

**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

---

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) (Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.) is one of California's most important environmental laws. It requires state and local agencies to disclose and consider the environmental implications of their actions. It further requires agencies to avoid environmental impacts when such avoidance is feasible. In furtherance of these goals, six objectives are identified:

- disclose to decision makers and the public the significant environmental effects of proposed activities;
- identify ways to avoid or reduce environmental damage;
- prevent environmental damage by requiring implementation of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures;
- disclose to the public reasons for agency approvals of projects with significant environmental effects;
- foster interagency coordination; and
- enhance public participation.

The CEQA procedures are guided by the legislative intent to include public participation to the greatest extent possible. The legislature also intended that decision makers be able to make informed decisions based on substantial information regarding a "project" and that these decisions be based on a trail of reasoning accessible to the public.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and its preparation is the method by which information is gathered and organized, impacts assessed, and mitigation measures developed. The EIR is prepared by a lead agency (Placer County), circulated for public review and comment, and a final document with responses to public comments is prepared for consideration by advisory and legislative bodies, in this case the Placer County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

In addition, the State Resources Agency has adopted regulations, known as the state CEQA Guidelines (§15000 et seq.), to guide agencies in implementing the law. The Guidelines provide detailed procedures that agencies must follow to implement CEQA, including the procedures for the preparation of a CEQA document (an EIR for projects that may have significant impacts requiring mitigation measures or a Negative Declaration for projects with no significant impacts).

CEQA is more than merely a procedural statute. Substantive provisions of CEQA include provisions requiring agencies to avoid or mitigate significant impacts disclosed in an EIR when feasible.

### 1.1 TYPE AND PURPOSE OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This document is the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the construction and operation of the Riolo Vineyard Specific Plan ("proposed project"), a residential community with open space, parks, agricultural, and commercial components in an unincorporated area of Placer County (Appendix A). This Draft EIR is both a program-level and project-level EIR prepared pursuant to state CEQA Guidelines §15161 and §15169. It has been prepared for Placer County, which acts in the capacity of Lead Agency pursuant to CEQA, the Placer County Environmental Review Ordinance, and the state CEQA Guidelines. This Draft EIR analyzes the specific impacts of the proposed project, as described in a variety of documents prepared by the Applicant and its consultants, including the plan drawings listed in Chapter 18, References, and supporting documents referenced in this Draft EIR. These documents are incorporated herein by reference and are available for review at the Placer County Planning Department in Auburn, California.

## Project Synopsis

The proposed project would be developed on a 525.8-acre site, located approximately 24 miles southwest of the City of Auburn and 2½ miles southwest of the City of Roseville. The proposed project would include up to 933 residential units, primarily single-family dwelling units, on 265.6 acres. A total of 597 residential units are proposed by the Applicant, with the remaining 330 anticipated to be developed by other landowners in the future. The site's remaining 260.2 acres would consist of agricultural, open space, commercial, and public/quasi-public uses as well as residential developments when the other landowners seek entitlements for their properties. Four access points would be provided from the exterior roadways to enter and exit the site. This Draft EIR examines direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the planning, construction, and operation of the Riolo Vineyard Specific Plan using the most currently available information. A detailed project description is provided in Chapter 3.

## Project-Level and Programmatic-Level Analysis

This Draft EIR analyzes impacts at both the project and programmatic levels. As stated in the CEQA Guidelines §15161, a project-level analysis reviews the environmental impacts of a specific development project and the changes in the environment that would result from the development project, to include its planning, construction, and operation. Accordingly, all parcels in the Plan Area proposed for development by the Applicant are analyzed at the project level. This Draft EIR also analyzes offsite infrastructure impacts at the project level.

The Plan Area includes seven parcels not controlled by the Applicant. Because the Riolo Vineyard Specific Plan does not propose any action on these parcels, they are examined at a programmatic level, i.e., in a broader context that does not consider project-specific impacts. Certain land uses and density assumptions have been incorporated into the project description for program-level parcels that would likely be developed in the future. Programmatic-level review allows the County to consider cumulative impacts and mitigation measures at an early time when it has greater flexibility to deal with basic issues and cumulative impacts (CEQA Guidelines §15168(b)(4)). The County would require that future action on these parcels undergo further environmental review pursuant to CEQA.

## Subsequent Conformity Review Process

Applicants for program-level parcels would need to undergo the County's Subsequent Conformity Review Process to ensure that their development proposals conform to the Riolo Vineyard Specific Plan, CEQA regulations, and program-level mitigation measures identified in this Draft EIR. Upon conclusion of the Subsequent Conformity Review Process, the County will determine whether the proposed development entitlement is consistent with the Specific Plan, whether additional environmental review is required, and if so, the scope of such additional review.

