

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is a draft environmental impact report (EIR) on the proposed Hidden Falls Regional Park Project (proposed project, or project). It has been prepared by the Placer County (County) Department of Facility Services in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 15000 et seq.). As specified in Section 15367 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the public agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project is the lead agency for CEQA compliance. The County is the lead agency under CEQA, because it has the principal responsibility for approving and carrying out the project and is the primary source of funding and grant recipient for funding of the proposed project. The County Planning Commission is responsible for certifying and approving the EIR for the proposed project. This document has been prepared in accordance with the County Planning Department's format for EIRs (Placer County 2006).

1.1 TYPE AND PURPOSE OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

1.1.1 TYPE OF EIR

In accordance with Section 15161 of the State CEQA Guidelines, this document is a project EIR that examines the environmental impacts of a specific proposed project. As a project EIR, this document examines the potential environmental effects of all phases of the project: planning, construction, and operation.

1.1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

A state or local public agency must comply with CEQA when it undertakes an activity that may cause a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect change in the environment. The County has prepared this EIR to meet the requirements of CEQA. An EIR is an informational document used to inform agency decision makers and the general public of any significant environmental effects of a project, identify feasible ways to mitigate the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project that can reduce environmental impacts. As required by CEQA, the County will consider the information presented in the EIR when determining whether to approve the proposed project.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE EIR AND EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

1.2.1 SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, a lead agency shall focus an EIR's discussion on significant environmental effects and may limit discussion on other effects to brief explanations about why they are not significant (PRC Section 21002.1, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15143). Furthermore, indication of the manner in which significant impacts can be feasibly mitigated or avoided is included among the purposes of an EIR. A determination of which impacts would be potentially significant was made for this project based on review of the information presented in the 2005 initial study prepared for the project, comments received as part of the public review process for the project, and additional research and analysis of relevant project data by environmental professionals.

SCOPE OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This EIR presents an analysis of a range of environmental impact topics associated with implementation of the proposed project. The County has determined that the proposed project has the potential to result in environmental impacts on the following resources, which are addressed in detail in this EIR:

- ▶ Land Use and Agricultural Resources (Chapter 4.0)
- ▶ Soils, Geology, and Seismicity (Chapter 5.0)
- ▶ Cultural Resources (Chapter 6.0)
- ▶ Visual Resources (Chapter 7.0)
- ▶ Transportation and Circulation (Chapter 8.0)
- ▶ Air Quality (Chapter 9.0)
- ▶ Noise (Chapter 10.0)
- ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality (Chapter 11.0)
- ▶ Biological Resources (Chapter 12.0)
- ▶ Public Services and Utilities (Chapter 13.0)
- ▶ Hazardous Materials and Hazards (Chapter 14.0)

ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This EIR is organized as follows:

Chapter 1.0, “Introduction,” summarizes the purpose, need, objectives, and scope of the proposed project; describes the purpose of the EIR and provides an overview of the environmental review process for the project; discusses agency roles and authorities; and provides details on project scoping.

Chapter 2.0, “Summary,” summarizes the conclusions of the environmental analysis.

Chapter 3.0, “Project Description,” describes the project’s location; discusses the project’s background, history, and objectives; and explains the components and features of the proposed project, including construction techniques and schedule.

Chapter 4.0, “Land Use and Agricultural Resources,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on land use, planning, and agricultural resources.

Chapter 5.0, “Soils, Geology, and Seismicity,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on soils, geology, and seismicity and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 6.0, “Cultural Resources,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on cultural resources and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 7.0, “Visual Resources,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on aesthetics and visual resources and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 8.0, “Transportation and Circulation,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on traffic and transportation and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 9.0, “Air Quality,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on air quality and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 10.0, “Noise,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project related to noise and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 11.0, “Hydrology and Water Quality,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on hydrology and water quality and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 12.0, “Biological Resources,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on biological resources and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 13.0, “Public Services and Utilities,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on public services and utilities and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 14.0, “Hazardous Materials and Hazards,” describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts of the proposed project on hazardous materials and hazards and provides mitigation measures for potentially significant effects.

Chapter 15.0, “Other CEQA Sections,” describes the alternatives considered and eliminated for the proposed project; alternatives selected for further analysis, and the evaluation of the environmental effects of those alternatives; significant unavoidable effects on the environment; irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources; growth-inducing effects; and cumulative impacts.

Chapter 16.0, “Report Preparers,” lists individuals who participated in the preparation of this EIR, presented according to organization and agency.

