intent to include public participation to the greatest extent possible. The legislature also intended that decision makers be able to make informed decisions based on substantial information regarding a "project" and that these decisions be based on a trail of reasoning accessible to the public.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and its preparation is the method by which information is gathered and organized, impacts assessed, and mitigation measures developed. The EIR is prepared by a lead agency (in this case, Placer County), circulated for public review and comment, and a final document with responses to public comments is prepared for consideration by advisory and legislative bodies (in this case, the Placer County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors).

In addition, the State Resources Agency has adopted regulations, known as the state CEQA Guidelines (§15000 et seq.), to guide agencies in implementing the law. The guidelines provide detailed procedures that agencies must follow to implement CEQA, including the procedures for the preparation of a CEQA document (an EIR for projects that may have significant impacts or a Negative Declaration for projects with no significant impacts or where all significant impacts are reduced to less-than-significant levels through mitigation measures).

CEQA is more than merely a procedural statute. Substantive provisions of CEQA include provisions requiring agencies to avoid or mitigate significant impacts disclosed in an EIR when feasible.

1.1 TYPE AND PURPOSE OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This Draft EIR has been prepared by the Placer County Department of Public Works pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines. This Draft EIR is a "Focused" Draft EIR. It analyzes those impacts determined by the Initial Study and Notice of Preparation (NOP) (**Appendix A**) to be potentially significant, and for which no mitigation was identified to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level (CEQA Section §15143). An Initial Study for the proposed project was prepared in December 2007 by the Placer County Department of Public Works, and was circulated with an NOP on December 18, 2007 by the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency. The Initial Study and NOP prepared for the proposed project determined that Air Quality, Noise, and Transportation and Circulation may have impacts that would be potentially significant and unavoidable, and that these resource areas should be carried forward to the Focused Draft EIR for analysis.

This Focused Draft EIR analyzes the impacts of the proposed project, an update to the *Dry Creek/West Placer Community Plan – Transportation Element* and proposed roadway changes that could be implemented subsequent to project approval in an unincorporated area of western Placer County, near the intersection of PFE Road and Cook-Riolo Road. This Focused Draft EIR is a program-level EIR prepared pursuant to state CEQA Guidelines §15168. It has been prepared for Placer County, which acts in the capacity of Lead Agency pursuant to CEQA, the Placer County Environmental Review Ordinance, and the state CEQA Guidelines.

Subsequent to the Initial Study, three new elements were added to the proposed project: (1) widening PFE Road from two to four lanes from Watt Avenue east to Walerga Road, (2) widening Walerga Road¹ from four to six lanes from Baseline Road south to Sacramento County line, and (3) widening Watt Avenue from four to six lanes from PFE Road south to the Sacramento County line. To update the information from the Initial Study, an updated special-status species search was conducted for biological resources and an updated record search was performed for cultural resources to ensure an adequate analysis was completed. This information is included in **Section 2.4, Impacts Found Not to be Significant**. Based on this additional information, and a review of the resource topics in the Initial Study, it was determined that these new elements would not substantially change the impact analyses in the Initial Study, and would not result in potentially significant impacts not addressed in the Initial Study.

Project Synopsis

The *Dry Creek/West Placer Community Plan* (or *Community Plan*) is a composite of many goals, policies, and implementation proposals to govern the future physical development of approximately 9,200 acres in southwestern Placer County. The proposed project is an update to the *Dry Creek/West Placer Community Plan – Transportation Element* to revise the transportation goals and policies for relevance to today's community environment and to ensure applicability in the future. As a part of the *Community Plan* update, the County proposes to identify the appropriate level of service (LOS) standard that would accommodate future development within the *Community Plan* area, keep PFE Road open (the current *Community Plan* currently calls for closure of PFE Road at Cook-Riolo Road upon reaching certain traffic thresholds), control the speed limit by constructing speed reduction treatments on PFE Road and Cook-Riolo Road in order to preserve the rural character of the *Community Plan* area and keep regional traffic from using these roadways as cut-through routes, widen selected *Community Plan* area roadways (Watt Avenue, Walerga Road, and PFE Road), and remove the Baseline Road/Cook-Riolo Road/Woodcreek Oaks Boulevard intersection restriction. This Focused Draft EIR examines direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the planning, construction, and operation of these changes to the *Community Plan* at a programmatic level for the topics identified above, using the most currently available information. A detailed project description is provided in **Chapter 3**.

