



INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PLAN

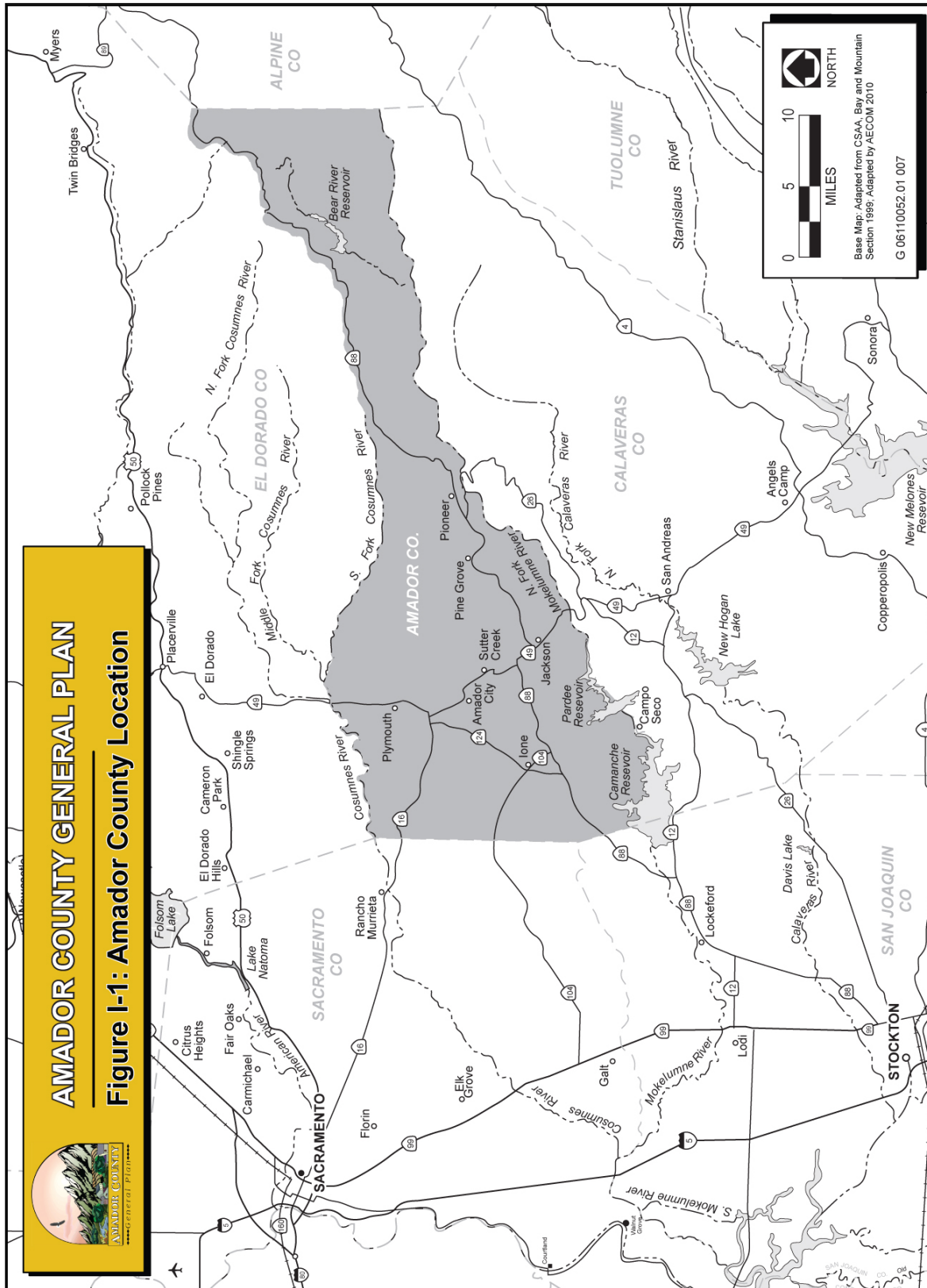
Amador County residents and businesses value a high quality rural lifestyle, historic resources, healthy natural environment, vibrant local economy, scenic resources and vistas, and services that meet people's needs. The primary benefit of the Amador County General Plan (General Plan) is that it allows the County to control, to the degree possible, its own destiny in achieving these objectives. The General Plan forges links between land use and the countywide transportation, infrastructure, and public service networks. It will provide the flexibility needed to accommodate growth and change while effectively managing the county's wealth of natural resources.

