

CHAPTER 4.0

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

4.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The California Environmental Quality Act and the implementing State CEQA Guidelines require that alternatives to the proposed project be discussed in the EIR. The value of such discussion is to inform public decision-makers of the differential environmental impacts which may be associated with each potential alternative, and to enable a reasoned judgement to be made as to which alternative to the proposed project may be environmentally superior. Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines provides the following description of what should be included in the alternatives discussion in an EIR:

- (a) Alternatives to the Proposed Project. An EIR shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives. An EIR need not consider every conceivable alternative to a project. Rather it must consider a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives that will foster informed decision making and public participation. An EIR is not required to consider alternatives which are infeasible. The lead agency is responsible for selecting those alternatives. There is no ironclad rule governing the nature or scope of the alternatives to be discussed other than the rule of reason.
- (b) Purpose. Because an EIR must identify ways to mitigate or avoid the significant effects that a project may have on the environment (Public Resources Code Section 21002.1), the discussion of alternatives shall focus on alternatives to the project or its location which are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.
- (c) Selection of a range of reasonable alternatives. The range of potential alternatives to the proposed project shall include those that could feasibly accomplish most of the basic objectives of the project and could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of the significant effects. The EIR should briefly describe the rationale for selecting the alternatives to be discussed. The EIR should also identify any alternatives that were considered by the lead agency but were rejected as infeasible during the scoping process and briefly explain the reasons underlying the lead agency's determination. Additional information explaining the choice of alternatives may be included in the administrative record. Among the factors that may be used to eliminate

alternatives from detailed consideration in an EIR are: (i) failure to meet most of the basic project objectives, (ii) infeasibility, or (iii) inability to avoid significant environmental impacts.

(d) Evaluation of Alternatives. The EIR shall include sufficient information about each alternative to allow meaningful evaluation, analysis, and comparison with the project. A Matrix displaying the major characteristics and significant environmental effects of each alternative may be used to summarize the comparison. If an alternative would cause one or more significant effects in addition to those that would be caused by the project as proposed, the significant effects of the alternative shall be discussed, but in less detail than the significant effects of the project as proposed.

(e) “No Project” alternative.

(1) The specific alternative of “no project” shall also be evaluated along with its impact. The purpose of describing and analyzing a no project alternative is to allow decision makers to compare the impacts of approving the proposed project with the impacts of not approving the proposed project. The no project alternative analysis is not the baseline for determining whether the proposed project’s environmental impacts may be significant, unless it is identical to the existing environmental setting analysis which does establish that baseline (see Section 15125).

(2) The “no project” analysis shall discuss the existing conditions at the time the notice of preparation is published, as well as what would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services. If the environmentally superior alternative is the “no project” alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives.

(3) A discussion of the “no project” alternative will usually proceed along one of two lines:

(A) When the project is the revision of an existing land use or regulatory plan, policy or ongoing operation, the “no project” alternative will be the continuation of the plan, policy or operation into the future. Typically this is a situation where other projects initiated under the existing plan will continue while the new plan is developed. Thus, the projected impacts of the proposed plan or alternative plans would be compared to the impacts that would occur under the existing plan.

(B) If the project is other than a land use or regulatory plan, for example a development project on identifiable property, the “no project” alternative is the circumstance under which the project does not proceed. Here the discussion would compare the environmental

effects of the property remaining in its existing state against environmental effects which would occur if the project is approved. If disapproval of the project under consideration would result in predictable actions by others, such as the proposal of some other project, this “no project” consequence should be discussed. In certain instances, the no project alternative means “no build” wherein the existing environmental setting is maintained. However, where failure to proceed with the project will not result in preservation of existing environmental conditions, the analysis should identify the practical result of the project’s non-approval and not create and analyze a set of artificial assumptions that would be required to preserve the existing physical environment.

(C) After defining the no project alternative using one of these approaches, the lead agency should proceed to analyze the impacts of the no project alternative by projecting what would reasonably be expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services.

(f) Rule of reason. The range of alternatives required in an EIR is governed by a “rule of reason” that requires the EIR to set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice. The alternatives shall be limited to ones that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. Of those alternatives, the EIR need examine in detail only the ones that the lead agency determine could feasibly attain most of the basis objectives of the project. The range of reasonable alternatives shall be selected and discussed in a manner to foster meaningful public participation and informed decision making.

(1) Feasibility. Among the factors that may be taken into account when addressing the feasibility of alternatives are site suitability, economic viability, availability of infrastructure, general plan consistency, other plans or regulatory limitations, jurisdictional boundaries (projects with a regionally significant impact should consider the regional context), and whether the proponent can reasonably acquire, control or otherwise have access to the alternative site (or the site is already owned by the proponent). No one of these factors establishes a fixed limit on the scope of reasonable alternatives.

(2) Alternative locations.

(A) Key question. The key question and first step in analysis is whether any of the significant effects of the project would be avoided or substantially lessened by putting the project in another location. Only locations that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project need be considered for inclusion in the EIR.

