
PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE



Countywide General Plan
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

VOLUME I

SCH# 93082012

Prepared by:

Crawford Multari & Starr
DKS Associates
Psomas and Associates
Jones & Stokes Associates
Recht Hausrath & Associates
J. Laurence Mintier & Associates

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The Placer County *Countywide General Plan* is the result of over three years of work by a multi-disciplinary consultant team, County staff, the Placer County Planning Commission, and the Placer County Board of Supervisors. This *Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR)* documents the environmental considerations incorporated into the process of preparing the *Countywide General Plan* and evaluates the environmental implications and effects of the plan.

CEQA

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Sections 21000-21177) mandates the preparation of draft and final environmental impact reports for projects or programs that have the potential of resulting in adverse impacts on the environment. Detailed requirements concerning both content and process are set forth in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15000 et seq., *Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act* (hereinafter referred to as *State CEQA Guidelines*).

THE PURPOSE OF THIS EIR

The purposes of CEQA (and thus EIRs) are summarized in Article 1 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. Article 1 reads, in part, as follows:

§15002. General Concepts.

(a) Basic Purposes of CEQA. The basic purposes of CEQA are to:

- (1) Inform governmental decision-makers and the public about the potential, significant environmental effects of proposed activities.
- (2) Identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly reduced.
- (3) Prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring changes in projects through the use of alternatives or mitigation measures when the governmental agency finds the changes to be feasible.
- (4) Disclose to the public the reasons why a governmental agency approved the project in the manner the agency chose if significant environmental effects are involved.

Subsection (f) of this section summarizes the purpose and content of an EIR:

(f) Environmental Impact Reports and Negative Declarations. An environmental impact report (EIR) is the public document used by the governmental agency to analyze the significant environmental effects of a proposed project, to identify alternatives, and to disclose possible ways to reduce or avoid the possible environmental damage.

- (1) An EIR is prepared when the public agency finds substantial evidence that the project may have a significant effect on the environment. (See §15064(a)(1).)

Subsection (g) summarizes the concept of "significant effect":

- (g) **Significant Effect on the Environment.** A significant effect on the environment is defined as a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions which exist in the area affected by the proposed project. (See: Section 15382.) Further, when an EIR identifies a significant effect, the government agency approving the project must make findings on whether the adverse environmental effects have been substantially reduced or if not, why not. (See: Section §15091.)

The express purpose of an EIR is further elaborated in Section 15121:

§15121. Informational Document.

- (a) An EIR is an informational document which will inform public agency decision makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project. The public agency shall consider the information in the EIR along with other information which may be presented to the agency.
- (b) While the information in the EIR does not control the agency's ultimate discretion on the project, the agency must respond to each significant effect identified in the EIR by making findings under Section 15091 and, if necessary, by making a statement of overriding considerations under Section 15093.
- (c) The information in an EIR may constitute substantial evidence in the record to support the agency's action on the project if its decision is later challenged in court.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE GENERAL PLAN AND EIR

The *State CEQA Guidelines* provides the following general directions concerning the coordination of planning and environmental impact assessment:

§15080. General.

To the extent possible, the EIR process should be combined with the existing planning, review, and project approval process used by each public agency.

The *State CEQA Guidelines* provides for combining the EIR with the general plan as follows:

§15166. EIR as Part of a General Plan.

- (a) The requirements for preparing an EIR on a local general plan, element, or amendment thereof will be satisfied by using the general plan, or element document, as the EIR and no separate EIR will be required, if:
- (1) the general plan addresses all the points required to be in an EIR by Article 9 of these Guidelines; and
 - (2) the document contains a special section or a cover sheet identifying where the general plan document addresses each of the points required.

In accordance with these two sections of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, and in an effort to minimize repetition of information, five separate General Plan documents are being used to satisfy the requirements for a Final EIR. These are: 1) the *Countywide General Plan Policy Document*; 2) the *General Plan Background Report*, which describes existing conditions and trends in Placer County; 3) the *General Plan Issues and Options Report*, which was prepared prior to the *Countywide General Plan Policy Document* and describes planning issues, policy and program options, and land use alternatives; 4) the *Draft Environmental Impact Report*, which was published in October 1993 and assessed the implications of the *Draft General Plan* published at the same time; and 5) this *Final Environmental Impact Report*, which is comprehensive revision of the *Draft EIR* and assesses the environmental implications and effects of the *General Plan* adopted in 1994. Together, these five documents address the issues required by state law to be covered in a Final EIR.

USE OF THIS EIR AS A PROGRAM EIR/MASTER ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The precise format of an EIR is not dictated by CEQA or the *State CEQA Guidelines*, but is left to the discretion of the lead agency preparing the EIR. Several types of EIR or alternatives for formatting EIRs are described in the *State CEQA Guidelines*. Of particular relevance to a general plan EIR are Program EIRs and Master Environmental Assessments (MEAs).

The *State CEQA Guidelines* describes a Program EIR as follows:

§15168. Program EIR.