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

Amador County's General Plan might be compared to a roadmap leading to a better future. Contained within this roadmap is a description of Amador County today, a vision of a desirable future, and a path, expressed through goals, policies and implementation, to achieve the vision. The General Plan clarifies and articulates the County's intentions in responding to the expectations of residents, landowners, and businesses, regarding their long-term vision for the county.

Each local government within California is required to adopt a general plan and update this plan at regular intervals. State law defines the purpose of the general plan as anticipating and planning for "the physical development of the county." To be considered comprehensive, the General Plan must address many issues that influence land use decisions. Specifically, State law requires the County to develop a plan for land use, circulation, housing, resource conservation, open space, noise, and public safety. Amador County has also identified governance and economic development as locally important priorities in addition to State requirements. Thus, the General Plan consists of nine chapters, known as elements, addressing these priorities.

Throughout the General Plan, the County defines goals, policies, and standards. County decisions affecting land use and development must be consistent with the General Plan. An action, program, or project would be considered consistent with the General Plan if, considering all of its aspects, it would further the goals and policies set forth within the General Plan and not obstruct their attainment.





AMADOR COUNTY PLANNING AREA

Amador County is located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Range, approximately 25 miles east of Sacramento. State Route (SR) 49 traverses the county from north to south along the Mother Lode, connecting the cities of Plymouth, Sutter Creek, Amador City, and Jackson. SR 104 and SR 124 connect lone with neighboring areas of Amador and Sacramento Counties, and SR 16 connects the county with Sacramento to the west. SR 88 extends from Stockton on the west, through the county to the Kirkwood ski resort, passing through Jackson, and the unincorporated communities of Martell, Pine Grove, Pioneer, Red Corral, and Buckhorn. SR 88 is an important route over the Sierra Nevada, connecting the Central Valley to U.S. 395 in the eastern Sierra Nevada.

Amador County is bordered by El Dorado County on the north, Alpine County on the east, Calaveras County on the south, and Sacramento and San Joaquin Counties on the west. The only public airport in Amador County is Westover Field, located in Martell. Private airports in the County include the Eagle's Nest Airport in the northwestern portion of the county, south of SR 16. The former Amador Central rail line extends from lone to Martell, and connects to active Union Pacific lines in the Central Valley. Figure I-1 illustrates Amador County's location.

Amador County's planning area encompasses the unincorporated land within the County's boundaries (that is, excluding the land within the city limits of Amador City, lone, Jackson, Plymouth, and Sutter Creek). Goals and policies, as well as land use and circulation plans set forth and quantified in the General Plan address the unincorporated county area.

AMADOR COUNTY, THE HEART OF THE MOTHER LODGE

The eastern Miwok historically occupied Amador County and surrounding areas to the west. While the Plains Miwok shared a common language and cultural background, they consisted of a number of separate and politically independent groups. Each group used a number of permanently inhabited and seasonally occupied locales. The eastern Miwok relied on a broad spectrum of plant and animal food sources. Of the plant species, the Plains Miwok most valued the valley oak, but also used buckeye, laurel, and hazelnut. Various seeds include wild oats and balsam root, several species of edible roots, and greens such as wild pea and miner's lettuce, berries, and a number of different mushroom varieties. Tule elk and pronghorn antelope were the most important animal species. Various species of rabbit were hunted in the summer. Waterfowl and fish,

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especially salmon, were extremely important food sources for the eastern Miwok.

