



COUNTY OF PLACER
Community Development Resource Agency

**ENVIRONMENTAL
COORDINATION
SERVICES**

John Marin, Agency Director

Gina Langford, Coordinator

DATE: June 15, 2007

TO: Interested Parties

SUBJECT: **Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for Hidden Falls Regional Park (PEIR T20070444)**

REVIEW PERIOD: **June 15, 2007 – July 16, 2007**

Placer County will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project identified above in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Section 15082. The purpose of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to provide responsible agencies and interested persons with sufficient information in order to make meaningful responses as to the scope and content of the EIR. Your timely comments will ensure an appropriate level of environmental review for the project.

Project Description/Location: Hidden Falls Regional Park is approximately 1,182 acres in the Sierra Nevada foothills, which consists of the properties formerly known as Spears Ranch (961 acres) and Didion Ranch (221 acres). The project site is situated along Coon Creek and is south of the Bear River. Garden Bar Road is located to the west; Mt. Vernon and Mt. Pleasant Roads are to the south; and Bell and Hubbard Roads are to the east.

For more information regarding the project, please contact Andy Fischer, Senior Planner, (530)889-6819 or email: afisher@placer.ca.gov

A copy of the 10-page NOP is available for review at the Auburn Library, Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, and County website:

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/Home/CommunityDevelopment/EnvCoordSvcs/EnvDocs/EIR.aspx>

Scoping Meeting: The Lead Agency will hold a public Scoping Meeting to receive oral comments on Thursday, June 28, 2007, 6:30 pm in the Planning Commission Hearing Room, Community Development Resource Center, located at 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn.

NOP Comment Period: Written comments should be submitted at the earliest possible date, but not later than 5:00 pm on July 16, 2007 to Maywan Krach, Environmental Coordination Services, Community Development Resource Agency, 3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190, Auburn, CA 95603, (530)745-3132, fax (530)745-3003, or cdraecs@placer.ca.gov

PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Placer County, as the Lead Agency, will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed Hidden Falls Regional Park Project (proposed project). In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, Placer County has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP), which is intended 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.

Once a decision is made to prepare an EIR, the lead agency must prepare a NOP to inform all responsible and trustee agencies (agencies) that an EIR will be prepared (CEQA Guidelines Section 15082). 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.

The purpose of this notice is twofold:

- (1) to solicit input, by July 16, 2007, from interested individuals, groups, and agencies about the desired content and scope of the draft EIR to be prepared by Placer County for the proposed project, and
- (2) to announce a public scoping meeting on the proposed project, to be held at 6:30 p.m. on June 28, 2007, at the Planning Commission Hearing Room, Community Development Resource Center, located at 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn.

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 Hidden Falls Regional Park 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 between North Auburn and the City of Lincoln in Placer County, approximately 40 miles northeast of Sacramento. Hidden Falls Regional Park is approximately 1,182 acres in the Sierra Nevada foothills, which consists of the properties formerly known as Spears Ranch (961 acres) and Didion Ranch (221 acres) (Exhibits 1 and 2). The project site is situated along Coon Creek and is south of the Bear River. Garden Bar Road is located to the west; Mt. Vernon and Mt. Pleasant Roads are to the south; and Bell and Hubbard Roads are to the east.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

On December 23, 2003, Placer County acquired the 961-acre Spears Ranch, and on November 5, 2004, Placer County acquired the 221-acre Didion Ranch through the Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program (Placer Legacy) for park and open space purposes. Placer Legacy was created in 2000 to implement the goals and policies of the Placer County General Plan and to allow the community to retain its unique natural heritage, minimize conflicts between conservation and economic development, and enhance the prosperity of current and future residents. In September 2004, a mitigated negative declaration was adopted for the Didion Ranch portion of the park; therefore, the environmental review process has been completed for the Didion Ranch site. Thus, this EIR will focus on the Spears Ranch (961 acres) portion of the park.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

The proposed project would include many different features and uses of the proposed park. Specific features and uses that are being considered for the proposed park are as follows:

TRAIL SYSTEM / MISCELLANEOUS PASSIVE RECREATION FACILITIES

- ▶ approximately 12 miles of new unpaved trails in addition to 10 miles of existing ranch roads for hikers, bikers, and equestrians, including bridge crossings over Coon Creek, Deadman Creek, and ephemerals to support the trail network and connections to the existing trail system within the Didion Ranch portion of the park (Exhibit 3);
- ▶ trail/bridge connections to other public trails in proximity to the Hidden Falls Regional Park Property (in addition to the trail network constructed on site);
- ▶ no more than two permanent restroom facilities and associated septic/water systems in addition to existing facilities and septic systems;
- ▶ portable and/or pit type restroom facilities as required to accommodate authorized uses;
- ▶ emergency access bridge over Coon Creek;
- ▶ fire suppression amenities;
- ▶ equestrian facilities;
- ▶ picnic facilities including covered pavilions;
- ▶ benches and rest areas throughout the park;
- ▶ hunting as a management tool;
- ▶ improvements to facilitate public access to viewing areas;
- ▶ fitness/ropes course(s);
- ▶ disc golf;
- ▶ drinking fountains;
- ▶ holding organized events;
- ▶ interpretive programs including signage, displays, and/or guided tours; and
- ▶ other facilities and activities consistent with Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Preservation Program goals and objectives.

VEHICLE ACCESS AND PARKING

A traffic study is required to determine the level of vehicle access that may be permitted to the project site via Garden Bar Road. Depending on the outcome of the study, any or all of the following public access options may be incorporated into the proposed project:

- ▶ public access to the site through the 221-acre site via the trail system currently existing on the Didion Ranch portion of the park; only maintenance/emergency vehicles would be allowed to enter the site beyond the existing parking lot on the 221-acre site (While it is anticipated that some level of public vehicle access to the westerly portion of the site via Garden Bar Road will be necessary to accommodate expected use demand, public vehicle access may be limited to the facilities at the 221 acre site during initial phases of development of the westerly 961 acres of the park);
- ▶ a parking/staging/drop-off area along Garden Bar Road near the existing service entrance road; pedestrian/equestrian access to the site would be permitted along the existing service road/easement;
- ▶ a parking/staging area on-site near the westerly property boundary with associated access road from Garden Bar Road; vehicle traffic would be allowed on-site, but regulated per the findings of the traffic study.

In addition, the following options are being considered for parking:

- ▶ a surfaced parking lot to accommodate anticipated uses and a gravel equestrian parking area;
- ▶ a gravel overflow parking area; and
- ▶ a parking lot to accommodate a nature/conference center.

SIGNAGE / INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

- ▶ directional signage would be placed along primary public access routes from both Auburn and Lincoln;
- ▶ directional and informational signage located at strategic locations throughout the Park; and
- ▶ a kiosk would be placed at each parking/staging area in addition to interpretive and directional signage and/or audio-visual displays at key points throughout the property.

EMERGENCY FACILITIES / VEHICLE ACCESS

- ▶ an emergency access bridge capable of supporting fire fighting equipment will be constructed over Coon Creek;
- ▶ existing low flow crossings along ranch roads would be improved and maintained across Coon Creek;
- ▶ a fuel load reduction/fire prevention plan would be prepared and implemented for the site; and
- ▶ a water storage tank/pond and hydrant assembly.

USE OF EXISTING RANCH HOUSE / EVENTS

- ▶ A variety of renovation and use options will be evaluated for the existing primary ranch house. Uses under consideration include conference facility, nature center, event facility, environmental education camp, and others.
- ▶ Group events such as cross country track meets, weddings, conferences, and educational field trips/camps will be evaluated in conjunction with the traffic study. The study will evaluate and define group events in the following categories:
 1. Group events that may be conducted as a regular use.
 2. Group events that should be regulated by separate event permit.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES / USES

Under the direction of the Placer County Department of Facility Services, any or all of the following may be evaluated:

- ▶ educational /agricultural / scouting camps may be conducted on-site;
- ▶ academic agricultural / ecological research projects;
- ▶ multi-day or overnight educational / agricultural / scouting camps may be conducted on-site subject to agreement and conditions determined by the County on a case-by-case basis;
- ▶ access for school programs such as cross-country training and track meets, and educational field trips that are consistent with passive recreation and education would be permitted; potential uses include renovation of the existing ranch house as a conference/nature center, caretaker residence, wedding facility, or camp facility; and
- ▶ the two existing site buildings to the southeast of the ranch house will be re-constructed for educational, maintenance, caretaker, or other uses.

