

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

4.0 APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

4.0.1 SCOPE AND LEVEL OF DETAIL

According to Sections 15126.2(a) and 15126.2(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR shall identify and focus on the significant environmental effects of the proposed project, including effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed project were implemented.

Although some significant environmental impacts are identified as significant and unavoidable, the County may still approve the project if it determines that social, economic, legal, technological, or other factors override the unavoidable impacts. The County would then be required to prepare a “Statement of Overriding Considerations” that discusses the specific reasons for approving the project, based on information in the EIR and other information in the record.

Sections 4.1 through 4.16 of this EIR present the environmental impact analysis for the anticipated effects of implementation of the Draft General Plan. Topics evaluated in these sections are listed in Section 1.0, “Introduction”, and were identified in the notice of preparation (NOP) (Appendix A). Section 1.0 also describes the appropriate level of detail for a general plan EIR impact analysis.

4.0.2 STRUCTURE

Each section in this chapter presents an evaluation of a particular environmental topic and includes a description of existing conditions (both physical and regulatory), environmental impacts, mitigation measures proposed to reduce significant environmental impacts (where necessary), and a determination of the level of significance after mitigation measures are implemented.

REGULATORY SETTING

This subsection describes federal, state, and regional and local plans, policies, regulations, and laws that apply to the environmental topic being evaluated with implementation of the Draft General Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This subsection provides information about the existing physical environment related to the environmental topic. In accordance with Section 15125 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the discussion of the physical environment describes existing conditions within the planning area at the time the NOP was filed—July 28, 2009. The general plan update process included the collection of comprehensive data covering a variety of planning issues in 2006. Setting information in this EIR is largely based on the General Plan Working Papers, completed in 2006 and 2007, but has been updated to 2009 conditions or more recent data in some cases. For example, the environmental setting includes the Department of Conservation important farmland inventory updated in 2010, and data from the Amador Water Agency Urban Water Management Plan updated in 2011.

For some resources (such as noise and cultural resources), earlier data are the most detailed and comprehensive available, and provide environmental setting information used in the EIR. As a result of the economic recession that began in 2007, existing environmental conditions in 2009 for these resources were similar to those in 2005 or 2006. For these resources, these earlier data are representative of conditions on the ground at the time of the NOP in 2009.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This subsection provides an analysis of the environmental impacts of adoption and implementation of the Draft General Plan. First, where applicable, the subsection describes the methods, process, procedures, and/or assumptions used to formulate and conduct the impact analysis. Next, it presents the thresholds of significance used to identify the significant environmental impacts of the Draft General Plan. Following this is an analysis of the environmental impacts.

Draft General Plan policies are generally visionary in nature, rather than prescribing specific actions. Although these policies are useful for characterizing the County’s broad goals, objectives, and priorities, the impact analysis in this EIR generally does not rely on implementation of advisory or guidance policies to reduce impacts that would otherwise be significant. Policies which clearly direct or prevent particular actions are mentioned in impact analyses as project features, and the potential of these policies to reduce impacts is evaluated. Where implementation of the Draft General Plan—including construction of residential units, nonresidential facilities, and associated infrastructure—would result in significant impacts even with implementation of these policies, enforceable mitigation measures, including General Plan implementation programs, are presented to reduce those impacts to the extent feasible.

4.0.3 DETERMINING LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

For each environmental impact identified in this EIR, a statement of the level of significance of the impact is provided. Impacts are assessed as one of the following categories:

- ▶ The term “no impact” is used when the environmental resource being discussed would not be adversely affected by implementation of the Draft General Plan. This impact level does not need mitigation.
- ▶ A “less-than-significant impact” would cause a minor adverse change in the physical environment that does not exceed significance thresholds. This impact level does not require mitigation, even if feasible, under CEQA.
- ▶ A “significant impact” would have a substantial adverse effect on the physical environment, exceeding impact significant thresholds. Impacts may also be considered “potentially significant” if they have the potential to be significant, but based on existing information it is not possible to conclude they would be significant. Under CEQA, feasible mitigation measures must be identified to avoid or substantially reduce significant impacts.
- ▶ A “significant and unavoidable impact” would cause a substantial adverse effect on the environment, and no feasible mitigation measures or alternatives are available to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.

4.0.4 FORMAT OF IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Throughout the discussion, impacts are identified numerically and sequentially. For example, impacts discussed in Section 4.1 are identified as 4.1-1, 4.1-2, and so on. Mitigation measures, where needed, are identified numerically to correspond with the number of the impact being reduced by the measure. For example, Mitigation Measure 4.1-1 would mitigate Impact 4.1-1.