On January 28, 1848, John Marshall, a foreman working for John Sutter's sawmill near Coloma happened upon a discovery that would shape the history of California and the nation: gold.

As word spread of the discovery, gold miners flooded to the Mother Lode to search for fortune. In 1849, the population of California surged from 14,000 to over 100,000, comprised of Americans and immigrants from around the world. Throughout the Mother Lode, small mining camps and towns sprung up to supply gold mines and miners – the demand for food, booze, supplies, building materials, and entertainment drove development along the American and Mokelumne Rivers, and deep into the Sierra foothills.

Early in the gold rush, streams were placer mined (1846–1857). Most of the important lode deposits were discovered in the 1850s. From the 1870s to the 1890s, mining expanded to maintain profitability. By 1875, mines such as the Keystone, South Spring Hill, Oneida, Old Eureka and Plymouth had become large and highly profitable. As mining progressed to greater and greater depths, costs increased. The Argonaut, Kennedy, Central Eureka, Bunker Hill, Fremont Gover, and Lincoln Cons were major gold sources in the 1880s and 1890s.

By some estimates, merchants supplying gold miners made more than the miners themselves. In Amador County, a proliferation of other industries, like wine, lumber, and agriculture supplied mining camps and towns with provisions. During the 1850s, the soil in Shenandoah Valley was found to be excellent for growing grapes without irrigation. The official Amador County map of 1866 lists 8 sawmills, and the 1881 map lists 10 sawmills. During the 1870s, cattle ranching became commonplace. As the county developed, towns rose up around early mining settlements and homes and buildings reflecting the popular architectural styles were built.

Mining costs continued to increase, and during the early 1900s and World War I the South Spring Hill, Lincoln Cons, Oneida, Zeila, South Eureka, Bunker Hill and Treasure mines were shut down. However, the county continued to yield large amounts of gold as the Argonaut, Kennedy, Central Eureka and other mines grew. Mining occurred at greater and greater depths until the Argonaut and Kennedy became the deepest mines in the country.

All of the mines were shut down soon after the beginning of World War II. The Central Eureka mine was reopened in 1945, but due to high costs and a federally fixed price on gold, the mine was shut down again in 1953. This was the last active major gold mine on the Mother Lode in Amador County. However, in recent years, shaft mining activity has been



resumed between the towns of Amador City and Sutter Creek, and gold panning continues to thrill hobbyists and professional gold miners alike.

Since the 1950s, Amador County has seen steady population growth, primarily in rural residential areas. As mining and timber production have declined, tourism has become more important to the County's economy.

CUSTOM, CULTURE, AND TRADITIONS OF AMADOR COUNTY

Amador County was established in 1854. The name "Washington" was considered by the State Senate, but the name "Amador" was substituted in the State Assembly. The name pays homage to ranchero Jose Maria Amador, and is a loose Spanish translation for "love of gold."

Today, Amador County is rich in history, spectacular scenery, and year-round recreation. Sightseeing throughout scenic Amador County is popular. Visitors can trace the paths of pioneers and gold miners by visiting historical landmarks of the Mother Lode gold mines, Chaw Se Indian Grinding Rock Cultural Center, Amador County Museum, Shenandoah Valley wineries, Daffodil Hill, Volcano Theater, Historic Preston Castle, antique shops and shows, art galleries, flea markets, and family events such as the Amador County Fair. Opportunities for every sports enthusiast are available in all seasons. Numerous resorts, lakes and rivers, in addition to scenic roadways to the high Sierras, provide for camping and recreational vehicle parks, fishing, swimming, boating, jet skiing, hiking, jogging, picnicking, horseback riding, rafting, hunting, skiing, and golfing. The county offers a wide range of hospitality from economical to elegant, including historic Victorian inns, motels, hotels, and bed and breakfasts. Many family-owned dining establishments offer classic American food, as well as outstanding Italian, French, Chinese, and Mexican cuisine.