MAINTENANCE FACILITIES

- ▶ maintenance yard – to be located in proximity to the ranch house and staging area. Yard would be used to store and maintain equipment including tractors, mowers, ATVs, and attachments;
- ▶ maintenance shop/barn – would be a new building or renovation of one or more of the existing buildings;
- ▶ an enclosed dumpster;
- ▶ maintenance yard lighting; and
- ▶ perimeter and cross fencing will have maintained access for maintenance vehicles.

FISHING / WILDLIFE / HABITAT RESTORATION

- ▶ designated fishing locations may be developed in coordination with Department of Fish and Game;
- ▶ fish passage amenities;
- ▶ fishing ponds may be developed in conjunction with the fuel load reduction/grazing plans and in coordination with Department of Fish and Game; and
- ▶ habitat restoration projects to include oak woodland, grassland, and riparian restoration/habitat enhancement.

FENCING

- ▶ perimeter fencing around the property would be maintained; and
- ▶ cross fencing and riparian/sensitive area exclusionary fencing may be constructed where appropriate throughout the property.

AGRICULTURE

Under the direction of the Placer County Department of Facility Services, any or all of the following may be conducted:

- ▶ continued agricultural activities, including grazing; and
- ▶ farm management practices (fence maintenance, irrigated pasture expansion, etc.);
- ▶ agricultural research projects by qualified institutions;
- ▶ agricultural education programs; and
- ▶ potential leases for grazing and/or growing.

FILM PRODUCTION/THEATRE

- ▶ film and theatre productions subject to approval by Placer County.

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 several project alternatives, at a varying level of detail, including the “No Project” Alternative.

SCOPING

Scoping is an initial, essential, and critically 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.

As specified by the CEQA Guidelines, the NOP will be circulated for a 30-day review period. The 30-day NOP review and comment period begins **June 15, 2007** and ends **July 16, 2007**. 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:

Maywan Krach
Placer County Community Development Resource Agency
3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190
Auburn, CA 95603
fax 530-745-3003
cdraecs@placer.ca.gov

SCOPING MEETING

In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21083.9, notice is hereby given that Placer County will conduct a scoping meeting on June 28, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at the Planning Commission Hearing Room, Community Development Resource Center, located at 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn, California to accept oral comments on the environmental issues that should be addressed in the EIR.

AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

PLACER COUNTY

Placer County will serve as the lead agency for CEQA compliance and will coordinate with CEQA responsible and trustee agencies. As lead agency under CEQA, Placer County will be primarily 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.

REQUIRED APPROVALS AND PERMITS

Permits and approvals would be required from the following federal, state, and local agencies for the construction of the proposed project:

- ▶ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- ▶ Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
- ▶ California Department of Fish and Game (DFG)
- ▶ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- ▶ County Community Development Resource Agency (CDRA) (Minor Use Permit)
- ▶ County Department of Public Works (encroachment permit for Garden Bar Road)
- ▶ County Environmental Health Division (sewage system evaluation and water system permit)