- (B) None feasible. If the lead agency concludes that no feasible alternative locations exist, it must disclose the reasons for this conclusion, and should include the reasons in the EIR. For example, in some cases there may be no feasible alternative locations for a geothermal plant or mining project which must be in close proximity to natural resources at a given location.
 - (C) Limited new analysis required. Where a previous document has sufficiently analyzed a range of reasonable alternative locations and environmental impacts for projects with the same basic purpose, the lead agency should review the previous document. The EIR may rely on the previous document to help it assess the feasibility of potential project alternatives to the extent the circumstances remain substantially the same as they relate to the alternative.
- (3) An EIR need not consider an alternative whose effect cannot be reasonably ascertained and whose implementation is remote and speculative.

The sections of this Chapter that follow present a description of the alternatives considered and an analysis of the alternatives in the context of CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines. Alternative locations were not discussed because there are no areas within Placer County, other than the Plan area, that are appropriate for consideration of the Foresthill Divide Community Plan. The Placer County General Plan specifically provides for 22 areas in the county to be addressed in Community Plans, one of which is the Foresthill Divide. Consideration of such an alternative under these circumstances would be infeasible. An analysis of the comparative environmental superiority of the various alternatives is also provided as required by CEQA.

The range of alternatives that are addressed include an evaluation of the No Project alternative (which is required to be addressed), a Highest Density Alternative, a Lowest Density Alternative, and a Reduced Density Alternative. The Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives represent the high and low ranges, respectively, of a total of five conceptual alternatives that were reviewed and considered by the FDCP Team in one of their Town Hall meetings.

4.1.2 NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

In accordance with Section 15126.6(e)(3)(A) presented above, the No Project alternative consists of an analysis of the continuation of the existing plan, in which case the Plan area will be developed in accordance with the existing Foresthill General Plan without adoption of the FDCP. Under this alternative, the projected impacts of the proposed FDCP are compared to the impacts that would occur under the existing Foresthill General Plan. The 1981 Foresthill General Plan encompassed approximately 56 square miles with a projected Buildout population of 14,400, compared to 109 square miles within the FDCP area with a projected Buildout population of 18,963. The additional area encompassed by the FDCP (53 square miles) under the No Project

Alternative would develop in accordance with the Placer County General Plan or the Weimar/Clipper Gap/Applegate General Plan, depending upon the location.

4.1.3 HIGHEST DENSITY ALTERNATIVE

The Highest Density Alternative was considered and rejected by the FDCP Team. The Highest Density Alternative is shown in Figure 4-1 (the map shows residential areas only; other uses would be the same as the proposed FDCP). The Highest Density Alternative would accommodate a buildout population of 28,355 residents, compared to the FDCP buildout estimate of 18,963. In comparison to the proposed FDCP, densities in residential areas would be higher: residential densities in many areas are doubled, and many areas shown in the proposed FDCP for Timberland uses are shown for residential uses (primarily at densities ranging from 2.3 du/acre to 4.6 du/acre) in the Highest Density Alternative. The estimated population for this alternative at buildout (28,355) is comparable to the estimated buildout population for the existing 1981 Foresthill General Plan in consideration of the fact that the 1981 plan was approximately ½ the square mile size of the proposed FDCP with a projected buildout population of 14,400. The FDCP Team rejected this alternative because it was not consistent with the Vision and General Goals formulated by the Team, which are described in Chapter 2 of this EIR.

As cited above in Section 15126.6(f), “The alternatives shall be limited to ones that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project.” That is not the case for the Highest Density Alternative; however, it is evaluated in this EIR because it is an actual alternative that was considered and rejected in the process of developing the FDCP.

4.1.4 LOWEST DENSITY ALTERNATIVE

The Lowest Density Alternative was also considered and rejected by the FDCP Team. The Lowest Density Alternative is shown in Figure 4-2 (the map shows residential uses only; other uses would be the same as the proposed FDCP). The Lowest Density Alternative would accommodate a buildout population of 12,727 residents, or a little more than half of the FDCP buildout estimate of 18,963. In comparison to the proposed FDCP, densities in residential areas would be reduced in the Todd’s Valley area, the Pomfret Estate (“Forest Ranch”) property, and some properties along Foresthill Road between Todd’s Valley and the Pomfret Estate property. The FDCP Team rejected this alternative because it was not consistent with the general goals and vision for the Community Plan area, which call for concentrating population and residential development near the Core Area of Foresthill.

4.1.5 REDUCED DENSITY ALTERNATIVE

A Reduced Density Alternative has been developed for consideration in this EIR. There is no map available for this alternative; however, it would accommodate a buildout population of 9,250 residents. It would require reducing residential densities throughout the Plan area, with the exception of areas that are already subdivided. Other planned land uses would be similarly

reduced in area because the lower population would not support the amount of commercial, industrial and mixed-use development accommodated by the FDCP.

4.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

4.2.1 NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

As described above, the No Project Alternative is continuation of the existing 1981 Foresthill General Plan. Since adoption of the 1981 Foresthill General Plan, there have been several changes to the affected area. The Plan area has been enlarged from a 56 square mile Plan area to an approximately 109 square mile Plan area. The proposed Plan area encompasses more of the Foresthill Divide, and more accurately represents a fairly cohesive, yet spread-out, geographical community.

With completion of the Sugar Pine Reservoir Dam, Sugar Pine Reservoir provides drinking water to the majority of residents within the Plan area. The reservoir is owned and operated by the Foresthill Public Utility District (Foresthill PUD).