More than 85,000 acres of land in Amador County (more than 20 percent of the County's total area) is managed by federal agencies, primarily the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Amador County has rich and valued customs, tradition, and culture that reflect its history of mining, timber harvesting, agriculture, and grazing on public land. Land in Amador County has not always been federally managed. At the start of the gold rush, California was technically still a part of Mexico. The relationship between federal management and individual use of public land has long been a topic of discussion in the county. That relationship and related discussion continues today, and will in the future so long as there is productive use of both public and private land for grazing cattle, timber harvesting, hunting, and recreation.

The culture and customs surrounding life in the county have been shaped by the productive forests which carpet much of the eastern portion of

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Amador County, including parts of the El Dorado National Forest. The people of Amador County have historically depended on the forests. Beginning with the Miwok Indians who used the forests for sustenance, followed by the 49ers and pioneers who used wood for campfires, to cook, warm their bodies, repair their wagons and build their homes. The pioneers' very survival depended upon the availability of wood and wood products. Forest lands in Amador County are some of the most productive in the world. With proper management and use, they should supply the county's needs for countless generations to come.

Grazing on public lands has been part of the custom and culture of Amador County, long before the concept of public lands. Early grazing of cattle on common area lands provided milk and meat for the miners and early settlers. In the 1870s, beef cattle were introduced and annual cattle drives began. Cattle were driven up into the high country from May through October, then gathered and driven three or four days to the lower wintering ranges. By the 1960s, very few cattle were driven, in favor of trucking which continues today. Many families that grazed cattle and sheep left their names associated with places such as Allen Camp, Maggie's Meadow (Badaracco), Burk Cabin, Culberts, Dufrene, Ellis Meadow, Kirkwood Meadow, Mattley Meadow, Meiss Meadow, Mehrten Springs, Pardoe, Plasse Trading Post, Schneider Cow Camp, and Votaws.

Amador County has a long tradition of hunting that continues today. Thousands of hunters visit the El Dorado National Forest each year for deer, bear, grouse, quail, coyotes, squirrels, as well as fishing. Hunting is permitted seasonally, except in the Salt Springs State game refuge. Countless thousands of hunters and anglers visit public forests and lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), bringing revenue to sporting goods stores, motels, grocery stores, fuel stations, and vehicle repair shops.

Public lands in Amador County are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Early in the 20th century, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) permitted private residents to build recreational cabins on public land. These residences, built between 1922 and 1959, are located at Kirkwood Lake, Devil's Gate, South Silver Lake, East Silver Lake, and Bear River. Today, 178 recreational cabins are privately owned and leased from USFS on 20-year terms. Some cabins are now used by the fourth generation, providing recreation and enjoyment for the permittees and their families.

Agriculture has been an important economic sector for Amador County since the county was formed in 1854. As a result, Amador County is renowned for its primary agricultural products – wine, walnuts, apples, and beef. Originally, much of the agricultural land was used for grazing animals and raising grains and hay. Since the first winery was established in 1956 in Shenandoah Valley, Amador wineries have continued to grow



in both number and stature. Many of these are small, family-owned operations.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As part of the General Plan update public outreach process, county residents established a Community Vision Statement. The Vision Statement is the foundation for General Plan goals, policies, and programs. It is an expression of residents' shared values and requirements for Amador County's future. The Vision identifies the ideal conditions to work toward over the next 25 years and provides guidance for policy makers as they work to improve quality of life.

PREAMBLE

We, the citizens of Amador County, envision the county as a place known for its high quality rural lifestyle, historic resources, healthy natural environment, vibrant local economy, scenic resources and vistas, and services that meet our people's needs.

COMMUNITY

Amador County continues to be a place of small, distinct towns where neighbors know and can depend on one another, and where low crime rates foster a feeling of security and residents are enabled to participate in the decision-making process. We have a vibrant economy—one that provides jobs with enough income to allow residents a reasonable quality of life, and encourages and supports business, especially locally-owned, unique businesses and our historic business districts. We have created a livable community—one with a supply of housing affordable to those who live and/or work in our community.