- (a) General. A program EIR is an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either:
- (1) Geographically,
 - (2) As logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions,
 - (3) In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or
 - (4) As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.

The *State CEQA Guidelines* describes a Master Environmental Assessment as follows:

§15169. Master Environmental Assessment.

- (a) General. A public agency may prepare a Master Environment Assessment, inventory, or data base for all, or a portion of, the territory subject to its control in order to provide information which may be used or referenced in EIRs or Negative Declarations. Neither the content, the format, nor the procedures to be used to develop a Master Environmental Assessment are prescribed by these Guidelines. The descriptions contained in this section are advisory. A Master Environmental Assessment is suggested solely as an approach to identify and organize environmental information for a region or area of the state.

The chief advantage of Program EIRs and MEAs is that they can be used to streamline CEQA compliance for a broad range of subsequent projects. Program EIRs or MEAs can be used as the basis for preparing initial studies on individual projects; they can be used as the basis for issuing negative declarations on individual projects; and they can be referenced in subsequent EIRs to address major and cumulative impacts of projects, allowing project-level EIRs to focus on more site-specific impacts. Preparing a Program EIR or MEA does not obviate the need for environmental analysis on individual projects, but it can expedite and simplify subsequent environmental reviews under CEQA.

For these reasons, this EIR has been organized and is intended to be used as both a Program EIR and a Master Environmental Assessment.

DEGREE OF SPECIFICITY AND SPECULATION

The *State CEQA Guidelines* includes the following discussions regarding forecasting, speculation, and the degree of specificity required in an EIR:

§15144. Forecasting

Drafting an EIR or preparing a Negative Declaration necessarily involves some degree of forecasting. While foreseeing the unforeseeable is not possible, an agency must use its best efforts to find out and disclose all that it reasonably can.

§15145. Speculation

If, after thorough investigation, a Lead Agency finds that a particular impact is too speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impact.

§15146. Degree of Specificity

The degree of specificity required in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity involved in the underlying activity which is described in the EIR.

- (a) An EIR on a construction project will necessarily be more detailed in the specific effects of the project than will be an EIR on the adoption of a local general plan or comprehensive zoning ordinance because the effects of the construction can be predicted with greater accuracy.
- (b) An EIR on a project such as the adoption or amendment of a comprehensive zoning ordinance or a local general plan should focus on the secondary effects that can be expected to follow from the adoption or amendment, but the EIR need not be as detailed as an EIR on the specific construction projects that might follow.

This EIR evaluated impacts of the Countywide General Plan based primarily on estimated levels of development allowed under the *General Plan* that could reasonably be expected to occur by the year 2010. In several sections of the EIR, the possible effects of development through 2040 are also discussed, but no conclusions concerning the significance of the impacts are reached, since such conclusions would be very speculative given uncertainty about long term growth projections and future technological advances.

PLACER COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW ORDINANCE

In October 1990, the County adopted the *Placer County Environmental Review Ordinance* (Chapter 31 of the *Placer County Code*). The purpose of the *Ordinance* is to implement the requirements of CEQA, supplement the *State CEQA Guidelines*, implement the Permit Streamlining Act, and implement State law relating to mitigation monitoring. By summarizing local and state requirements for environmental review succinctly in a single document, the *Ordinance* provides Placer County residents, property owners, business owners, prospective developers, employees, and elected and appointed officials with a valuable aid in considering the environmental effects of development activity. To supplement the *Environmental Review Ordinance*, the County also published the *Environmental Review Procedures Manual*. While the *Manual* was prepared as an in-house guide for Placer County land development staff, it provides anyone involved in the environmental review process with a variety of information pertaining to the "everyday" application of State and County environmental regulations.

USE OF THIS EIR

This EIR serves two basic purposes. First, it establishes the environmental framework for adoption of the *General Plan*, providing information to the public, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors concerning the potential consequences of adopting the plan, and, second, it serves as a first-tier EIR for subsequent EIRs on projects implementing the *General Plan* (e.g., community plans, specific plans, individual projects). The principal utility of this *EIR* in serving as a first tier for subsequent projects will be to provide a framework for assessment of cumulative impacts.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This *Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR)*, which as noted above is one of five reports being used to satisfy the requirements of CEQA, has been prepared as a comprehensive revision of the *Draft EIR*, which was published in October 1993. Revisions to the *Draft EIR* reflect two types of change: (1) those made in response to land use and policy changes made by the Board of Supervisors to the *Draft General Plan* as a result of public review of the *Draft Policy Document*; and (2) editorial, substantive, and technical changes made in response to comments received on the *Draft EIR*. The changes to the *Policy Document* and *EIR* are summarized in Section 1.7 of Chapter 1 of this *EIR*, starting on page 1-10.

Because of its size, this *Final EIR* document has been published in two volumes. Volume I consists of the revised *Draft EIR* (i.e., this Introduction, Chapters 1 through 10, and appendices). Volume II consists of the comments submitted on the *Draft EIR* and the County's formal response to those comments.

Volume I is organized as follows.