Programmatic-Level Analysis

This Focused Draft EIR analyzes the environmental impact of the *Community Plan – Transportation Element* update at the programmatic level because the construction-related specifics of the proposed project regarding funding, design, phasing, and implementation have not yet been determined. As stated in the CEQA Guidelines §15168, a program-level analysis may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related. Following this approach, when individual activities within the program are proposed, Placer County would be required to examine the individual activities

¹ Currently, Walerga Road from Baseline Road south to PFE Road is partially a two-lane road and partially a four-lane road. As a part of the planned roadway assumptions, Placer County intends to widen Walerga Road to four lanes from Baseline Road south to Sacramento County line in the future. The widening to six lanes will be developer-driven along the existing two-lane section and County-driven along the existing four-lane section. This roadway widening is not a component of the proposed project.

within the program to determine whether their effects were fully analyzed in the program EIR. If the activities would have no effects beyond those analyzed in the program EIR, no further CEQA compliance would be required. However, if additional environmental studies are deemed necessary once project-specific plans are submitted for processing, the program EIR could serve as the "tiering" document in accordance with CEQA Guidelines §15152. Additionally, programmatic-level review allows the County to consider cumulative impacts and mitigation measures at an early time when it has greater flexibility to deal with these basic issues (CEQA Guidelines §15168(b)(4)).

Subsequent Conformity Review Process

Once project-specific plans are submitted, Placer County would conduct a Subsequent Conformity Review Process to ensure that individual development plans conform to the *Community Plan – Transportation Element*, CEQA regulations, and program-level mitigation measures identified in this Focused Draft EIR. Upon conclusion of the Subsequent Conformity Review Process, the County would determine whether the specific plans are consistent with the *Community Plan*, whether additional environmental review is required, and if so, the scope of such additional review.

1.2 TERMINOLOGY

The following terms are used throughout this Focused Draft EIR:

Proposed Project: The *Dry Creek/West Placer Community Plan – Transportation Element* update.

Community Plan Area: The area is comprised of 9,200 acres in southwestern Placer County. Its boundaries are Baseline Road to the north, the City of Roseville to the east, the Sacramento/Placer county line to the south, and the Sutter/Placer county line to the west.

Transportation Element: This document contains goals and policies for the management of traffic, outlines the existing (1990) transportation system, discusses the existing (1990) improvement programs, outlines the desired level of service (LOS), discusses the proposed transportation system changes, and outlines the financing plan for capital improvement projects in the *Community Plan* area.

Traffic Study Area: The traffic study area includes selected roadways and intersections both inside and outside of the *Community Plan* area that would be affected by transportation improvements from within the *Community Plan* area. The traffic study area covers a wider geographic area than is influenced by project-generated traffic.

Program-Level Analysis: CEQA analysis of the *Community Plan – Transportation Element* update is being conducted at the programmatic level because the construction-related specifics of the proposed project regarding funding, design, phasing, and implementation have not yet been determined. At this time, no project-specific plans are submitted for processing to Placer County.

Speed-Reduction Treatments: Speed-reduction treatments could take many forms, including roundabouts, neckdowns, center islands, and lateral shifts at mid-block locations to reduce through speeds.

Regional and Community Plan Area Roadway Assumptions: The planned roadway assumptions are expected to be completed under cumulative conditions whether or not the proposed project is implemented. They are described in detail in **Chapter 6, Transportation and Circulation**.

Regional and Community Plan Area Land Use Assumptions: The recently completed, approved, and planned developments in the *Community Plan* area involve changes to land uses. Cumulative development assumptions were prepared through discussions with the staffs of Placer County and the cities of Roseville, Rocklin, and Lincoln. See **Chapter 6, Transportation and Circulation**.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THIS DRAFT EIR

This Focused Draft EIR is organized as follows: The **Introduction (Chapter 1)** provides background regarding the type and purpose of this EIR and information regarding program-level analyses. It describes the organization and terminology used in this document, and the scope of the analysis. It also explains how significance criteria are used to determine whether an impact of the proposed project is significant or not. Opportunities for jurisdictions, agencies, and the public to stay involved in the process are identified, and details are provided on where comments on this Focused Draft EIR can be provided and when and where public hearing(s) will be held.