The solid waste disposal site in Foresthill, operated by the Bureau of Reclamation, has closed since the adoption of the 1981 General Plan. The site is currently being used as a transfer station, from which waste is transferred to the County's Western Regional Landfill near Roseville.

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan is also based on several assumptions that have proven to be faulty since the Plan was adopted in 1981. These include the following assumptions: (1) that the population growth rate would be fairly high (annual growth rate of 7.8 percent) in the Plan area; (2) completion of the Auburn Dam within the planning period; and (3) that forest products would continue to be a primary source of revenue and employment within the Plan area (the two lumber mills operating in 1981 have since closed).

The following subjects have been analyzed in comparison to the existing Plan area conditions and the proposed FDCP.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan assumed that population growth in the Plan area (which at 56 square miles is approximately one-half the geographic size of the proposed FDCP Plan area, at 109 square miles) would increase at a fairly high annual rate of 7.8 percent (consistent with population growth in the area over the previous decade). That would result in a Plan area population of approximately 11,900 by 2002. In fact, population growth in both the Foresthill General Plan area and the proposed FDCP Plan area has been considerably lower, and the proposed FDCP assumes an annual growth rate of between one and two percent. The Foresthill General Plan states that it allows for a holding capacity of 14,400; however, analysis of the 1981 General Plan during preparation of the FDCP revealed that the land use designations and zoning accommodated by the 1981 General Plan would actually allow for a population holding capacity of 28,000± for the 56 square mile 1981 Plan area. The holding capacity of the proposed 109

square mile FDCP is estimated at 18,963. The number of housing units accommodated by the FDCP would similarly be lower, with the number of new housing units that could be built in the Plan area estimated to be 7,128. Compared to the proposed FDCP, impacts of the No Project Alternative (the 1981 Foresthill General Plan) on population and housing would be greater because it would accommodate more population growth and housing units. The 1981 Foresthill General Plan is based on out-of-date assumptions regarding population growth rate in the Plan area.

LAND USE

The majority of the Plan area is forested and/or part of the steeply sloping topography that slopes to the Middle and North Forks of the American River. Development is primarily concentrated in areas where it can be sustained, including Foresthill, the Todd's Valley Subdivision, Baker Ranch, Michigan Bluff, and Yankee Jim's areas. Land use within the Foresthill townsite consists of commercial uses, industrial uses, and scattered public uses along the Foresthill Road corridor. Medium and low density and rural residential uses are an integral part of the townsite as well. Timberland Production Zones exist immediately southwest of the townsite.

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan includes the following discussion of land use districts included in the Plan (the locations of the various land uses are shown in Figures 4-3 and 4-4):

Residential

The proposed land use map shows a range of residential land uses to accommodate the maximum projected population of 11,900 people by the year 2000. The range spans from "Medium Density Residential" (4 – 10 units per acre) to Forestry (20 to 160 acre minimum). The residential holding capacity of the proposed plan is approximately 14,400 as compared to the 54,000 people allowed under the existing zoning. [See conclusion regarding actual holding capacity of the Plan under "Population and Housing" above.]

The higher density residential areas proposed are shown in the central townsite and surrounding area as well as the existing Todd Valley Subdivision. Some of the properties in the outlying areas are proposed for Forestry Residential designation (4.6 – 20 acre minimum) with the majority of the area between the townsite and Spring Garden Road in the 2.3 – 4.6 acre range and the choice timber producing property being designated Forestry (20 – 160 acre minimum). The purpose for maintaining larger parcel sizes outside of the townsite area is to encourage higher density residential areas near the existing commercial townsite and to preserve the timber producing lands in the outlying areas.

The Plan, as adopted by the Board, attempts to concentrate density around the townsite and within the boundaries of the Foresthill Public Utility District and to maintain the outlying areas for forestry uses.

Commercial

The primary commercial area in the plan is recommended to remain in the existing downtown core area. Satellite commercial areas reflecting existing uses are shown at the Monte Verde Inn and in the townsite of Baker Ranch. At the hearing of April 20, 1981 at the Board of Supervisors, it was determined that a Planning Reserve designation be established to allow for multiple uses including additional commercial in the general vicinity of Ponderosa Way at Auburn-Foresthill Road. While no specific area is identified on the Land Use Map at this time, the Planning Commission can consider the merits of a complete development plan in this area at the appropriate time...

Industrial

The proposed plan recognizes the two industrial lumber mill uses in the plan area. It is also recommended that property across Auburn-Foresthill Road from the Bendix Mill be designated Industrial to ensure compatibility of land uses in the future. An additional industrial site is proposed for future need off Auburn-Foresthill Road near the existing dumpsite. This area was chosen because it minimized traffic and visual pollution problems.

Forest and Forest Residential

The main emphasis of this plan is to preserve the valuable timber resources and general rural character of the Foresthill area. The recommended range of parcel sizes of 4.6 to 160 acre minimum for the Forest and Forest Residential districts reflects this desire to protect timber producing property from dense residential encroachment while also serving to maintain a strong rural identity in the area. Consideration was also given to soil types, slope, geology, water quality, and sewage disposal in determining the recommended parcel sizes.

The clustering of housing units is encouraged in the Forest and Forest Residential designation to take advantage of available services and maximize open space areas.