Chapter 17.0, “References and Persons Consulted,” lists the sources of information cited throughout this EIR.

1.2.2 EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

Based on preliminary environmental review of the project, it was determined that the proposed project would not result in significant impacts in three resource areas. Therefore, the following resource areas do not require further analysis in this EIR:

- ▶ Population, Employment, and Housing
- ▶ Mineral Resources
- ▶ Recreation

These resource areas are described briefly below.

POPULATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND HOUSING

The proposed project would not involve the construction of new homes or businesses or the extension of new roads or infrastructure serving residential or job-forming uses. It would not involve the displacement of any existing housing, including affordable housing. The proposed project would not result in the disruption or division of an established community, including low-income or minority communities. Implementation of the proposed project would occur in phases, and work would be performed by one or more crews from the California Conservation Corps, licensed contractors, volunteers, and/or County staff. These activities would generate short-term employment opportunities; however, the work would be temporary and occur over several years, with certain activities starting and stopping for shorter durations within that time period. Because of the limited number and type of jobs that would be generated and the temporary nature of those jobs, the proposed project would have very little effect on employment in the region. Therefore, the proposed project would have little to no effect on population, employment, or housing. These topics will not be discussed further in this EIR.

MINERAL RESOURCES

The proposed project would not result in the loss of any known mineral resources, nor would it impede or interfere with the establishment or continuation of existing mineral extraction operations, and the project area is not delineated as a locally important mineral recovery site. It would not result in the loss of available known

mineral resources that would be of value to the region or residents of the state. Given these findings, implementation of the proposed project would have no effect with regard to mineral resources; therefore, mineral resources will not be discussed further in this EIR.

RECREATION

The proposed project would provide more opportunities for recreation within the county. The majority of the project area is not currently used for recreation, and the only existing recreational use in the project vicinity is the Didion Ranch portion of Hidden Falls Regional Park (Park). The proposed facilities would connect to the Didion Ranch portion of the Park once completed and, therefore, would provide a larger trail system than currently exists. Because the proposed project involves construction of regional-park facilities, it would not cause an increase in use of any existing neighborhood or regional parks, and it has the potential to alleviate overuse of other parks in the county. The environmental effects of constructing the recreational facilities associated with the proposed project are the subject of this EIR. Additionally, the proposed project would not require the construction or expansion of other recreational facilities not discussed in this EIR. Therefore, the proposed project would have a beneficial effect on recreational opportunities within the county and create no adverse effects on other recreation resources. Given these factors, recreation will not be discussed further in this EIR.

1.3 DEFINITION OF BASELINE

According to Section 15125 of the State CEQA Guidelines, baseline conditions are normally defined as the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project as they exist at the time that the notice of preparation (NOP) is published. Therefore, for the purposes of this document the baseline conditions are defined as the conditions that existed in the project vicinity as of June 2007. This baseline condition was used as the basis for determining the level of significance of impacts of the proposed project.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Placer County's CEQA checklist and the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines were the primary sources of environmental questions considered in developing significance criteria for this EIR. Significance criteria for each resource area are listed under the impacts heading in each chapter (Chapters 4.0 through 14.0).

1.5 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

1.5.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The entire Hidden Falls Regional Park, when completed, would include two adjoining properties, Spears Ranch and Didion Ranch. Together, these two adjoining parcels would make up the 1,200-acre Park. On December 23, 2003, Placer County acquired the 979-acre¹ Spears Ranch, and on November 5, 2004, the County acquired the 221-acre Didion Ranch through the Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program (Placer Legacy Program) for park and open space purposes. The Placer Legacy Program was created in 2000 to implement the open space and natural resource goals and policies of the *Placer County General Plan* (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.

The Didion Ranch portion of the Park was opened to the public in October 2006 and includes approximately 7 miles of natural surface trails available for non motorized multiple-use, a concrete handicapped accessible trail, a paved access road via Mears Drive, a 50-stall paved parking lot, gravel equestrian parking area, restroom, picnic

¹ The acreage for Spears Ranch has been updated from 961 acres to 979 acres based on more accurate assessor's parcel information. The project boundary has not been modified.

areas, 12,000-gallon emergency water storage tank and hydrant, helistop, informational kiosks, and directional signage.

The Placer Legacy Program and all associated actions operate under the following guidelines:

- ▶ All actions are voluntary; only willing buyers and willing sellers participate.
- ▶ The Placer Legacy Program is based on the existing General Plan and community plans and therefore does not require land-use or zoning changes.
- ▶ The program is non-regulatory; no new regulations will be adopted to meet the objectives of the program.

