

CHAPTER 4.0

Environmental Analysis

Readers Guide to the Environmental Analysis

To assist the reader of this programmatic EIR for the 2035 Plumas County General Plan Update, this section provides an overview of the organization and content of the environmental analysis conducted for the proposed project as more described in Chapter 3 of this DEIR. The following information includes a description of the overall scope of the environmental analysis (including those environmental resource topics addressed), a description of the organization and content of each resource section, and a description of the baseline year used in the environmental analysis.

Scope of the Environmental Analysis

Sections 4.1 through 4.12 of this chapter provide a detailed discussion of the existing conditions (environmental setting) in the DEIR Study Area (generally unincorporated Plumas County) and describe the impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed project. The setting information was used to form the foundation on which impacts associated with the proposed project are evaluated. The impact discussion also identifies mitigating policies and implementation measures from the proposed project that serve to mitigate or reduce significant impacts to a less-than-significant level.

As part of the proposed project, an NOP with an environmental checklist (based on Appendix G “Environmental Checklist” of the CEQA Guidelines) was prepared and circulated for public review and comment (see Appendix A of the DEIR). On the basis of the NOP and public input, the scope of environmental resources and issues to be addressed in the RDEIR for the proposed project was established.

Organization of the Environmental Analysis

The following chapter is divided in various sections, each addressing a key environmental resource topic/issue. The organization of these topics is summarized in Table 4-1.

**TABLE 4-1
ORGANIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

Section 4.1 Land Use and Aesthetics	Section 4.7 Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Mineral Resources
Section 4.2 Traffic and Circulation	Section 4.8 Hazardous Materials and Public Safety
Section 4.3 Air Quality	Section 4.9 Public Services, Recreation Resources, and Utilities
Section 4.4 Energy and Climate Change	Section 4.10 Agricultural and Timber Resources
Section 4.5 Noise	Section 4.11 Biological Resources
Section 4.6 Hydrology, Water Quality and Drainage	Section 4.12 Cultural Resources

Additionally, to assist the reader of this DEIR in comparing information about the various environmental resource topics, each section contains the following main headings and information:

- **Regulatory Setting.** This section provides an understanding of all applicable federal, state, and/or local regulations applicable to the proposed project.
- **Environmental Setting.** This section describes the foundation from which the impacts are evaluated. It provides background information on the County.
- **Impacts and Methodology.** This section provides the actual discussion of impacts and findings for the program-related elements of the proposed project. The section opens with a description of the significance criteria and methods used to conduct the analysis. Following this information is a detailed presentation of the impact assessment for each element of the proposed project. If significant impacts are identified, mitigation measures (where feasible and in the form of policies) also are proposed to reduce these impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Significance Criteria are a set of criteria used by the lead agency to determine at what level or “threshold” an impact would be considered significant. Significance criteria used in this EIR include: some that are set forth in the CEQA Guidelines, or can be discerned from the CEQA Guidelines; criteria based on factual or scientific information; and criteria based on regulatory standards of local, state, and federal agencies.

Evaluation and Presentation of Impacts

Terminology Used in the EIR

For each impact identified in this DEIR, a statement of the level of significance of each impact is provided. Impacts are categorized in one of the following categories:

- A project impact is considered significant if it reaches or exceeds the threshold of significance identified in the EIR. A project impact is considered **less than significant (LTS)** when there may be an impact but it does not reach the threshold or standard of significance and, therefore, would cause no substantial adverse change in the physical environment. No mitigation is required for less-than-significant impacts.
- A **potentially significant impact (PS)** is a substantial or potentially substantial, adverse change in the physical environment. Physical conditions in the area will be directly or indirectly affected by the General Plan Update. Impacts may be direct or indirect and short-term or long-term. A project impact is considered significant if it reaches or

exceeds the threshold of significance identified in the EIR. Mitigation measures may reduce a potentially significant adverse impact to a less-than-significant impact.

- A **significant unavoidable impact (SU)** occurs when even with the adoption of all feasible mitigation measures a significant adverse impact cannot be avoided or mitigated to a less-than-significant level should the project be implemented.
- A designation of **no impact (NI)** was given if the proposed project would not result in an adverse impact on the physical environment.