A more detailed analysis of land capabilities is performed as part of the precise zoning process when exact minimum parcel sizes are established for all properties within the plan area.

Rural Estate

A large portion of the western area of the Plan has been designated Rural Estate, 2.3 – 4.6 acre minimum. With this adoption, the Board directed that the basic zone district establish large minimal parcel sizes to discourage the parcel map or “lot-and-block” subdivision approach, and encourage higher densities, where feasible, through “Land Use Intensity” designations for planned unit developments.

Planning Reserve

The intent of the Planning Reserve District is to allow an area to be set aside for a broad range of commercial and multiple residential uses based on the future needs of the community. Uses could range from retail commercial, duplex-fourplex units, mobilehome parks, professional offices or public service buildings. Proposed uses in this area would require the filing of a rezoning application along with the filing of a specific plan containing the provisions specified in Section 65451 of Title 7 (Planning) of the California Government Code. Such provisions include the location of all housing, business, industry, open space, public buildings and grounds, among other uses. It also includes the location of streets and roads, standards for population and building density, along with water supply and sewage disposal. With the adoption of the Plan on April 20, 1981, the Board of Supervisors proposed that a nonspecific site be kept for Planning Reserve purposes and that it generally be sited in the area near the Ponderosa Way-Auburn-Foresthill Road intersection.

Other

Also designated on the plan are proposed and existing parks, fire stations, schools and other public and quasi-public uses. These are discussed in detail in the Public Services and Safety sections of this plan.

Residential densities in the 1981 Foresthill General Plan have been decreased by more than half under the proposed FDCP. As described in the proposed FDCP, the Foresthill Divide is unique in many ways, and is not suited to standard land use planning techniques. As an example, to provide a resident population in the downtown area, the Plan provides for Mixed-Use Areas that allows for many different activities to occur within those areas. Retail commercial uses, offices, public service buildings, and other traditional downtown businesses will be mixed with single-family and multi-family residential uses (perhaps even within the same building) in the Historic Downtown Mixed-Use Area. A downtown resident population is anticipated to be the catalyst for more community events, and help create a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood reminiscent of the historic era represented by the architectural styles of the existing buildings in that area.

The Canyon Mixed-Use Area extends from the Foresthill Road/Mosquito Ridge Road “Y” west to the medical building on the south side of Foresthill Road from the church west to the Starlite Café on the north side of Foresthill Road. This district will provide for retail commercial, tourist commercial, single and multi-family residential, and other uses while taking advantage of the phenomenal view of the Sierra Nevada to the east.

These mixed-used districts are one way to accomplish one of the primary goals of the FDCP: that higher residential densities should be located near the core of the community (defined as the area that extends from Foresthill Elementary School westerly to Foresthill Divide Middle School). The Plan also concentrates higher residential densities east of the historic downtown district to provide local traffic circulation throughout the “downtown” area.

Another difference between the 1981 General Plan and the proposed FDCP is the special treatment of the old mill site at the west end of the historic downtown district in the FDCP. More than half the old mill site has been and will be utilized for the new high school (opened in 2004), a new elementary school and a forest education facility. The Mill Site area immediately adjacent to the school site will house job-generating businesses. This site will require careful planning to accommodate all of these existing and proposed new uses.

Compared to the proposed FDCP, the No Project Alternative (1981 Foresthill General Plan) would allow higher residential densities, would allow more land to be converted from rural open space to rural residential uses, and would not allow for mixed uses in the Core Area. It is based on out-of-date assumptions regarding population growth rate and industrial uses. Commercial development in the FDCP is limited to the “Core Area” and three identified small outlying commercial areas. Private forest holdings and agricultural interests will continue to exist with protection from development pressure and adjacent development activities, and an open space designation has been applied to public lands. The Mixed-Use Areas in the FDCP provide greater certainty to potential developers and the community than the Planning Reserve designation in the 1981 Foresthill General Plan, which was not applied to specific properties. Overall, the land use policies of the FDCP are more protective of the environment than the policies of the 1981 Foresthill General Plan.

COMMUNITY DESIGN

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan contains few policies relating to community design. Policies for scenic highways include encouraging and utilizing existing County programs for protection and enhancement of scenic corridors, including design review, sign control, undergrounding utilities, scenic setbacks, density limitations, planned unit developments, grading and tree removal standards, open space easements, and land conservation contracts. It also provides for landscaping and landscaped mounding where desirable to maintain and improve scenic qualities and screen unsightly views. It requires the use of aesthetic design considerations for road construction, reconstruction, or maintenance for scenic highways, and encourages anti-litter, beautification and clean-up programs along scenic routes (identified as Auburn-Foresthill Road and Ruck-A-Chucky Route). It also recommends that there be a citizens’ design review committee to carefully review any proposed commercial development to assure that the location and appearance of the buildings, landscaping, and parking are consistent with the historic and rural character of the area. It requires design control for all new commercial development, remodeling of old facilities, and industrial development visible from major roads. It does not address light and glare.