The **Executive Summary (Chapter 2)** provides a brief description of the proposed project. It summarizes impacts the proposed project would have on environmental resources and the mitigation measures identified to reduce those impacts, where feasible. Significant unavoidable impacts of the proposed project are identified, if determined. Alternatives analyzed in the Focused Draft EIR that would avoid or reduce the significant environmental impacts of the proposed project are described, and impacts they would have are compared to the significant impacts of the proposed project. Areas of controversy are also identified.

The **Project Description (Chapter 3)** describes the components of the proposed project, and includes tables and figures to assist in understanding what is being proposed. It also includes a list of entitlements and approvals that would be required if the proposed project were to be implemented.

The **Resource Chapters (Chapters 4 through 6)** provide information on each of the environmental issues analyzed in this Focused Draft EIR. Each resource chapter includes information regarding the environmental and regulatory setting for the resource, identifies impacts to those resources as a result of implementation of the proposed project, and describes mitigation measures to eliminate or reduce significant impacts, where feasible. Each resource chapter is subdivided into the following subsections:

- Environmental Setting
- Regulatory Setting
- Impacts
- Mitigation Measures

For each impact identified, the discussion begins with a brief outline of the impact, its significance, and applicable mitigation measures, if required. For example:

IMPACT 4-5:	Violation of air quality standard
SIGNIFICANCE:	Potentially Significant
MITIGATION:	Mitigation Measures 4-5a through 4-5f
Proposed:	Mitigation Measures 4-5a through 4-5c
Significance After	
Proposed Mitigation:	Potentially Significant
Recommended:	Mitigation Measures 4-5d through 4-5f
RESIDUAL SIGNIFICANCE:	Less-than-Significant

The **Other CEQA Considerations (Chapter 7)** chapter includes the analyses of alternatives to the proposed project, comparing them to the proposed project in each environmental resource category evaluated for the proposed project, as required by CEQA. An environmentally superior alternative is identified. This chapter also includes the cumulative impact analyses for each environmental resource category under consideration, and identifies growth-inducing effects of the proposed project, unavoidable significant environmental impacts, and significant irreversible environmental changes as a result of the proposed project.

The **List of Preparers** is provided in **Chapter 8**, and the **References** used in support of this Focused Draft EIR are provided in **Chapter 9**. The **Distribution List** for the Notice of Availability of this EIR is provided in **Chapter 10**.

Appendices provide information in support of the above information, including the Initial Study/NOP (**Appendix A**) and comment letters received on the Initial Study/NOP (**Appendix B**). Other appendices include an updated special-status species search (**Appendix C**), an updated cultural resources record search (**Appendix D**), air quality model output results (**Appendix E**), and noise model output results (**Appendix F**).

1.4 SCOPE OF THE DRAFT EIR

As required by CEQA, the Draft EIR must “focus” only on significant environmental effects (Guidelines §15143). Based on the Initial Study and NOP (**Appendix A**), the environmental issues requiring analysis in this Focused Draft EIR are Air Quality, Noise, and Transportation and Circulation. The Focused Draft EIR characterizes the existing environmental resources of the study area, analyzes potential impacts to those resources as required by CEQA (as a result of implementation of the proposed project), and identifies mitigation measures to reduce impacts. Other CEQA-related issues are also analyzed, such as potential cumulative and growth-inducing impacts resulting from the proposed project.

This Focused Draft EIR evaluates the No Project Alternative and five build alternatives to the proposed project that could eliminate or reduce the significant impacts of the proposed project. The following alternatives to the proposed project are analyzed in this Focused Draft EIR:

- No Project Alternative – Closure of PFE Road Just West of Cook-Riolo Road;
- Alternative 1 – PFE Road to Remain Open;
- Alternative 2 – PFE Road to Remain Open, Widen/Extend *Community Plan* Area Roadways, and Remove Baseline Road/Cook-Riolo Road/Woodcreek Oaks Boulevard Intersection Restriction;
- Alternative 3 – PFE Road to Remain Open, Construct Speed Reduction Treatments, and Remove Baseline Road/Cook-Riolo Road/Woodcreek Oaks Boulevard Intersection Restriction;
- Alternative 4 – PFE Road to Remain Open, Construct Speed Reduction Treatments, Widen *Community Plan* Area Roadways, and Remove Baseline Road/Cook-Riolo Road/Woodcreek Oaks Boulevard Intersection Restriction.
- Alternative 5 – PFE Road to Remain Open, Keep Intersection Restriction, Widen *Community Plan* Area Roadways, and Construct Speed Reduction Treatments.

