

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: State Clearinghouse, Responsible and Trustee Agencies, and Interested Parties and Organizations

From: Placer County, Department of Facility Services, Parks Division (CEQA Lead Agency)

Contact: Andy Fisher

Date: November 10, 2005

Subject: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Proposed North Fork American River Trail Project

PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Placer County, as the Lead Agency, will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed North Fork American River Trail Project (proposed project). Once a decision is made to prepare an EIR, the lead agency must prepare a Notice of Preparation (NOP) in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082. Placer County has prepared this NOP to inform all responsible and trustee agencies (agencies) that an EIR will be prepared and to solicit comments from public agencies and other interested parties on the scope and content of the information to be addressed in the EIR for this project. The NOP is designed to provide stakeholders with sufficient information describing the proposed project and its potential environmental effects to enable agencies and the public to make a meaningful response related to the scope and content of information to be included in the EIR.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CEQA defines a “project” as any activity directly undertaken by a public agency that “may cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment” (Public Resources Code Section 21065). Public Resources Code Section 21151(a) specifies that a local agency must prepare an EIR on any project that it proposes to carry out or approve that may have a significant impact on the environment. It has been determined that the proposed North Fork American River Trail project may result in significant environmental impacts, and therefore, Placer County will prepare an EIR on the proposed project. A description of the proposed project is provided below.

PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed project is located on the southern slope of the North Fork of the American River canyon in Placer County, approximately 40 miles northeast of Sacramento. The beginning of the trail is located at the confluence of the North and Middle forks of the American River, approximately 3 miles northeast of the City of Auburn near Foresthill Road. The trail ends at Ponderosa Bridge, approximately 12.6 miles upstream and 5 miles west of the town of Foresthill (Exhibit 1). The trail would be primarily located on land owned by the Bureau of Reclamation in the Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA), which is managed by California State Parks. The trail alignment is generally bounded by Interstate 80 to the north and Foresthill Road to the south.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The proposed 12.6-mile multi-use trail is based, in part, on the proposed North Fork American River Trail Plan (Trail Plan). The Trail Plan is a product of the Trail Advisory Group (TAG) that was organized for the purposes of this project. The TAG is comprised of local citizens and stakeholders, and was formed to help identify a trail alignment and assist in providing public input related to trail planning issues and areas of controversy. The TAG consists of 12 representatives from environmental organizations, United States Bureau of Reclamation, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and trail user groups (i.e., equestrian, hiker, mountain biker). Members of the TAG may continue to provide input and assistance with the proposed project during the environmental review and construction phases. Volunteers from various interest groups may also help with trail maintenance in the future.

In 2004, Placer County completed a CEQA Initial Study and NEPA Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) to assess the proposed project's potential effects on the environment and the significance of those effects. The IS/EA concluded that there was no substantial evidence that any aspect of the proposed trail project, either individually or cumulatively, would result in a significant effect on the environment based on mitigation measures that were incorporated as part of the project that would avoid or reduce potential adverse environmental effects; as a result, a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was prepared for the project. The County approved the MND and filed a Notice of Determination (NOD) pursuant to CEQA on August 24, 2004, and Reclamation adopted a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) pursuant to NEPA on August 2, 2004.

During the public review phase of the IS/EA, members of the public provided comments expressing their views on potential environmental effects of the project. In response to issues raised by the public, the County has decided to prepare an EIR pursuant to CEQA for the proposed project and vacated its approval of the MND on May 10, 2005. This EIR is intended to address the issues raised by the public and to provide a more comprehensive environmental review of topics that the County had determined should have additional analysis beyond the information presented in the IS/EA.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Project objectives are an important component of the project description. Objectives represent the overarching goals and purpose of a project, and are typically used as a screening tool in evaluating project alternatives. Placer County has developed the following objectives for the proposed North Fork American River Trail project:

1. Provide access to the North Fork American River canyon within the Auburn State Recreation Area to a wide variety of users.
2. Route the trail to discourage informal connections to the lake/river.
3. Allow multiple non-motorized uses along the trail.
4. Reduce visibility of trail from river/lake.
5. Minimize environmental impacts of trail construction, including the avoidance of sensitive areas.
6. Promote safe grades and safe alignments.
7. Connect to staging termini (Foresthill Road and Ponderosa Way).
8. Provide connections to existing trails.
9. Ensure emergency access to trail.