The proposed FDCP contains much stronger and more specific requirements for community design in the Plan area. In addition to requiring compliance with the Placer County Rural Design Guidelines and the Placer County Design Guidelines Manual, the Community Design goals and policies provide clear direction regarding building design, signs and lighting in the Plan area. The FDCP also includes proposed Foresthill Community Design Guidelines, which are intended to preserve the FDCP’s historic built environment and guide future design. The proposed FDCP also includes policies designed to minimize light and glare associated with new development.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan contains one goal and four policies regarding public services which are very general in nature. It encourages the long term use of individual sewage disposal systems, encourages cluster developments to minimize environmental degradation, requires that adequate services are available for proposed developments prior to approval, and encourages mitigation measures for new developments to reduce the impacts on local services. Information about public services contained in the Plan is outdated. The proposed FDCP contains up-to-date information, and in addition to general goals and policies, includes goals and policies specifically directed at ensuring the adequacy and timely provision of the following public facilities and services: sewage disposal, water supply, education/schools, fire protection, public protection, drainage and water quality, public utilities, and other public services.

PARKS AND RECREATION

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan identifies two existing parks in the Plan area and two sites in the Todd Valley Estates subdivision that were dedicated to the County as future park sites. The Plan assumes that with completion of the Auburn Dam project, the recreation potential of the area would be expanded, although some recreation activities (e.g., rafting, gold mining) would be lost. The Foresthill General Plan encourages development of recreation facilities, encourages future park sites to be located near other public facilities, provides for adequate riding and hiking trails, and requires park dedication fees to ensure funding for future park needs. The proposed FDCP establishes park development standards and park facility standards, requires new subdivisions to be included in a type of financing district to generate sufficient funds to operate and maintain new public park facilities, and recommends expanding the powers of the Foresthill P.U.D. or creating a local recreation district to provide public services, administer and generate funds for the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and recreational programs in the community. The FDCP provides greater direction than the Foresthill General Plan regarding development of a system of interconnected hiking, riding and bike trails suitable for active recreation, transportation and circulation. Development of new linkages between trails and connecting trail systems have been identified as a priority in the FDCP.

NATURAL RESOURCES/CONSERVATION/OPEN SPACE

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan includes an Environmental Resources Management Element that addresses open space, seismic safety, conservation, recreation and parks, historical and archaeological sites, and a summary of information on natural resources. Policies of this Element including encouraging the following actions or practices: agricultural land preservation; development in areas of least environmental sensitivity; the use of ecologically innovative techniques in future development; professional, multiple use forest practices on timber producing lands; locating residential and commercial development away from areas of high timber or agricultural production; scenic or greenbelt corridors along major transportation routes; and retention of the rural, pastoral characteristics of the area. The Element also provides for reviewing proposed developments for their potential adverse effect on air and water quality, monitoring and controlling existing land uses that could deteriorate air and water quality, identification and preservation of all important fish and wildlife areas, providing for the protection of rare or endangered species, and preserving the natural condition of stream influence

areas. Open space policies including encouraging scenic or greenbelt corridors along major transportation routes, encouraging public and private ownership maintenance of open space, preserving natural areas along creeks and canals, promoting taxation techniques to allow property owners to preserve their lands as open space, and protecting residents and property from seismic and geologic hazards.

The Resource Management Element of the proposed FDCP identifies and updates information on existing natural resources of the Plan area. The proposed Plan includes policies that are much more specific and mandatory in nature for the following topics: vegetation, wetland and riparian areas, fish and wildlife habitat, agricultural resources, forest resources, water resources, soils, geology, open space, and visual resources. It recognizes the role of state and federal permitting requirements for natural resources that are not acknowledged in the 1981 Foresthill General Plan. While the 1981 General Plan demonstrated good intentions toward protection of natural resources, the proposed FDCP is more protective of the environment.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The 1981 Foresthill General Plan includes a brief description and one policy addressing historic sites, which is to continue the use of the Design Historic Zone District in areas of historical significance. The proposed FDCP includes an entire section on Cultural Resources (archaeological as well as historical) and numerous policies designed to identify and, to the extent possible, preserve archaeological and historical resources in the Plan area. The proposed FDCP is therefore more protective of cultural resources in the Foresthill Divide.

AIR QUALITY

The Environmental Resources Management Element of the 1981 Foresthill General Plan includes two policies that address air quality: to continue to monitor and control existing land uses that could deteriorate air quality, and to review developments for their potential adverse effect on air and water quality. The proposed FDCP includes an entire section on Air Quality. Although the County does not and cannot control all emissions, the FDCP includes numerous policies designed to reduce emissions and preserve air quality in the Plan area.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

The Transportation/Circulation Element of the 1981 Foresthill General Plan is very general in nature. It does not establish a Level of Service standard for Plan area roadways. It does recognize the constraints imposed by the dependence on Foresthill Road as the main access to Foresthill. It does not proposed new routes, but discusses a proposed roadway to connect Colfax with El Dorado County in conjunction with the Auburn Dam, which has never been built. The proposed FDCP establishes Level of Service standards for Plan area roadways, and also proposes three major roadway improvements: upgrading of Power Line Road, a Yankee Jim's Road connection to the new high school site, and the extension of Patent Road. Traffic calming measures are also proposed for the Core Area.

NOISE

The Noise section of the 1981 Foresthill General Plan is very general in nature and does not establish measurable standards. The proposed FDCP does not include a Noise Element, but instead relies on the Noise Element of the Placer County General Plan, which does establish standards.