## 1.2 TERMINOLOGY

There is the potential for confusion, given the Plan Area's characteristics, project- and program-level analysis, and offsite infrastructure improvements. The following terms are used throughout this Draft EIR and refer to the physical areas as described below:

**Proposed Project:** The construction and implementation of the Riolo Vineyard Specific Plan.

**Specific plan area or Plan Area:** The area that is proposed for governance and development under the Riolo Vineyard Specific Plan. Its boundaries are Dry Creek to the north, Walerga Avenue to the east, PFE Road to the south, and Watt Avenue to the west.

**Offsite areas:** The area outside of the specific plan area within which infrastructure improvements would be constructed as part of the proposed project or as mitigation for project impacts; these improvements include utility connections for potable water and recycled water pipelines along Walerga Road, PFE Road, and potentially Watt Avenue; connections to an existing Community Facilities District force main east of Walerga Road near Dry Creek; and roadway improvements along Walerga Road, PFE Road, and Watt Avenue.

**Study Area:** The study area includes the specific plan area and the offsite areas unless otherwise identified. For instance, the transportation analysis study area covers a wider geographic area that is influenced by project-generated traffic.

**Project-Level Parcels:** Parcels within the Plan Area owned or controlled by the Applicant and analyzed at a project-level in this Draft EIR.

**Project-Level Analysis:** CEQA analysis performed for parcels owned or controlled by the Applicant and for offsite areas, intended to fully examine the impacts of the project-level parcels. No further environmental review would be required for development of these parcels unless the parameters under which they are analyzed change in the future.

**Program-Level Parcels:** Parcels within the Plan Area not owned or controlled by the Applicant. These parcels may remain in their current uses; however, it is assumed for purposes of this Draft EIR that three program-level parcels would be developed in the future.

**Program-Level Analysis:** CEQA analysis performed for the seven parcels within the Plan Area not owned or controlled by the Applicant are intended to examine the impacts of the program-level parcels with less specificity, unless otherwise specifically described in this Draft EIR, as no development proposals have been submitted to the County for approval. Certain assumptions regarding land uses for these parcels are made in this Draft EIR. Development proposals for program-level parcels would be examined in light of this Draft EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared.

**Residential Unit or Dwelling Unit:** A physical place of residence.

**Equivalent Dwelling Unit:** Equivalent Dwelling Units (EDUs) are units of measure that standardize all land use types (e.g., housing, retail, or office) to the level of demand created by one single-family housing unit. For example, in the case of potable water, one EDU is equivalent to the amount of water (gallons per day) provided to one residential household.

### 1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THIS DRAFT EIR

This Draft EIR is organized as follows: The *Introduction* provides background regarding the type and purpose of the Draft EIR and information regarding project-level and program-level analyses. It describes the organization and terminology used in this document, and the scope of the analysis. It also explains how significance criteria are used to determine whether an impact of the proposed project is significant or not. Opportunities for you to stay involved in the process are identified, and details are provided on where to provide your comments on this Draft EIR and when and where public hearings will be held.

The *Executive Summary* provides a brief description of the proposed project. It summarizes impacts the proposed project would have on environmental resources and the mitigation measures identified to reduce those impacts, where feasible. Significant unavoidable impacts of the proposed project are identified.

Alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIR that would avoid or reduce the significant environmental impacts of the proposed project are described, and impacts they would have are compared to the significant impacts of the proposed project. Areas of controversy are also identified.

The **Project Description** describes the components of the proposed project, and includes tables and figures to help you better understand what is being proposed. It also includes a list of entitlements and approvals that would be required if the proposed project were to be implemented.

The **Resource Chapters** provide information on each of the environmental issues analyzed in this Draft EIR. Each resource chapter (Chapters 4 through 15) includes information regarding the environmental and regulatory setting for the resource, identifying impacts to those resources by the proposed project, and describing mitigation measures to eliminate or reduce significant impacts, where feasible. Each resource chapter is subdivided into the following subsections:

- Environmental Setting
- Regulatory Setting
- Impacts
- Mitigation Measures

For each impact identified, the discussion begins with a brief outline of the impact, its significance, and applicable mitigation measures. For example:

<b>IMPACT 13-5:</b>	Placement of fill or structures in 100-year floodplain
<b>SIGNIFICANCE:</b>	Potentially Significant
<b>MITIGATION:</b>	Mitigation Measures 13-5a through 13-5f
<b>Proposed:</b>	Mitigation Measures 13-5a through 13-5c
<b>Significance After</b>	
<b>Proposed Mitigation:</b>	Potentially Significant
<b>Recommended:</b>	Mitigation Measures 13-5d through 13-5f
<b>RESIDUAL SIGNIFICANCE:</b>	Less than Significant

The **Other CEQA Considerations** chapter includes the analyses of alternatives to the proposed project, comparing them to the proposed project in each environmental resource category evaluated for the proposed project, as required by CEQA, and an environmentally superior alternative is identified. This chapter also includes the cumulative impact analyses for each environmental resource category, and identifies growth-inducing effects of the proposed project, unavoidable significant environmental impacts, and significant irreversible environmental changes as a result of the proposed project.