10. Minimize conflicts with private property.
11. Design alignment to minimize conflicts with trail users.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

The proposed project located along the southern slope of the American River canyon would include the following components:

- ▶ a 12.6-mile multi-use trail accommodating hiking, biking and equestrian use (Exhibit 2);
- ▶ bridges and stream fords to accommodate stream crossings;
- ▶ two staging areas (Foresthill Road and Ponderosa Way);
- ▶ portable restroom;
- ▶ signage; and
- ▶ informational kiosks.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The EIR will evaluate a range of alternatives in accordance with Section 15126.6 of the State CEQA Guidelines. The alternatives evaluation will consist of a qualitative and comparative analysis of a set of project alternatives, including the “No Project” Alternative. Alternatives analyzed in the EIR will be selected from among alternative trail alignments considered in the Trail Plan, identified through the public review process, and/or developed by the County.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC REVIEW

Public scoping is an initial, essential, and important component of the proposed project. Scoping will help to identify the final range of actions, alternatives, site design options, environmental impacts to be evaluated, methods of assessment, and mitigation measures that will be analyzed in the EIR. The scoping process will help to eliminate from detailed study those issues that are not critical to the decision at hand. It is also an effective way to bring together and resolve the concerns of interested federal, state, and local agencies; specific stakeholder groups; and the general public.

Before the release of this NOP, the County held a public scoping meeting on August 31, 2005 in Auburn, California to present the project and to solicit comments on the project and the environmental review process. The comments presented at the meeting were noted, will be considered, and will be included as part of the EIR.

In addition, the NOP will be circulated for a 30-day review period as specified by the CEQA Guidelines. The 30-day NOP review and comment period begins **November 10, 2005** and ends **December 10, 2005**. Written responses can be submitted anytime during the NOP review period. Please include the name of a contact person for your agency, if applicable. All written public and agency comments should be directed to:

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11476 C Avenue
Auburn, California 95603
Phone: (530) 889-6819
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Your views and comments on how the project may affect the environment are welcomed. Please contact Andy Fisher if you have any questions about the proposed North Fork American River Trail Project and/or the environmental review process.

AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

PLACER COUNTY

Placer County will serve as the lead agency for CEQA compliance and will coordinate extensively with CEQA responsible and trustee agencies. As lead agency under CEQA, Placer County will be principally responsible for conducting the environmental review process, including scoping, preparing appropriate environmental documentation, and obtaining required permits and other regulatory approvals. Following completion of the EIR, the Placer County Board of Supervisors will decide whether to certify and approve the EIR.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