CHARACTER

We protect and enhance our county's unique character – its history, natural beauty, and rural lifestyle. Due to our successful efforts, our historic and cultural heritage; scenic vistas, agriculture, rivers, streams, and other natural areas; and historic buildings and towns continue to attract visitors.

RESOURCES

We judiciously manage the county's wealth of natural resources—mineral, agricultural, timber, surface and groundwater, soil, air, open space, and wildlife—managing and enhancing our resources for present and future generations. We preserve our resources while also protecting our property and personal rights.



SERVICES

We strive to serve current and future generations by providing utilities and services that are available, affordable, well-maintained, and well-planned while maintaining our rural character. We provide transportation choices through upkeep of our roadways, safe bicycle and pedestrian paths, and transit opportunities that respond to our needs. We have access to health services, professional, well-trained emergency service providers, quality child-care and senior services, and expanded opportunities for recreation and lifelong learning. Working with our local schools, we have created an excellent learning environment where both children and adults can obtain high-quality education and skills to achieve personal and economic success.

GENERAL PLAN PREPARATION

Public Participation and Outreach

Amador County initiated a comprehensive General Plan update in 2006. Public participation played an important role in the preparation of this General Plan. Because the General Plan reflects the goals of the community, citizen input was essential to identify issues and formulate goals. The public had several opportunities to participate, including the following:

- Five introductory community workshops were held during September 2006. These workshops provided an introduction to the General Plan update process and a forum to discuss visions for the future. Discussion at each workshop focused on four broad elements – community, character, resources, and services.
- Twenty-seven General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) meetings, were held on a bi-weekly to monthly basis from July 2006 through April 2008. The public participated in GPAC discussions regarding issues and opportunities, existing conditions, vision, goals, and land use alternatives.
- The County hosted workshops and open houses on alternatives, goals, and policies in June and September 2008.
- Two rounds of study sessions before a joint session of the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission in October and November 2008, and March through July 2009.
- General Plan documents, including meeting agendas and summaries, background working papers, draft goals and policies, and draft land



use alternatives, have been continuously posted on the county’s website for public access since 2006.

The GPAC played a critical role in developing the framework for the General Plan. The GPAC was a twelve-member group of Amador County residents (with alternates) appointed by the Board of Supervisors to assist County staff and consultants preparing the Draft General Plan. The GPAC reviewed and provided feedback on the vision, key policy issues and plan proposals, and assisted with outreach and communication with the general public. GPAC members (and their alternates) represented each of the five county supervisorial districts, and also represented the Commission on Aging, Board of Realtors, Foothill Conservancy, Farm Bureau and Chamber of Commerce.

ORGANIZATION AND USE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan consists of nine elements, or chapters, that together meet State requirements for a general plan. These elements are presented in Table I-1, below. The General Plan also includes an introduction and a glossary.

**Table I-1
General Plan Elements**

Amador County General Plan Elements	State Mandated Elements	Optional Elements
Land Use	X	
Circulation	X	
Economic Development		X
Conservation	X	
Open Space	X	
Governance		X
Safety	X	
Noise	X	
Housing	X	

The General Plan represents the County’s policy for determining the appropriate physical development and character of Amador County, and establishes an overall future development capacity.

An Implementation Plan has been prepared describing the programs which the County intends to use to achieve General Plan goals and policies. Although not a part of the General Plan, the Implementation Plan is included as an attachment to the plan. The General Plan Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) also provides programmatic information and analysis of the General Plan, and can be used as a base for analysis by later projects implementing the General Plan.

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The General Plan process was informed by working papers which presented issues and opportunities in several policy areas for the County. Working paper topics included Agriculture, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Circulation, Cultural Resources, Demographics, Energy, Hydrology and Water Quality, Infrastructure, Land Use, Local Economy, Noise, and Public Health and Safety. The working papers served both to inform discussions by the GPAC, and also to provide background information used to prepare the General Plan.