**Appendices** provide information in support of the above information, including the Notices of Preparation and comment letters received in response to them, an analysis regarding consistency of the proposed project to the policies of the *Placer County General Plan* and the *Dry Creek/West Placer Community Plan*, and additional information.

## 1.4 SCOPE OF THE DRAFT EIR

As required by CEQA, the Draft EIR must focus only on significant environmental effects (Guidelines §15143). Based on the NOP and Initial Study (Appendices B and C), the environmental issues requiring analysis in this Draft EIR are land use; population, employment and housing; biology; cultural resources; visual resources; transportation and circulation; air quality; noise; soils, geology and seismicity; hydrology and water quality; public services and utilities; and hazardous materials.

The Draft EIR characterizes the existing environmental resources of the study area, analyzes potential impacts to those resources as required by CEQA (as a result of implementation of the proposed project), and identifies mitigation measures to reduce impacts. It also analyzes the impact of traffic mitigation measures to be constructed by the Applicant. Other CEQA-related issues are also analyzed, such as potential cumulative and growth-inducing impacts resulting from the proposed project. The following alternatives to the proposed project are analyzed in this Draft EIR: (1) No Project Alternative, which includes two subalternatives, (1A) No Development Alternative and (1B) Community Plan Development Alternative; (2) Floodplain Encroachment Avoidance Alternative; (3) Reduced Density Alternative; and (4) Clustered Development Alternative.

## 1.5 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

In general, CEQA *Guidelines* define a significant effect on the environment as “a substantial, or potentially substantial” adverse change in the physical environment. A potential impact is considered significant if a project would substantially degrade the environmental quality of land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance (CEQA Guidelines, 1998). Definitions of significance vary with the physical condition affected and the setting in which the change occurs. The CEQA *Guidelines* set forth physical impacts that trigger the requirement to make “mandatory findings of significance” (CEQA *Guidelines*, 1998).

This CEQA document relies on three levels of impact significance:

1. Less-than-significant impact, for which no mitigation measures are warranted;
2. Significant impact that can be mitigated to a level that is less than significant; and,
3. Significant impact that cannot be mitigated to a level that is less than significant. Such impacts are significant and unavoidable.

Each resource area uses a distinct set of significance criteria. For example, a proposed project resulting in an exposure of persons to noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or community plan would be considered a significant impact. If existing levels, without the proposed project, already exceed the standards, an increase in noise levels of 3 dB attributable to the proposed project would be considered significant. Construction of appropriate sound walls could reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level. If criteria for determining significance relative to a specific environmental resource impact are not identified in the *Guidelines*, criteria were developed for this Draft EIR consistent with the past pattern and practice of Placer County.

The significance criteria are identified at the beginning of the impacts discussion for each resource area. These significance criteria promote consistent evaluation of impacts for all alternatives considered, even though significance criteria are necessarily different for each resource considered.

## 1.6 CEQA PROCESS

An NOP and Initial Study for this Draft EIR were issued on November 1, 2005 (Appendix B). A Public Scoping Meeting was held at the Placer County Planning Commission Hearing Room on October 5, 2005. Comment letters received on the November 2005 NOP and at the Public Scoping Meeting are also included in Appendix B. A revised NOP was released for public comment on July 28, 2006 (Appendix C). Comment letters received on the July 2006 NOP are also included in Appendix C.

The distribution list for this Draft EIR is contained in Chapter 19. This Draft EIR is available for public review at the following locations:

- Placer County Planning Department, 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn, CA
- Auburn/Placer County Library, 350 Nevada Street, Auburn, CA
- County web site [www.placer.ca.gov](http://www.placer.ca.gov)

Comments on this Draft EIR can be sent to Maywan Krach at the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn, CA 95603. The comment period begins on January 25, 2008 and ends on March 10, 2008. In addition, a public hearing to receive comments on this Draft EIR will be held during the comment period in the County's Planning Commission hearing room at 3901 County Center Drive in Auburn, at a date to be determined. Comments received during the comment period and at the public hearing will be addressed in the Final EIR. The Final EIR will be reviewed by the Placer County Planning Commission and by the Placer County Board of Supervisors for certification in accordance with CEQA and Placer County Guidelines. If the project is ultimately approved, written findings of fact for each significant environmental impact identified in the EIR will be prepared to:

- Determine that the proposed project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact;
- Find that changes to the proposed project are within another agency's jurisdiction, and such changes have been or should be adopted; and/or
- Find that specific economic, social, or other considerations make mitigation measures or proposed project alternatives infeasible.

Such findings must be based on substantial evidence in the administrative record and must include an explanation that bridges the gap between evidence in the record and the conclusions required by CEQA.

If the decision-making body elects to proceed with a project that will generate significant unavoidable impacts, then a Statement of Overriding Considerations explaining the decision to balance the benefits of the project against unavoidable environmental impacts is necessary. Based on the findings described above, a Statement of Overriding Considerations in such case would be prepared as part of the project approval process.