Description of Impact Analysis

The impact assessment for each environmental resource topic provided in this DEIR is divided into a number of individual impact statements that deal with specific topics. Each impact statement and subsequent impact description begins with a summary table identifying each impact's level of significance and any additional (beyond those currently provided under the 2035 General Plan or proposed project) required mitigating policies necessary to mitigate an identified adverse impact. An example from DEIR Section 4.11 "Biological Resources" is provided below:

Impact 4.11-1: Special Status Species

LTS	The proposed project could have an adverse impact on special status species.
	Level of Significance Before Mitigation: <i>Potentially Significant</i>
	Required Additional Mitigating Policies and Implementation Measures: <i>Revised Policy COS-7.2.13 "Biological Resource Maps and Surveys"</i>
	Resultant Level of Significance: <i>Less than Significant</i>

A summary of key policies and implementation measures (included in the 2035 General Plan Update Goals and Policies Report) that identify actions that mitigate adverse impacts are included in the analysis for each impact description, with a summary table provided for each impact. Table 4.11-4 from DEIR Section 4.11 "Biological Resources" is provided below as an example.

**TABLE 4.11-4
MITIGATING POLICIES**

Conservation and Open Space (COS) and Water Resources (W) Elements			
Policies designed to minimize this impact through the implementation of land use management practices (including resource agency coordination) designed to protect open space areas include the following:			
COS-7.1.1	Open Space Land Use Definition	COS-7.2.13	Biological Resource Maps
COS-7.1.2	Conservation and Open Space Program	COS-7.2.14	Natural Landscapes in Site Design
COS-7.1.3	Collaborative Open Space Land Use Management	COS-7.2.15	Use of Native Plant Species for Landscaping
COS-7.1.4	Conservation Easements	COS-7.2.16	Controlled Fuel Management
COS-7.2.8	Vehicle and Wildlife Conflicts	COS-7.2.17	Private Land Management
COS-7.2.12	Habitat Protection and Monitoring	COS-7.2.18	Inter-Agency Coordination
Policies designed to minimize this impact through the protection of sensitive open space areas, species, and wildlife movement corridors include the following:			
COS-7.2.1	Habitat Protection	COS-7.2.9	Wildlife Fencing
COS-7.2.2	Species and Habitat Avoidance	COS-7.2.10	Lake Davis Area
COS-7.2.3	Land Use Management	COS-7.2.11	Density Transfers
Policies designed to minimize this impact through the protection of sensitive wetland, riparian, and stream corridor habitats include the following:			
COS-7.2.4	Stream Corridor Development	COS-7.2.6	No Net Loss of Wetland Habitats
COS-7.2.5	Fishery and Stream Corridor Inventories	COS-7.2.7	Wetland and Riparian Habitat Buffers
Policies designed to minimize this impact through the protection of the visual quality of County open space areas include the following:			
COS-7.6.1	Scenic Areas	COS-7.6.4	Community Design
COS-7.6.2	Development in Identified Scenic Areas and Viewsheds	COS-7.6.5	Scenic Impacts of Off-premise Permanent Advertising Signs and Billboards
COS-7.6.3	Scenic Roadway Protection		
Policies designed to minimize this impact through the implementation of best management practices designed to improve the water quality of local lakes, creeks, and rivers include the following:			
W-9.2.1	Participation in Water Quality Objectives	W-9.2.5	Wastewater Standards and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)
W-9.2.2	Background Water Quality		
W-9.2.3	County Facilities	W-9.2.6	Erosion and Sediment Control Measures
W-9.2.4	Wildfire and Water Quality Controls	W-9.7.4	Runoff Quality
		W-9.7.5	Best Management Practices

Baseline Year

As stated in the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15125(a)), an EIR must describe the existing conditions in the vicinity of the proposed project. For each of the environmental resources assessed in this DEIR, the description of existing environmental and regulatory conditions is included under the “Regulatory Setting” and “Environmental Setting” headings in each section.

In describing existing conditions, it is necessary to establish a date at which these conditions exist. As stated in the State CEQA Guidelines (Section 15125(a)), existing conditions are normally assessed “at the time the notice of preparation is published” or if a notice of preparation is not published “at the time environmental analysis is commenced”. The section further states, “This environmental setting will normally constitute the baseline physical conditions by which a Lead Agency determines whether an impact is significant”.

As the original notice of preparation for the DEIR was prepared in 2012, the County established baseline physical conditions for this environmental analysis as those conditions that existed in the County's Study Area at the time that the DEIR was prepared (2012). Given the broad programmatic nature of this DEIR for the proposed project, much of the baseline condition has been collected and/or updated from the General Plan Briefing Report using the most recent countywide resource data available from Federal, State, and other regional sources. This updated information includes use of current Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program data from the California Department of Conservation. However, some of the available baseline data may reference an earlier time period, due to the nature of the data (flood zones, soil conditions, seismic conditions, water conditions, etc) and the frequency in which the agencies responsible for collecting and mapping resource data update their information. The methodology discussion for each environmental resource section in this chapter provides specific information on the types of data used to characterize baseline conditions and prepare each individual analysis.