4.2.2 HIGHEST DENSITY ALTERNATIVE

The following subjects have been analyzed in comparison to the existing site conditions and the proposed project.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

This alternative would accommodate a buildout population of 28,355 residents, compared to the FDCP buildout estimate of 18,963. The number of new housing units that would be accommodated would be considerably increased over what would be allowed by the FDCP. This would represent a substantial increase in the number of people and housing units currently in the Plan area. It is also unlikely that this growth rate would be achieved during the planning period.

LAND USE

In comparison to the proposed FDCP, densities in residential areas would be higher: residential densities in many areas are doubled, and many areas shown in the proposed FDCP for Ag/Timberland uses are shown for residential uses (primarily at densities ranging from 2.3 du/acre to 4.6 du/acre) in the Highest Density Alternative. Other planned land uses would be the same as the proposed FDCP. This alternative would result in a substantially greater area in which development would occur, as well as the higher density of residential development, changing the rural, forested character that is a major focus of the proposed Plan. This alternative would represent a greater conversion of open space lands to rural or urbanized uses. Because the areas designated for commercial, industrial, and mixed-use would remain the same, but residential development would increase, the balance between jobs and housing in the Plan area would become less favorable.

COMMUNITY DESIGN

Many of the elements of community design included in the proposed FDCP could be applied to the Highest Density Alternative, including the Foresthill Community Design Guidelines. However, Goal 3.C.1. of the FDCP reads “Promote, preserve and enhance the forested nature of the Foresthill Divide and rural atmosphere of the Foresthill community by requiring high aesthetic quality in all new development.” As discussed under Land Use and Population and Housing above, increasing the residential densities and increasing the area planned for development would conflict to some degree with this goal, as well as policies designed to preserve the natural terrain, ridgelines and hilltops, and rural atmosphere. However, the aesthetic standards and design criteria of the proposed Design Guidelines could still be applied to new

development under the Highest Density Alternative. Light and glare would potentially increase due to the greater number of structures.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The Highest Density Alternative would require a higher level of services and additional public facilities in comparison to the proposed FDCP. Significant impacts would be anticipated to occur for several services and facilities. The adequacy of the water supply to serve that level of development is unknown. Additional schools and school sites would be needed to serve the Plan area. Fire protection would need to be increased, including equipment and personnel (and possibly station expansion). At higher densities, use of individual wastewater disposal systems could become problematic and result in significant water quality impacts. Law enforcement, public utilities, and other public services would also be affected.

PARKS AND RECREATION

The Highest Density Alternative would result in a greater demand for parks and recreational facilities and programs. New residential development would be required to dedicate land or pay in-lieu fees for new park sites. The proposed FDCP requires new subdivisions to be included in a type of financing district to generate sufficient funds to operate and maintain new public park facilities, and recommends expanding the powers of the Foresthill P.U.D. or creating a local recreation district to provide public services, administer and generate funds for the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and recreational programs in the community. New development under the Highest Density Alternative would be subject to these requirements. Larger-scale new developments may also include private recreational facilities to serve residents.

NATURAL RESOURCES/CONSERVATION/OPEN SPACE

The proposed FDCP includes policies directed at protecting vegetation, wetland and riparian areas, fish and wildlife habitat, agricultural resources, forest resources, water resources, soils, areas of geologic hazards, open space and visual resources. However, with higher development densities and more areas planned for development, more open space will be converted to development, impacts on resources will be greater, and preservation of resources will be more difficult to attain.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Higher density development, and development of more areas, will increase the potential to disturb or destroy previously unidentified cultural resources in the Plan area.

AIR QUALITY

Increasing the population to be accommodated in the Plan area would result in additional emissions of criteria pollutants from both stationary and mobile sources (i.e., additional vehicle trips). This would increase the severity of air quality impacts in the Plan area.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Increasing the population to be accommodated in the Plan area would cause more roadway segments to exceed proposed Level of Service standards, and would create more internal inconsistencies (or require a change in the Level of Service standard.) It would represent a substantial increase in traffic on roadways which have significant constraints upon further expansion, especially Foresthill Road, the Foresthill bridge, and the I-80/Foresthill Road interchange.

NOISE

Due primarily to increased traffic on Plan area roadways, ambient noise levels would increase, especially in proximity to major roadways, and more people and residential uses would be exposed to noise levels that could exceed adopted standards. Traffic-related noise impacts would be potentially significant, but could normally be mitigated to a less than significant level on a project-by-project basis.

4.2.3 LOWEST DENSITY ALTERNATIVE

The following subjects have been analyzed in comparison to the existing site conditions and the proposed project.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

This alternative would accommodate a buildout population of 12,727 residents, compared to the FDCP buildout estimate of 18,963. The number of new housing units that would be accommodated would also be lower than what would be allowed by the FDCP. This would represent an increase in the number of people and housing units currently in the Plan area similar to the proposed FDCP.

LAND USE

In comparison to the proposed FDCP, densities in residential areas would be reduced in the Todd's Valley area, the Pomfret Estate ("Forest Ranch") property, and some properties along Foresthill Road between Todd's Valley and the Pomfret Estate property. Other planned land uses would be the same as the proposed FDCP. This alternative would result in a lower density of residential development, maintaining the rural, forested character in a manner similar to the proposed Plan. This alternative would represent a similar conversion of open space lands to rural or urbanized uses as the proposed FDCP.