This **Introduction** provides basic background information, including a description of the laws requiring the preparation of this *EIR* and a description of the document's organization.

Chapter 1 describes the project setting, summarizes the project objectives, describes the project, explains Placer County's General Plan Update process, describes the differences between the draft and final versions of the *General Plan* and the *EIR*, and summarizes the significant environmental effects of the plan.

Chapter 2 summarizes and explains the development potential estimates upon which much of the rest of the assessment is based.

Chapter 3 evaluates the land use, housing, and population impacts of the plan.

Chapter 4 assesses transportation impacts.

Chapter 5 reviews non-County infrastructure and services impacts, including water, sewer, drainage, solid waste, and schools.

Chapter 6 summarizes the potential effects on County-provided facilities and services.

Chapter 7 assesses the plan's impact on recreational and cultural resources.

Chapter 8 examines the plan's impacts on natural resources.

Chapter 9 reviews health and safety impacts of the plan.

Chapter 10 addresses mandatory EIR sections, including alternatives, short-term versus long-term uses, significant irreversible effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts.

Appendix A summarizes the *Issues and Options Report* and its use in preparing the *Draft General Plan*.

Appendix B lists the firms that prepared the *General Plan* and *EIR*

Appendix C lists the respondents to the Notice of Preparation prepared for the *Draft EIR*

Appendix D identifies persons and organizations consulted in the process of preparing the *General Plan* and *EIR*.

Appendix E describes the *Draft EIR* review process, including an explanation of the distribution of the reports and a list of those groups and individuals who commented during the 45-day review period.

Volume II of this *Final EIR* is the County's formal response to comments submitted during the 45-day Draft EIR review period. It includes a photocopy of each comment letter submitted during the review period, with each individual comment marked with a unique identifier. Preceding each letter is a brief summary of each comment along with the County's formal response. Volume II also summarizes oral comments made at public hearings concerning the *Draft EIR* along with the County's response to these comments.

FORM OF THIS EIR'S ANALYSIS

The *Countywide General Plan* and this *EIR* were prepared simultaneously in an effort to identify potentially-significant implications of the plan early in the process and to include policies and programs in the plan to minimize or avoid these adverse implications. The format and content of the environmental impact analysis in this *EIR* reflect this approach to preparing the *Countywide General Plan*.

Accordingly, for each subject addressed in Chapters 3 through 9, the discussion is generally broken into the following seven parts:

Setting: This section briefly summarizes pertinent information concerning existing conditions. Since the *General Plan Background Report* constitutes the comprehensive setting for the *EIR*, this section focuses on the highlights, while referring the reader to relevant sections of the *Background Report*.

Methodology: This section discusses the assumptions and methodology used to identify implications and to assess impacts.

Implications of the General Plan Land Use Diagram: This section projects conditions that could result from the development permitted by the land use designations shown on the *General Plan Land Use Diagram* without consideration of the policies and programs included in the *General Plan Policy Document*. This part focuses primarily on implications of estimated development at 2010. Some of the analyses, however, also consider potential implications at 2040 development levels. Because development estimates for year 2040 are very speculative, the analysis of 2040 implications is generally qualitative.

General Plan Policy Response: This section identifies those policies and programs contained in the *General Plan Policy Document* that would ameliorate or lessen the severity of potential negative implications identified in the previous part. While this discussion focuses primarily on policies and programs that reduce the potentially significant negative implications of the *Land Use Diagram*, it also in some cases identifies policies or programs that reduce potential impacts that may not be particularly significant.

Impacts: This section describes the environmental impacts of the *General Plan* considering the combined effect of the implications of the *Land Use Diagram* and the policies and programs included in the *General Plan Policy Document* that address these implications. This discussion includes an assessment of the severity of the impact, including a conclusion as to whether the impacts are considered significant according to *CEQA*. The impacts are characterized as "significant," "potentially significant," or "less-than-significant." This analysis and its conclusions focus on impacts of estimated development at 2010. No formal impact conclusions are reached concerning the severity of impacts at 2040 development levels.

Again, the *General Plan* and *General Plan EIR* were prepared simultaneously in an effort to identify potentially-significant implications of the plan early in the process and to include policies and programs in the plan to minimize or avoid these adverse implications.

Mitigation Measures: This section identifies mitigation measures that could reduce or eliminate negative impacts identified as "significant" or "potentially-significant."

Cumulative Impacts: Several of the topical analyses lend themselves to a discussion of cumulative impacts. This section summarizes the possible cumulative impacts associated with these topical areas. This includes a brief explanation of the assumed cumulative context, since the differences in the nature of the topics being assessed require significantly different types and levels of focus. For instance, because of the nature of model used, the traffic analysis assesses the affects of development not only within the unincorporated area of Placer County, but also in the county's cities and adjacent counties. On the other hand, the primary analyses of agricultural

land and habitat conversion focus only on the unincorporated area of Placer County; the cumulative discussion considers habitat conversion in the cities and adjacent counties. Chapter 10 includes a summary of the important cumulative impacts.