Presently, a number of ongoing land management and maintenance activities are being performed throughout the Hidden Falls property including establishment of shaded fuel breaks, perimeter access clearing, ranch road maintenance and stabilization, and cattle management by the former owner of the Spears Ranch.

The proposed trail system on the Spears Ranch portion of the Park is based, in part, on input from the Hidden Falls Trail Forum. Members of the Trail Forum and their affiliations are described below in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Hidden Falls Trail Forum Members and Affiliations	
Name	Affiliation
Kathy Dombrowski	Loomis Basin Horseman’s Association
Pat Gibbs	Loomis Basin Horseman’s Association
Jim Haagen-Smit	IMBA/FATRAC
Kathy Haagen-Smit	IMBA/FATRAC
Doug Houston	IMBA/FATRAC
Jim Howard	California Conservation Corps/High School Cross Country Coach
Janet Peterson	Action Coalition for Equestrians
Jessica Pierce	Placer Land Trust
Clark Smith	Sun City Lincoln Hills Hiking Club
Jim Crowfoot	Sun City Lincoln Hills Hiking Club
Phil Hendricks	EDAW Trail Specialist
Sandy Spurgeon	Placer County Department of Facility Services Parks and Grounds Division
Andy Fisher	Placer County Department of Facility Services Parks and Grounds Division
Source: Placer County 2008	

1.5.2 HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND AREAS OF CONTROVERSY

In September 2004, a mitigated negative declaration was adopted for the Didion Ranch portion of the Park to satisfy the requirements of CEQA. Therefore, existing uses on the Didion Ranch portion of the Park are not included as part of the proposed project in this EIR. However, because expansion of the Didion Ranch parking area and relocation of the existing helistop are modifications to existing uses within the Park, they will be covered in this EIR. In 2006, the County initiated the environmental review process for the proposed project and prepared a preliminary initial study.

To further evaluate potential significant environmental effects associated with the proposed project, the County decided to prepare an EIR for the project pursuant to CEQA. The County issued the NOP on June 16, 2007, to inform public agencies and the general public of its intention to prepare an EIR on the proposed project. The NOP included a brief project description, a summary of the scoping and public-review process, and an outline of the probable environmental impacts of the proposed project. The NOP was mailed to 613 property owners in the vicinity of the Park. The County held a public scoping and informational meeting on June 28, 2007, in Auburn, California. The comments presented at the meeting were used by the County in determining the scope and content of this EIR. Appendix A of this EIR contains a copy of the NOP.

COMMENTS AND AREAS OF CONTROVERSY

The following list presents the main topics of concern raised during the NOP scoping process and the chapters of this EIR in which these issues are addressed:

- ▶ Traffic and safety along Garden Bar Road (Chapter 8.0)
- ▶ Increased risk of wildfire (Chapter 14.0)
- ▶ Public safety related to hunting (Chapter 14.0)

As provided in law, CEQA analyses focus on the physical environmental effects of a project, not the social or economic effects, unless the social and economic effects lead indirectly to a physical change in the environment (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064[e]). The analyses included in Chapters 4.0 through 14.0 of this EIR address both direct and indirect effects related to the potential physical effects of the project. Comments that address management issues (e.g., trespassing, illegal activity) are discussed in Chapter 3.0, "Project Description."

In addition to the CEQA scoping process, County staff presented information on the proposed project and received comments at 13 Municipal Advisory Council meetings throughout western Placer County in the summer and fall of 2007. The proposed project was generally well received by the Municipal Advisory Council members with questions predominantly concerning the timing of Park availability to the public and the nature of amenities to serve respective user groups. Questions and comments at the Rural Lincoln Municipal Advisory Council included concerns similar to those expressed during the CEQA scoping process.

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

This EIR uses several standard terms as follows:

- ▶ *Reservation-based Event* is an organized function consistent with passive recreation and/or educational purposes conducted in the Park involving fewer than 200 people on-site at a given time, not including regular use of the Park. Reservation-based events would be regulated by the Placer County Parks Division Reservation System. Reservation-based events are also differentiated from daily use and would be held by groups applying for a reserved portion of the Park. The County would provide 2 weeks notification to CalFire of any events that would have greater than 30 vehicles and/or between 100 and 200 participants. Daily use groups not requesting reserved portions of the Park would not be considered events. The number of participants would, however, be restricted as a result of parking limitations.
- ▶ *Large event* is an organized function conducted within the Park involving more than 200 people on-site at any given time, not including regular use of the Park. Size, timing, duration, and other variables related to these events are not known at this time, therefore, consistent with other County Park operations, these would be required to obtain a Temporary Event Permit from the County and would undergo separate environmental review prior to authorization of the large event. Parking would also be a limiting factor for large events.
- ▶ *Didion Ranch parking area expansion* includes expansion of the existing parking area on the Didion Ranch portion of the Park from 55 parking spaces (i.e., 50 for cars, five for trucks and trailers) to 82 (i.e., up to 25

additional paved stalls and 12 additional truck and trailer spaces), and relocation of the existing helistop adjacent to the parking area immediately south of the existing helistop.