COMMUNITY DESIGN

The elements of community design included in the proposed FDCP could be applied to the Lowest Density Alternative, including the Foresthill Community Design Guidelines. Goal 3.C.1. of the FDCP reads "Promote, preserve and enhance the forested nature of the Foresthill Divide and rural atmosphere of the Foresthill Community by requiring high aesthetic quality in all new

development.” Reducing the residential densities would be consistent with this goal, as well as policies designed to preserve the natural terrain, ridgelines and hilltops, and rural atmosphere. The aesthetic standards and design criteria of the proposed Design Guidelines would be applied to new development under the Lowest Density Alternative. Light and glare would slightly decrease due to the reduced number of structures.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The Lowest Density Alternative would result in a slightly reduced demand for services and need for additional public facilities in comparison to the proposed FDCP. The only public service for which a potentially significant impact has been identified for the FDCP is fire protection (since providing an increased level of service is outside the control of Placer County). For that reason, it would also be considered a potentially significant impact for the Lowest Density Alternative.

PARKS AND RECREATION

The Lowest Density Alternative would result in a slightly reduced demand for parks and recreational facilities and programs in comparison to the FDCP. New residential development would be required to dedicate land or pay in-lieu fees for new park sites. The proposed FDCP requires new subdivisions to be included in a type of financing district to generate sufficient funds to operate and maintain new public park facilities, and recommends expanding the powers of the Foresthill P.U.D. or creating a local recreation district to provide public services, administer and generate funds for the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and recreational programs in the community. New development under the Lowest Density Alternative would be subject to these requirements.

NATURAL RESOURCES/CONSERVATION/OPEN SPACE

The proposed FDCP includes policies directed at protecting vegetation, wetland and riparian areas, fish and wildlife habitat, agricultural resources, forest resources, water resources, soils, areas of geologic hazards, open space and visual resources. In comparison to the proposed FDCP, with lower development densities, a similar amount of open space will be converted to development, and impacts on resources, and opportunities to preserve resources, will be similar.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Lower density development, in comparison to the proposed FDCP, will reduce the potential to disturb or destroy previously unidentified cultural resources in the Plan area.

AIR QUALITY

Reducing the population to be accommodated in the Plan area would result in reduced emissions of criteria pollutants from both stationary and mobile sources (i.e., reduced vehicular emissions). This would reduce the severity of air quality impacts in the Plan area; however, because the Plan area does not currently meet State and federal standards for ozone and particulate matter, cumulative impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Reducing the population to be accommodated in the Plan area might result in segments of Foresthill Road meeting the proposed Level of Service standards without requiring mitigation. It would represent a slight decrease in traffic on roadways which have significant constraints upon further expansion, especially Foresthill Road, the Foresthill Bridge, and the I-80/Foresthill Road interchange.

NOISE

Due to slight reductions in traffic on Plan area roadways, ambient noise levels would slightly decrease, especially in proximity to major roadways. Fewer people and residential uses would be exposed to noise levels that could exceed adopted standards.

4.2.4 REDUCED DENSITY ALTERNATIVE

The following subjects have been analyzed in comparison to the existing site conditions and the proposed project.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

This alternative would accommodate a buildout population of 9,250 residents, compared to the FDCP buildout estimate of 18,963 and the existing estimated population of 5,702. The total number of housing units that would be accommodated would be 3,477, compared to 2,281 existing housing units and 7,128 new housing units that would be accommodated by the FDCP at buildout. This would represent an increase in the number of people and housing units currently in the Plan area, but would accommodate fewer people and housing units than the proposed FDCP, the Highest Density Alternative, or the Lowest Density Alternative.

LAND USE

In comparison to the proposed FDCP, residential densities would be reduced in all areas, with the exception of areas that are already subdivided for residential development. Higher density residential development (6 or 8 dwelling units/acre) would not be accommodated, and some areas proposed for residential development in the FDCP would instead be designated for non-residential uses to achieve the density reductions. Other planned land uses would be similarly reduced in area because the lower population would not support the amount of commercial, industrial and mixed-use development accommodated by the FDCP. This alternative would result in a lower density of residential development, maintaining to a greater degree than the FDCP and the Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives the rural, forested character of the Plan area. This alternative would reduce the conversion of open space lands to rural or urbanized uses in comparison to the proposed FDCP and the Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives.

COMMUNITY DESIGN

The elements of community design included in the proposed FDCP could be applied to the Reduced Density Alternative, including the Foresthill Community Design Guidelines. Goal 3.C.1. of the FDCP reads “Promote, preserve and enhance the forested nature of the Foresthill Divide and rural atmosphere of the Foresthill Community by requiring high aesthetic quality in all new development.” Reducing residential densities would be consistent with this goal, as well as policies designed to preserve the natural terrain, ridgelines and hilltops, and rural atmosphere. The aesthetic standards and design criteria of the proposed Design Guidelines would be applied to new development under the Reduced Density Alternative. Light and glare would decrease in comparison to the FDCP and the Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives due to the reduced number of structures.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The Reduced Density Alternative would result in a reduced demand for services and need for additional public facilities in comparison to the proposed FDCP and the Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives. The only public service for which a potentially significant impact has been identified for the FDCP is fire protection (since an impact has been identified and providing an increased level of service is outside the control of Placer County). For that reason, since development would still increase under the Reduced Density Alternative, it would also be considered a potentially significant impact for this alternative.