The alternatives analyzed are described in detail in **Chapter 7**. Similar to the proposed project for comparative purposes, Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 5 use the updated/modified LOS standard to determine

significant impacts as identified in Goal 6 and Policy 9 in the *Community Plan – Transportation Element* update (see **Chapter 3, Project Description**). The No Project Alternative and Alternative 4 use LOS C to determine significant impacts as identified in the 1990 *Community Plan – Transportation Element*.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

In general, CEQA Guidelines define a significant effect on the environment as “a substantial, or potentially substantial” adverse change in the physical environment. A potential impact is considered significant if a project would substantially degrade the environmental quality of land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance (CEQA Guidelines, 2006). Definitions of significance vary with the physical condition affected and the setting in which the change occurs. The CEQA Guidelines set forth physical impacts that trigger the requirement to make “mandatory findings of significance” (CEQA Guidelines, 2006). This CEQA document relies on three levels of impact significance:

1. Less-than-significant impact, for which no mitigation measures are warranted;
2. Significant impact that can be mitigated to a level that is less-than-significant; and,
3. Significant impact that cannot be mitigated to a level that is less-than-significant. Such impacts are significant and unavoidable.

Each resource area uses a distinct set of significance criteria. For example, if a proposed project resulted in an exposure of persons to noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or community plan, this would be considered a significant impact. If existing levels, without the proposed project, already exceed the standards, an increase in noise levels of 3 decibels attributable to the proposed project would be considered significant. Construction of appropriate sound walls could reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level. If criteria for determining significance relative to a specific environmental resource impact are not identified in the Guidelines, criteria were developed for this Focused Draft EIR consistent with the past pattern and practice of Placer County.

The significance criteria are identified at the beginning of the impacts discussion for each resource area. These significance criteria promote consistent evaluation of impacts for all alternatives considered, even though significance criteria are necessarily different for each resource considered.

1.6 CEQA PROCESS

An Initial Study and NOP for this Focused Draft EIR were issued on December 18, 2007 (**Appendix A**). A Public Scoping Meeting was held at the Placer County Planning Commission Hearing Room on January 8, 2008. Comment letters received on the Initial Study and NOP, and at the Public Scoping Meeting, are included in **Appendix B**. The distribution list for this Focused Draft EIR is contained in **Chapter 10**, and it is available for public review at the following locations:

- Placer County Planning Department, 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn, California
- Auburn/Placer County Library, 350 Nevada Street, Auburn, California
- County web site www.placer.ca.gov

Comments on this Focused Draft EIR can be sent to **MAYWAN KRACH, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TECHNICIAN** at the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn, California 95603 or to the following web address – cdreacs@placer.ca.gov. The comment period begins on **June 9, 2010** and ends on **July 23, 2010**. In addition, a public hearing to receive comments on this Focused Draft EIR will be held during the comment period in the County’s Planning Commission hearing room at 3901 County Center Drive in

Auburn on **July 22, 2010**. Comments received during the comment period and at the public hearing will be addressed in the Focused Final EIR. The Focused Final EIR will be reviewed by the Placer County Planning Commission and will be received by the Placer County Board of Supervisors for certification in accordance with CEQA and Placer County Guidelines. If the project is ultimately approved, written findings of fact for each significant environmental impact identified in the EIR will be prepared to:

- Determine that the proposed project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact;
- Find that changes to the proposed project are within another agency's jurisdiction, and such changes have been or should be adopted; and/or
- Find that specific economic, social, or other considerations make mitigation measures or proposed project alternatives infeasible.

Such findings must be based on substantial evidence in the administrative record and must include an explanation that bridges the gap between evidence in the record and the conclusions required by CEQA. If the decision-making body elects to proceed with a project that will generate significant unavoidable impacts, then a Statement of Overriding Considerations explaining the decision to balance the benefits of the proposed project against unavoidable environmental impacts is necessary. Based on the findings described above, a Statement of Overriding Considerations would be prepared as part of the project approval process.