- ▶ *Proposed project* is the set of actions proposed to be carried out in Hidden Falls Regional Park Project, which would involve improvement of access, the Didion Ranch parking area expansion, construction and maintenance of multiple-use, natural-surface trails, and implementation of other recreational facilities within the Spears Ranch portion of Hidden Falls Regional Park.
- ▶ *Park* is Hidden Falls Regional Park (Spears Ranch and Didion Ranch).
- ▶ *Project area* is the 979-acre Spears Ranch portion of the Park, Garden Bar Road from Mt. Pleasant Road to the Park entrance, and the parking area in the Didion Ranch portion of the Park.
- ▶ *No impact* means no change from existing conditions.
- ▶ *Less-than-significant impact* means no substantial adverse change in the physical environment. (No mitigation measures are needed.)
- ▶ *Potentially significant impact* means a potential effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the environment. (Mitigation is recommended, because potentially significant impacts are treated in the same way as significant impacts in the CEQA process.)
- ▶ *Significant impact* means a substantial adverse change in the physical environment. (Consideration of feasible mitigation is required.)
- ▶ *Significant and unavoidable impact* means a substantial adverse change in the physical environment that cannot feasibly be avoided, even with the implementation of all feasible mitigation.

1.7 PROJECT REVIEW AND CEQA PROCESS

1.7.1 AGENCY REVIEW AND CEQA PROCESS

This EIR will be used by the County and other agencies to fulfill the requirements of CEQA. It will also be used as an informational document by other federal, state, and local agencies that may have a direct interest in the proposed project. The County has the principal responsibility for approving and carrying out the project and for ensuring that the requirements of CEQA have been met; therefore, it is the lead agency under CEQA. The County is also the agency with the first discretionary action of the proposed project and is the primary recipient of funding for the project.

A CEQA responsible agency is a public agency that proposes to carry out or approve a project, for which a lead agency is preparing or has prepared an EIR or Negative Declaration. Responsible agencies include all public agencies other than the lead agency which have discretionary approval power over the project (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15381). State responsible agencies that may issue permits on or review the proposed project are the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and California Department of Fish and Game.

CEQA defines certain trustee agencies as those that have state-mandated responsibilities for natural resources that are held in trust for the people of California (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15386). In addition to its role as a responsible agency for streambed alteration agreements, the California Department of Fish and Game is a trustee agency that has jurisdiction over natural resources in the state that could be affected by the project, including the state's fish and wildlife resources and designated rare or endangered native plants.

Federal agencies that may issue permits on the proposed project or review the proposed project are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

1.7.2 PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD

This EIR is being distributed to agencies and individuals to ensure that interested parties have an opportunity to express their comments about the potential environmental effects of the proposed project, and to ensure that information pertinent to project approval is provided to agency decision-makers. This EIR is being distributed for a 45-day review period through July 31, 2009. Comments on the EIR should be sent to the following address no later than 5 p.m. on July 31, 2009:

Maywan Krach
Placer County Community Development Resource Agency
3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 745-3132
Fax (530) 745-3003

Comments may also be submitted by e-mail to <cdraecs@placer.ca.gov>. If comments are provided via e-mail, please include the project title in the subject line, attach comments in Microsoft Word format, and include the commenter's U.S. Postal Service mailing address.

Paper copies of the document are also available for review at the County offices, Auburn Library, Lincoln Library, and Placer County Clerk-Recorder's Office at the following addresses:

Auburn Library
350 Nevada Street
Auburn, CA 95603

Placer County Clerk-Recorder's Office
2954 Richardson Drive
Auburn, CA 95603

Lincoln Library
590 Fifth Street
Lincoln, CA 95648

Placer County Department of Facility Services Office
2855 2nd Street
Auburn, CA 95603

Electronic copies of the EIR can be downloaded from the County's website at:
<http://www.placer.ca.gov/CommunityDevelopment/EnvCoordSvcs/EnvDocs.aspx>