PARKS AND RECREATION

The Reduced Density Alternative would result in a reduced demand for parks and recreational facilities and programs in comparison to the FDCP and the Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives. New residential development would be required to dedicate land or pay in-lieu fees for new park sites. The proposed FDCP requires new subdivisions to be included in a type of financing district to generate sufficient funds to operate and maintain new public park facilities, and recommends expanding the powers of the Foresthill P.U.D. or creating a local recreation district to provide public services, administer and generate funds for the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and recreational programs in the community. New development under the Reduced Density Alternative would be subject to these requirements. However, the reduced number of housing units that would be developed would result in generation of less funding to operate and maintain park facilities.

NATURAL RESOURCES/CONSERVATION/OPEN SPACE

The proposed FDCP includes policies directed at protecting vegetation, wetland and riparian areas, fish and wildlife habitat, agricultural resources, forest resources, water resources, soils, areas of geologic hazards, open space and visual resources. In comparison to the proposed FDCP and the Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives, with lower development densities, a reduced amount of open space will be converted to development, and opportunities to preserve resources will be increased.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Lower density development, in comparison to the proposed FDCP and Highest and Lowest Density Alternatives, will reduce the potential to disturb or destroy previously unidentified cultural resources in the Plan area.

AIR QUALITY

Reducing the population to be accommodated in the Plan area would result in reduced emissions of criteria pollutants from both stationary and mobile sources (i.e., reduced vehicular emissions). This would reduce the severity of air quality impacts in the Plan area; however, because the Plan area does not currently meet State and federal standards for ozone and particulate matter, cumulative impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

As discussed in Chapter Three of this EIR, under the proposed FDCP the projected Level of Service on certain segments of Foresthill Road at FDCP buildout would exceed the Level of Service standard in the proposed Plan. Reducing the population to be accommodated in the Plan area would result in those roadway segments meeting the proposed Level of Service standards with less mitigation required. It would represent a decrease in traffic on roadways which have significant constraints upon further expansion, especially Foresthill Road, the Foresthill Bridge, and the I-80/Foresthill Road interchange.

NOISE

Due to reductions in traffic on Plan area roadways and reduced numbers of dwelling units adjacent to those roadways, ambient noise levels would decrease, especially in proximity to major roadways. Fewer people and residential uses would be exposed to noise levels that could exceed adopted standards.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines, a range of reasonable project alternatives has been evaluated to determine their comparative environmental superiority. The impacts of the proposed project that have been identified as significant, if not mitigated, include:

- Increased soil erosion and other soil-related hazards in the Plan area due to development in accordance with the proposed FDCP
- Adverse impacts on water quality in the Plan area and downstream due to wastewater generated by development in accordance with the proposed FDCP
- Water quality in the Plan area may be degraded following site development by the introduction of urban pollutants including vehicle oils and greases, heavy metals on roads, parking lots and driveways, fertilizers and pesticides used on site landscaping, and toxic

compounds released from auto maintenance areas. Construction during wet or dry weather will affect water quality with increased sedimentation, operation and maintenance of construction vehicles, and storage of materials that could release contamination to surface waters

- Adverse impacts on special-status avian species in the Plan area due to development in accordance with the proposed FDCP
- Increased traffic throughout the Community Plan area due to development in accordance with the FDCP
- Noise impacts due to increased roadway traffic
- Noise impacts due to the introduction of additional stationary noise sources in the Plan area
- Interior noise impacts for all sources within the Plan area
- Noise from construction-related activities in the Plan area may exceed adopted noise standards

Significant impacts that cannot be fully mitigated include:

- Loss of open space resulting from development in accordance with the FDCP
- Introduction of new sources of light and glare within the Plan area
- Provision of adequate fire protection services and facilities to serve the Plan area
- Conversion of timber lands to non-timber production use
- Alteration of views from scenic highways in the Plan area due to development in accordance with the proposed FDCP
- Adverse impacts on riparian habitat in the Plan area due to development in accordance with the proposed FDCP
- Adverse impacts on wildlife movement corridors/deer migration corridors in the Plan area due to development in accordance with the proposed FDCP
- New stationary and mobile sources of air pollutants caused by buildout of the proposed FDCP will result in increased emissions of ROG, NO_x, CO and PM₁₀
- Construction activities associated with development under the proposed FDCP will cause emissions of dust and contaminants from construction equipment exhaust that may contribute substantially to existing air quality violations or expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations

Accordingly, alternatives that reduce or avoid these impacts represent environmentally superior alternatives to the proposed project. As described at the beginning of this Chapter, if the environmentally superior alternative is the “no project” alternative, the EIR must also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the remaining alternatives.

Based upon the analysis contained and documented in Chapter Three of this EIR and the analysis presented above, the Reduced Density Alternative has been determined to be the environmentally superior alternative because it would have the fewest impacts on the existing environment. However, this alternative would not be consistent with the general goals and vision for the Community Plan area, because the reduced population would probably not support the mixed-use development and job-generating uses proposed in the FDCP. Both the “No Project” and “Highest Density” Alternatives would allow substantially greater densities and areas planned for development,