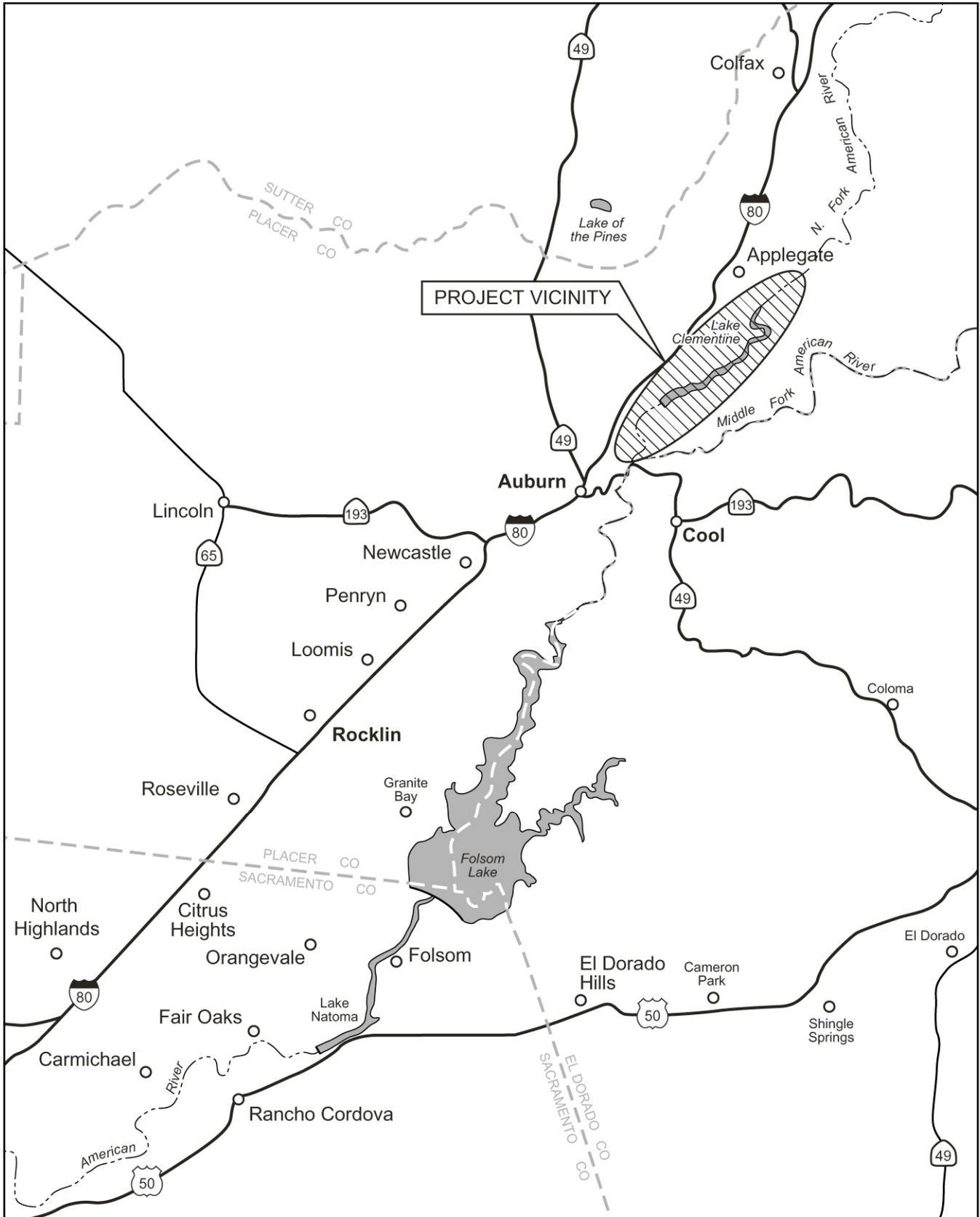
The EIR will analyze a broad range of environmental impacts association with the implementation of the proposed project. Based on the environmental analysis previously conducted in the IS/EA and public comments, Placer County has determined that the proposed project has the potential to result in environmental impacts on the following resources, which will be analyzed in further detail in the EIR:

- ▶ Land Use and Planning
- ▶ Geology and Soils
- ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ▶ Air Quality
- ▶ Traffic and Transportation
- ▶ Biological Resources
- ▶ Noise
- ▶ Public Services
- ▶ Aesthetics and Visual Resources
- ▶ Cultural Resources
- ▶ Recreation

Project-related impacts to the following resources were found to be absent, or at less-than-significant levels, and therefore, will not be carried forward for further analysis in the EIR:

- ▶ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- ▶ Mineral Resources
- ▶ Population and Housing
- ▶ Public Utilities and Service Systems

EXHIBIT 1: PROJECT LOCATION



Project Location

EXHIBIT 2: TRAIL ALIGNMENT

