

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This document and the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) that was circulated for public review on November 19, 2012 through January 2, 2013 (45-day public review period) and extended to January 11, 2013 are intended to constitute the Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) for the County of Plumas (County) 2035 Plumas County General Plan Update (proposed project). However, certification of the Final EIR rests with the Board of Supervisors; therefore additional materials may be added or modified by the County prior to the time of certification. (CEQA Guidelines §15090.) The information presented in this Final EIR is being provided in accordance with the requirements of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and includes the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1, “Introduction”**, discusses the purpose of this document, public review process, CEQA requirements, and use of this document.
- **Chapter 2, “Comments on the Draft EIR”**, includes a copy of each of the comment letters received during the review period from November 19, 2012 to January 11, 2013. The individual comment letter numbers correspond to those responses provided in Chapter 3.
- **Chapter 3, “Responses to Comments on the Draft EIR”**, contains the written responses to the individual comments received during the public review period for the Draft EIR along with written responses to those comments.
- **Chapter 4, “Minor Revisions to the Draft EIR”**, contains minor changes and edits to the text of the Draft EIR made in response to the comments. These changes correct minor errors and provide clarifications and amplifications to the information previously provided; the changes do not constitute significant new information or result in any new significant impacts.
- **Chapter 5, “Report Preparation”**, identifies the persons, firm, and/or agencies that contributed to preparation of the Final EIR.

It should be noted that throughout the Final EIR, the terms “General Plan Update” and “proposed project” are used interchangeably to describe the 2035 Plumas County General Plan Update that will be considered by County decision makers.

1.2 Project Overview

The County is in the process of amending and updating its existing general plan. The name used for the proposed update is the 2035 Plumas County General Plan Update. The proposed project will reorganize, update, and modernize the County's general plan policies and documents. This Final EIR for the proposed project was prepared in compliance with CEQA (Pub. Res. Code §§21000 et. seq.) and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14). The County is the Lead Agency for the environmental review of the proposed project and has the principal responsibility preparing the EIR and for approving the General Plan Update. As described in the CEQA Guidelines §15121(a), an EIR is a public information document used to inform public agency decision makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a proposed project, as well as mitigation measures and alternatives to the project that would reduce or avoid adverse environmental impacts.¹ CEQA requires that state and local government agencies consider the environmental consequences of plans and projects over which they have discretionary authority. The EIR is an informational document used in the planning and decision-making process. It is not the purpose of an EIR to recommend either approval or denial of a project.

The procedures required by CEQA “are intended to assist public agencies in systematically identifying both the significant effects of proposed projects and the feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures which will avoid or substantially lessen such significant effects” (Public Resources Code Section 21002). As a general rule, “public agencies should not approve projects as proposed if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of such projects.” However, “in the event specific economic, social, or other conditions make infeasible such project alternatives or such mitigation measures, individual projects may be approved in spite of one or more significant effects thereof (*ibid.*)”

Stated differently, under CEQA, a lead agency must make certain determinations before it can approve or carry out a project if the EIR reveals that the project will result in one or more significant environmental impacts.

The lead agency must “certify” the Final EIR. According to the CEQA Guidelines, “certification” consists of three separate steps. Prior to approving a project, the lead agency shall certify that (1) the Final EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA; (2) the Final EIR was presented to the decision-making body of the lead agency and that the body has reviewed and considered the information contained in the Final EIR prior to approving the project; and (3) the Final EIR reflects the lead agency's independent judgment and analysis (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15090(a); see also Public Resources Code, Section 21082.1(c)(3)).

Before approving a project for which a certified Final EIR has identified significant environmental effects, the lead agency must make one or more specific written findings for each of the identified significant impacts. These findings include and are limited to the following:

¹ The term “project” in CEQA includes any activity which may cause either a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment and is undertaken by any public agency. (Pub. Res. Code §21065.) The proposed General Plan 2030 Update is therefore the “project” for purposes of CEQA review.

1. Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project that avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the Final EIR.
2. Such changes or alternations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
3. Specific economic, legal, social, technological or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the Final EIR (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15091(a)).