The format used to present the evaluation of impacts and mitigation measures is as follows:

IMPACT 4.0-1 **Impact Title.** *An impact summary heading appears before the impact discussion. The heading contains the impact number and title. The impact statement briefly summarizes the findings of the impact discussion below. The level of significance is included at the end of the summary heading. Levels of significance listed in this EIR (as described above) are **no impact, less than significant, or significant.***

The impact discussion is contained in the paragraphs following the impact statement. The analysis describes impacts of Draft General Plan implementation compared to existing environmental conditions, and concludes with a statement about the significance of the impact.

Mitigation Measures

After the impact discussion, if necessary, feasible mitigation measures are identified that would avoid or substantially reduce the impact. If no mitigation is required or no feasible mitigation measures have been identified, this is stated. Where feasible mitigation measures have been identified, a conclusion on impact significance after mitigation is reached.

4.0.5 SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE EFFECTS

According to Sections 15126.2(a) and 15126.2(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR shall identify and focus on the significant environmental effects of the proposed project, including effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed project were implemented.

Table 4.0-1 lists significant environmental impacts, including impacts that are mitigated but would not be reduced to a less-than-significant level, thereby providing a quick reference by CEQA topic for those impacts found to be significant and unavoidable. Although some significant environmental impacts are identified as significant and unavoidable, the County may still approve the project if it determines that social, economic, legal, technological, or other factors override the unavoidable impacts. The County would then be required to prepare a “Statement of Overriding Considerations” that discusses the specific reasons for approving the project, based on information in the EIR and other information in the record.

Table 4.0-1 List of Impacts Found to Be Significant and Unavoidable	
Issue Area	Geographic Area
Aesthetic Resources	4.1-1 Effect on Scenic Vistas 4.1-3 Degradation of Visual Character 4.1-4 Increase in Light and Glare and Skyglow Effects
Agricultural and Forest Resources	4.2-1 Conversion of Farmland 4.2-3 Land Use Conflicts with Existing Agricultural Uses 4.2-5 Result in Conversion of Forestland to Non-Forest Use
Air Quality	4.3-1 Construction-Related Emissions 4.3-2 Generation of Long-Term Operational (Regional) Emissions of ROG, NOX, PM10, and PM2.5 4.3-4 Exposure of Sensitive Receptors to Short- and Long-Term Emissions of Toxic Air Contaminants 4.3-6 Exposure of Sensitive Receptors to Odors
Biological Resources	4.4-1 Adverse effect on special-status species 4.4-3 Substantial adverse effect on Ione chaparral, a sensitive natural community
Cultural Resources	None
Geology, Soils, Minerals, and Paleontological Resources	None

**Table 4.0-1
List of Impacts Found to Be Significant and Unavoidable**

Issue Area	Geographic Area
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	4.7-1 Generation of GHG Emissions 4.7-2 Conflict with a GHG Reduction Plan
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	4.8-7 Exposure of Structures to Urban and Wildland Fire.
Hydrology and Water Quality	4.9-4 Interference with Groundwater Recharge or Substantial Depletion of Groundwater Supplies
Land Use and Planning	None
Noise	4.11-1 Expose Noise Sensitive Receptors to Construction Noise Levels 4.11-2 Long-term Generation of Traffic Noise 4.11-3 Expose Noise Sensitive Receptors to Railroad Noise Levels Exceeding Amador County Standards
Population, Employment, and Housing	4.12-1 Permanent Increase in Population Growth
Public Services and Utilities	4.13-1 Increased Demand for Water Supplies 4.13-2 Increased Demand for Water Conveyance and Treatment Facilities 4.13-3 Increased Demand for Wastewater Collection, Conveyance, and Treatment Facilities
Transportation	4.14-1 Increase in Traffic Levels on State Highways Resulting in Unacceptable LOS 4.14-2 Increase in Traffic Levels on Local Roadways Resulting in Unacceptable LOS
Cumulative Impacts	6-1 Cumulative Aesthetic Resources Impacts 6-2 Cumulative Agricultural and Forest Resources Impacts 6-3 Cumulative Air Quality Impacts 6-4 Cumulative Biological Resources Impacts 6-7 Cumulative Greenhouse Gas Emissions Impacts 6-8 Cumulative Hazards and Hazardous Materials Impacts 6-9 Cumulative Hydrology and Water Quality Impacts 6-11 Cumulative Noise Impacts 6-12 Cumulative Population, Employment, and Housing Impacts 6-13 Cumulative Public Services and Utilities Impacts 6-14 Cumulative Transportation Impacts