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

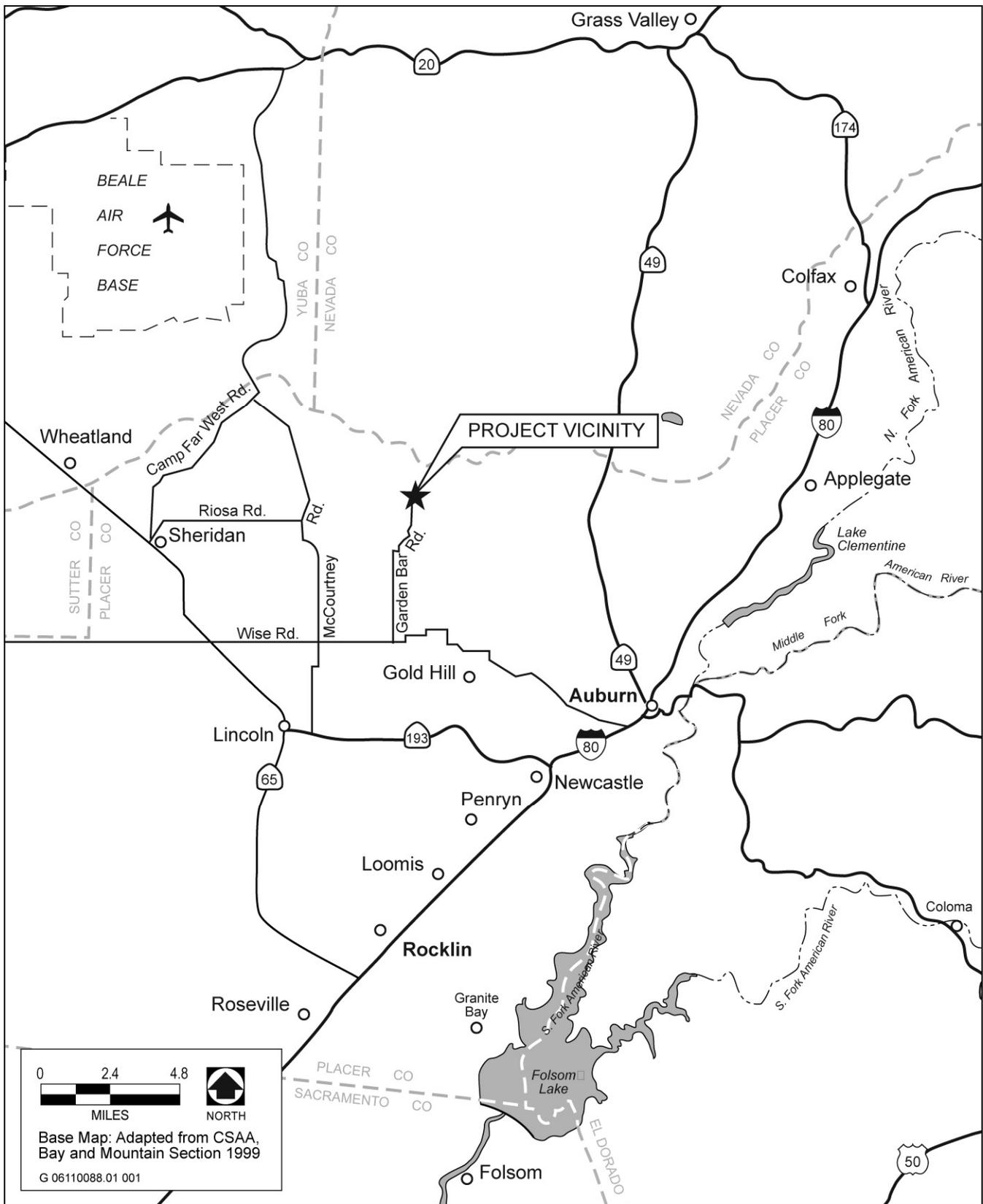
The EIR will analyze a broad range of environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed project. Based on the environmental analysis previously conducted in Placer County's Initial Study (IS), Placer County has determined that the proposed project has the potential to result in environmental impacts on the following resources:

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

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:

- ▶ Energy and Mineral Resources
- ▶ Population and Housing

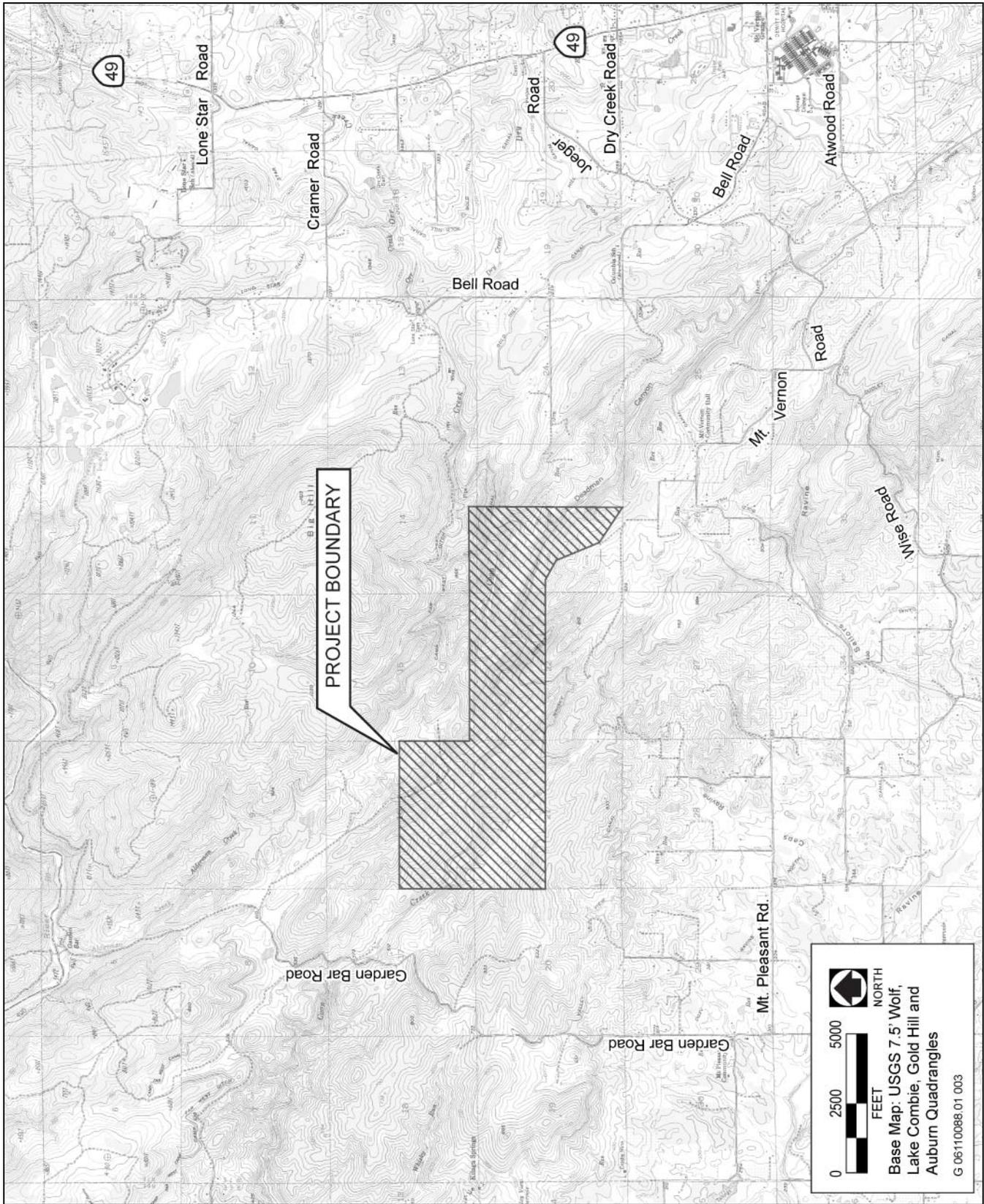
Your views and comments on how the project may affect the environment are welcomed. Please contact Andy Fisher if you have any questions about the environmental review process for the proposed Hidden Falls Regional Park Project.