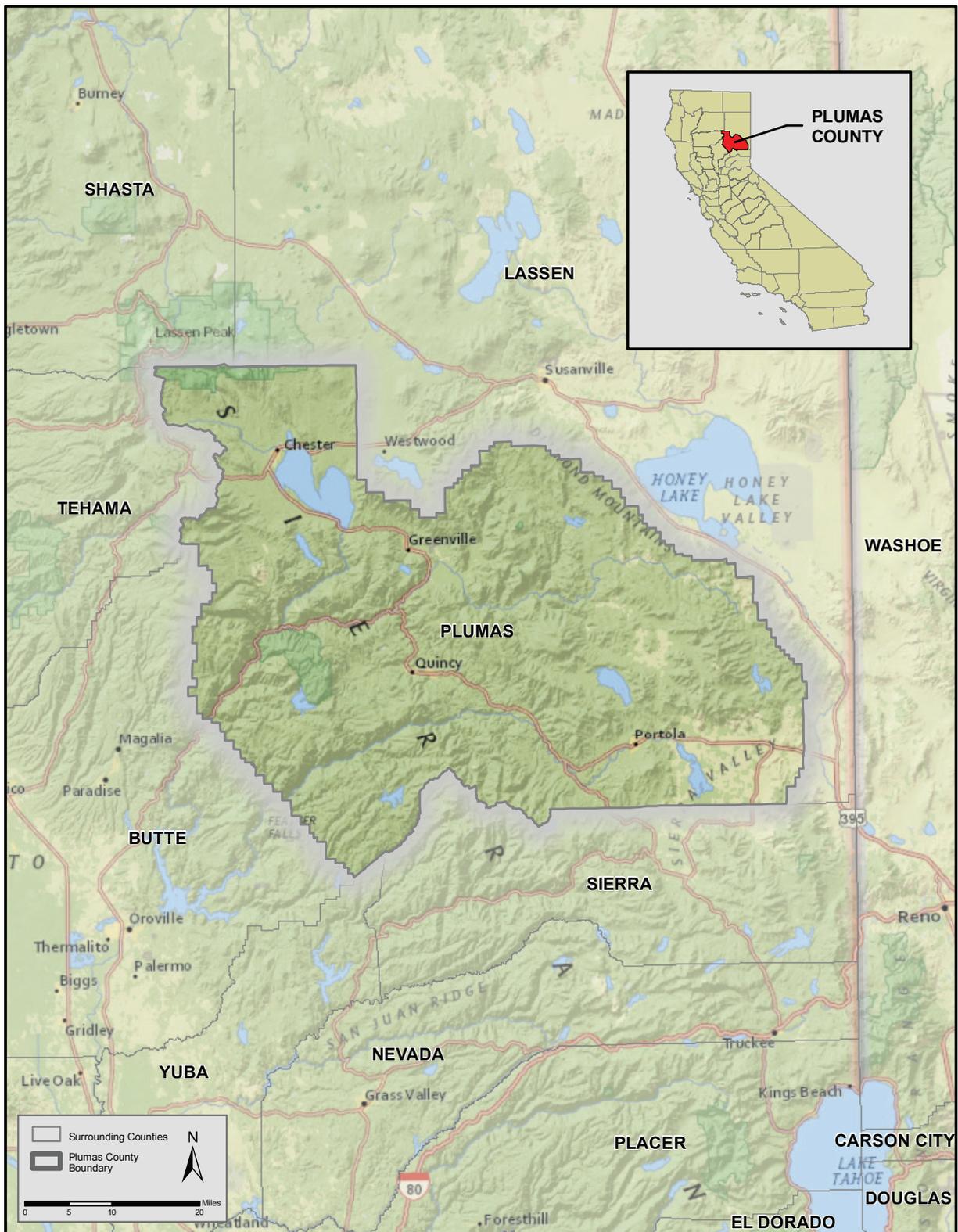
If there remain significant environmental effects even with the adoption of all feasible mitigation measures or alternatives, the agency must adopt a “statement of overriding considerations” before it can proceed with the project. The statement of overriding consideration must be supported by substantial evidence in the record (CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15092 and 15093).

These overriding considerations include the economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the proposed project. The lead agency must balance these potential benefits against the project’s unavoidable environmental risks when determining whether to approve the project. If the specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of a proposed project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, the lead agency may consider the adverse environmental impacts to be “acceptable” (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15093(a)). These benefits should be set forth in the statement of overriding considerations, and may be based on the Final EIR and/or other information in the record of proceedings (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15093(b)).

Notably, the California Supreme Court, reflecting on this multi-step process for considering project impacts and benefits, has stated that, “[t]he wisdom of approving any development project, a delicate task which requires a balancing of interests, is necessarily left to the sound discretion of the local officials and their constituents who are responsible for such decisions. The law as we interpret and apply it simply requires that those decisions be informed, and therefore balanced” (see *Citizens of Goleta Valley v. Board of Supervisors* (1990) 52 Cal.3d 553, 576).

1.3 Project Location

The County of Plumas is located in northern California (**Figure 1-1**). The County is bordered on the north by Lassen and Shasta Counties, on the west by Tehama and Butte Counties, on the south by Sierra and Yuba Counties, and on the east by Lassen County. The County is approximately 2,610 square miles in area. The County is located in the northernmost portion of the Sierra Nevada mountain range and the southernmost portion of the Cascade mountain range. Thus, most of the County is characterized as mountainous terrain, interspersed with valleys. Approximately 65 percent of the land in Plumas County is National Forest land owned and managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The remainder of the County land is mostly in private ownership. The County includes one incorporated City, the City of Portola. The primary geographic extent (Study Area) of the environmental analysis included in this DEIR for the proposed project is the entire County, excluding the City of Portola.