General Plan Structure

The General Plan is comprised of this introduction and nine elements. Each element may stand alone, but is also an integral part of the overall plan. The General Plan is accompanied by an Implementation Plan and Glossary. Each of the elements contains several common organizational features:

- The *Purpose, Scope and Contents, and Relationship to Other Elements* briefly identify the purpose of the element, describe its contents, and specify the relationship of the element to other General Plan elements.
- The *Plan* section offers an overview of the County's course of action to implement the goals and policies. Many of the elements also contain one or more policy maps which consolidate the various opportunities, constraints, classifications, and policies expressed in the element in graphic form. For example, the Land Use Element contains a "Land Use Diagram" identifying and describing the locations of future land uses by type, density and intensity within Amador County.
- The *Issues, Goals, and Policies* section of each element contains a description of identified planning issues, goals, and policies. The issues, goals, and policies are based on input received from the community, the GPAC, the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission, and County staff. Issues represent the needs, concerns or desires addressed within the General Plan. Goals are overall statements of community desires and consist of broad statements of purpose or direction. Policies serve as guides to the Board of Supervisors and County staff in reviewing development proposals and making other decisions that affect future growth and development.



Related Plans and Policies

State law places the General Plan atop the hierarchy of land use planning regulations. Several local ordinances and other County plans must conform to General Plan policy direction and work to implement the General Plan. Also, regional government agencies, such as the Amador Air District and the Regional Water Quality Control Board have been established, recognizing that planning issues extend beyond the boundaries of individual counties. Efforts to address regional planning issues such as air and water quality, transportation, affordable housing, and habitat conservation have resulted in the adoption or consideration of regional plans and regulations. Policies adopted by Amador County both affect and are affected by these plans. The paragraphs below describe important ordinances, plans, and programs associated with the General Plan.

Amador County Zoning Code

The Zoning Code, the primary tool used to implement the General Plan, regulates development type and intensity throughout the unincorporated county. Development regulations include limits on building height, setback requirements, and landscaping. The Zoning Code also outlines standards for many other land use issues.

Westover Field Airport Land Use Plan

The Airport Land Use Plan (ALUP) for Westover Field was prepared in October 1987 and amended in July 1990 by the Amador Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC). The plan provides a basis for determining which land uses which are compatible with airport operations.

Three “Safety Areas” are defined in the ALUP. These include Clear Zones, Approach/Departure Zones, and an Overflight Zone. Compatible land uses are identified for each zone. Please refer to the ALUP for more specific identification of permitted uses. No existing conflicts were identified in any of the three zones, although potential for future conflicts in the Clear and Overflight Zones from future development activity was identified. Conflicts may include both safety and noise conflicts with airport operations.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was adopted by the State legislature in response to a public mandate for environmental analysis of projects affecting the environment. The provisions of the law and environmental review procedure are described in the CEQA Statute

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and Guidelines. CEQA is the instrument for ensuring that environmental impacts of local development projects are appropriately disclosed, assessed, and mitigated.

Local Agency Formation Commission Guidelines

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 sets forth procedures for Local Agency Formation Commissions, or LAFCOs, throughout the state to review annexation applications. The Act was adopted to:

- Encourage orderly development including the provisions of the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act (CKH) Section 56001;
- ~~Ensure that populations receive efficient and high quality~~ Efficiently extend government services; and
- Guide development away from open space and prime agricultural lands, unless such action promotes planned, orderly, and efficient development.

~~The Amador County LAFCO must adhere to adopted guidelines pursuant to the Act in its review of future City and special district annexations and boundary changes. Amador LAFCO implements the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act and other statutes in its review of future city and district boundary changes, changes of local government organization, and adoption of spheres of influence.~~

Amador County Regional Transportation Plan

The Amador County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is prepared by the Amador County Transportation Commission (ACTC). The RTP is the long-term plan for the County's transportation infrastructure. It identifies and analyzes the County's transportation needs, and identifies priority projects to improve the County's transportation infrastructure.