Source: EDAW 2006

Project Vicinity Map

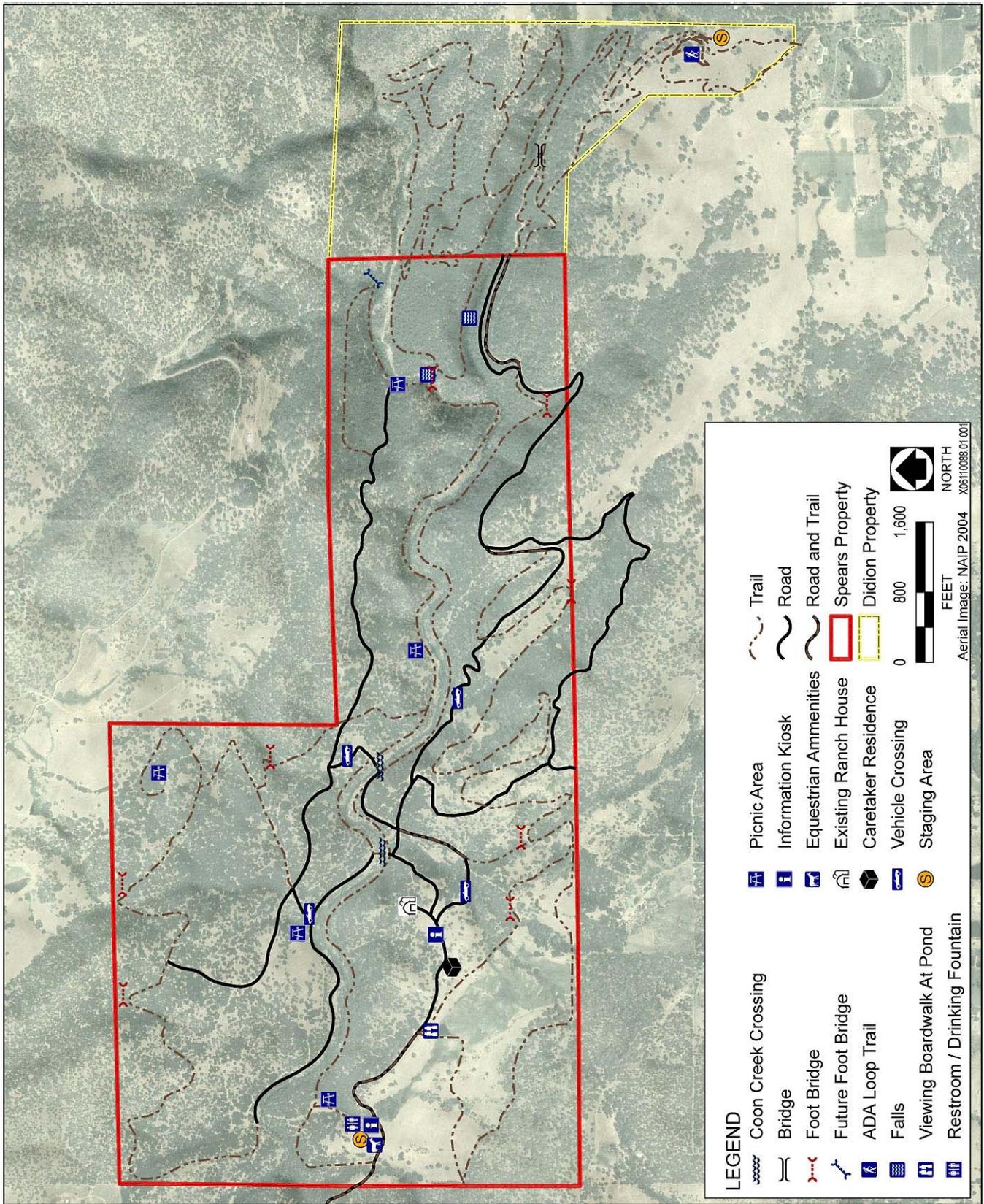
Exhibit 1



Source: EDAW 2007

Project Location Map

Exhibit 2



Source: Placer County 2006

Proposed Hidden Falls Project Features

Exhibit 3