

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Placer County (County), as Lead Agency, released the draft subsequent environmental impact report (Draft SEIR) for the Hidden Falls Regional Park Trails Expansion Project (proposed project) to the general public and public agencies on February 20, 2020. The Draft SEIR contains an environmental analysis of potentially significant effects of implementing the proposed project. Together, the Draft SEIR and this Final SEIR, which includes the responses to comments received on the Draft SEIR, constitute the SEIR for the Hidden Falls Regional Park Trails Expansion Project.

1.1 BACKGROUND

On January 31, 2017 the County issued a notice of preparation (NOP) to inform agencies and the public of its intention to prepare a SEIR covering the Hidden Falls Regional Park (HFRP) Trails Expansion and request for a modified conditional use permit (CUP), which would encompass both the existing HFRP and Trails Expansion area. A public scoping meeting was held on February 21, 2017 to receive comments on the project. A revised NOP was subsequently issued on June 4, 2018 to account for modifications to the project description. The County held a second public scoping and informational meeting on June 14, 2018, in Auburn, California. A scoping report including the NOPs, summaries of oral and written comment received, and copies of all written comments received from both public scoping processes are included in Appendix A of the Draft SEIR.

The Draft SEIR (State Clearinghouse Number 2007062084) was received by the State Clearinghouse and circulated for a 60-day public review period beginning on February 20, 2020. Due to logistical review concerns and potential difficulties reaching County staff associated with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health protection measures, the comment period was extended from 60 days to 90 days, concluding on May 20, 2020. The Draft SEIR and a Notice of Availability for the Draft SEIR were also published on the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency website. Printed copies of the Draft SEIR were made available for review at the Auburn Library (350 Nevada Street, Auburn), the Lincoln Library (485 Twelve Bridges Drive, Lincoln), the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency offices in Auburn (3091 County Center Drive, Auburn), and the County Clerk's Office (2954 Richardson Drive, Auburn). However, these library copies could not be accessed by the public after mid-March, when Placer County issued a Shelter in Place order due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, and public places, including public libraries, were closed to protect public health. A public meeting was held on May 14, 2020 via teleconferencing.¹ A transcript of the public meeting was prepared and is included in this Final SEIR.

The Draft SEIR identifies the proposed project's potential environmental impacts and the mitigation measures that would be required to be implemented. The following environmental analysis chapters are contained in the Draft SEIR:

- ▶ Land Use and Agricultural Resources;
- ▶ Soils, Geology, Seismicity, and Mineral Resources;
- ▶ Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources;
- ▶ Visual Resources

¹ Public meetings that occur through virtual means are held in compliance with both the Ralph M. Brown Act and the Governor's Executive Orders, specifically Executive Orders N-29-20 and N-35-20. Those orders modified Brown Act requirements to allow public meetings to occur through teleconferencing means with limited person-to-person physical contact.

- ▶ Transportation and Circulation;
- ▶ Air Quality;
- ▶ Noise;
- ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality;
- ▶ Wildlife;
- ▶ Public Services and Utilities;
- ▶ Hazards and Hazardous Materials;
- ▶ Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Energy;
- ▶ Wildfire;
- ▶ Alternatives; and
- ▶ Other California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Sections.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE FINAL SEIR

This Final SEIR allows the public and the County an opportunity to review the responses to comments, any resulting revisions to the Draft SEIR, and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) prepared for the project. The Final SEIR serves as the environmental document to inform the Municipal Advisory Councils, Parks Commission and Planning Commission on their recommendations and the County Board of Supervisors' consideration of the proposed project.

As required by Section 15090(a)(1)-(3) of the CEQA Guidelines, a lead agency, in certifying a Final EIR, must make the following three determinations:

1. The Final EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA.
2. The Final EIR was presented to the decision-making body of the lead agency, and the decision-making body reviewed and considered the information in the Final EIR prior to approving the project.
3. The Final EIR reflects the lead agency's independent judgment and analysis.

As required by Section 15091 of the CEQA Guidelines, no public agency shall approve or carry out a project for which an EIR has been certified that identifies one or more significant environmental effects of the project unless the public agency makes one or more written findings (Findings of Fact) for each of those significant effects, accompanied by a brief explanation of the rationale for each finding supported by substantial evidence in the record. The possible findings are:

1. Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the Final EIR.
2. Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
3. Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the Final EIR.

1.3 RECENT CASE LAW

Following the release of the Draft EIR, the Third Appellate District court published an opinion (December 18, 2019) regarding *Citizens for Positive Growth & Preservation v. City of Sacramento* (2019). Among other points, Citizens challenged the City of Sacramento’s adoption of its General Plan based on its use of the level of service (LOS) metric instead of the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) metric in the transportation impacts section. In general, the court ruled that although lead agencies are not yet required to analyze transportation impacts under the VMT metric, they can no longer draw a transportation impact significance conclusion using a metric that measures traffic congestion (e.g., LOS).

In response to this case, the County made modifications to the Transportation and Circulation section of the Draft SEIR prior to publication and included an impact discussion of VMT in the Draft SEIR, in preparation for a statewide requirement to do so which began on July 1, 2020, per Section 15064.3.

1.4 ORGANIZATION OF THE FINAL SEIR

The Final SEIR is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1, “Introduction,” provides a brief overview of the public review process for the Draft SEIR and describes the organization of the Final SEIR.

Chapter 2, “Responses to Comments,” includes five Master Responses that address common themes or concerns repeated in the comment letters received on the Draft SEIR. Chapter 2 then presents written and verbal comments received on the Draft SEIR and responses to these comments (as required by the CEQA Guidelines Section 15132). Placer County received two State agency comment letters, two tribal comment letters, 18 organizational comment letters, and 475 individual comment letters during the public comment period on the Draft SEIR for the proposed project. Each comment letter received has been numbered at the top and bracketed to indicate how the letter has been divided into individual comments. Each comment is given a number with the letter number appearing first, followed by the comment number. An “I” is used to denote a comment from an individual, while “S” is used for State Agencies, “T” is used for comment letters received from tribes, and “O” for comment letters from organizations. For example, the first comment from an Individual in Letter 1 would have the following format: I1-1. The response to each comment will reference the comment number. Chapter 2 also includes the transcript from the public meeting, identified as Letter I476, with comments coded in the same fashion, and responses to comments provided.² Five individual comment letters were received after the close of the public comment period and are identified as Letters I477 to I481.

Chapter 3, “Revisions to the Draft SEIR Text,” summarizes minor changes made to the Draft SEIR text since its release. The text deletions are shown in strikeout (~~strikeout~~) and additions are shown in double underline (underline).

Chapter 4, “Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program,” lists each of the impacts identified in the SEIR, the associated mitigation measure number and description, the implementation/monitoring responsibility, implementation timing/schedule, and responsible party for verification of compliance. CEQA Guidelines, Section

² Where a commenter at the public meeting provided verbal comments that were similar to their submitted comment letter, the commenter is referred to the responses to their written comment letter.

15097, requires lead agencies to adopt a program for monitoring the mitigation measures required to avoid the significant environmental impacts of a project. The intent of the MMRP is to ensure implementation of the mitigation measures identified within the SEIR for the proposed project.