SOURCE: National Geographic World Map; PC Framework Data, 2013

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Figure 1-1
Regional Location

The following is a list of important statistics that help to define the Study Area:

- The land area of Plumas County is approximately 2,610 square miles or 1,670,400 acres.
- The Upper Feather River Watershed has a land area of 3,500 square miles.
- Plumas County is located almost entirely within the watershed and makes up approximately 72% of the watershed's land area.
- Plumas County elevation ranges from 1,800 feet to 8,380 feet.
- 65% of the County's land area is public lands managed by the United States Forest Service, the majority of which falls within the Plumas National Forest and other areas within the Lassen, Toiyabe and Tahoe National Forests. In addition, the County contains a portion of the Lassen Volcanic National Park and is home to the Plumas Eureka State Park.
- An area constituting 6% of the County's land area is owned and managed by other public agencies, including the County and the State.
- Approximately 29% of the County's land area, or 482,910 acres, are privately owned lands. Of the privately owned lands 33.4% (161,290 acres) are located within County planning areas.
- Based on the 2010 U.S. Census, Plumas County is one of California's most rural counties with 7.8 people per square mile for a total of 20,007 residents (2010 U.S. Census).
- Also based on the 2010 U.S. Census, Plumas County is one of three California Counties to have experienced a loss in population (Sierra and Alpine Counties are the other two).

1.4 Program EIR and Final EIR Process

This Final EIR is prepared as a program EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15168. A program EIR assesses the broad environmental impacts of a program (a series of related projects) with the understanding that a more detailed site-specific review may be required to assess future projects implemented under the program. Please refer to Chapters 1 and 2 of the Draft EIR for additional discussion of the program EIR and subsequent environmental review.

The Draft EIR for the proposed project was submitted to the State Clearinghouse (SCH# 2012012016) and released for public and agency review on November 19, 2012. This 54-day public review and comment period concluded on January 11, 2013. During the review period, thirty-one (31) agency/public comment letters were received. These letters with comments pertaining to the Draft EIR are included in Chapter 2 of this Final EIR.

This document includes comments and responses to comments on the Draft EIR and, along with the Draft EIR, comprises the Final EIR for the proposed project. The County Board of Supervisor's will certify the Final EIR at a public hearing.

Consistent with CEQA Guidelines (§15132) this Final EIR consists of:

- a. The Draft EIR.
- b. Comment letters and recommendations received on the Draft EIR.
- c. A list of persons, organizations, and public agencies commenting on the Draft EIR.

- d. The responses of the lead agency to significant environmental points raised in the review and consultation process.
- e. Any other information added by the lead agency prior to certification of the Final EIR.

Items (c) through (d) are included in this document (see chapters 2-5 of this Final EIR). Item (a) and Item (b) are each bound separately. Revisions to the Draft EIR including minor edits and corrections, revisions made as result of comments received and clarifications and modifications are presented in Chapter 5 of this Final EIR. Consequently, this Final EIR document and the Draft EIR together shall comprise the Final EIR.

The true amount of fertilizer N put on fields is unknown, but these estimates are closer to real numbers than 140 lbs N/ac figure from the Sacramento County GHG Inventory that consultants used for Plumas and Sierra Counties. I worked with UCCE colleagues to come up with figures then consulted with a few local growers as well as two major fertilizer salesmen who have serviced the area for years. It is important that nitrogen use efficiency be looked at, not just rate. –Holly George, University of California Cooperative Extension, Plumas-Sierra Counties, April 2013.

Agriculture Sector Notes for Plumas and Sierra County 2005 Community-Wide GHG Inventory Reports

CROP	# AC in Plumas County *	# AC in Sierra County*	Estimated Average #/ac N fertilizer **	Notes
Alfalfa Hay	6,000	1,200	10	N amount from fertilizers is estimate of the annual application of P fertilizers (across all fields) with 11-52-0 being applied. Not applied every year to all fields, with many fields receiving zero for many years. (Range 0-25 #N/ac/yr)
Meadow Hay	3,000	1,600	10	Most (~90%) of this acreage isn't fertilized as it is low quality forage; estimate ~10% of acreage receives 100#N/ac (Range 0-100#N/ac/yr)
Grain Hay	1,000	700	70	Range 0-150#N/ac/yr
Irrigated Pasture	35,000	11,445	25	Some improved irrigated pastures (~10%) are fertilized; but much of the acreage is a grass/sedge/rush mixture with the majority of the acreage (~90%) not being fertilized. (Range 0-80#N/ac/yr)

*Source of figures is 2005 Crop & Livestock Report prepared by Plumas-Sierra County Department of Agriculture

** Source of Estimated fertilizer application, UCCE Intermountain Farm Advisors (Holly George-Plumas-Sierra Counties, Steve Orloff-Siskiyou County, Rob Wilson-Intermountain Research and Extension Center-Tulelake) and Dan Putnam, Statewide Alfalfa-Forage Specialist, UC Davis.

Footnotes

1. These estimates may be high due to the widespread lack of inputs on some of these more marginal grounds, common practice for economic reasons.
2. Rate is only one of the factors when it comes to either water quality impacts or atmospheric gas emissions. Timing (single vs multiple), method of application (surface, knifing in, etc.), and source of fertilizer, plus use of nitrification inhibitors are at least as important if not more important. **This is an important message for the water regulators as well as the air boards.**