

2.1 California Environmental Quality Act

This environmental impact report (EIR) (State Clearinghouse No. 2007121001) has been prepared according to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) California Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.; the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3); and the rules, regulations, and procedures for implementing CEQA as adopted by the County of Monterey (County). It evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed 2007 Monterey County General Plan update (2007 General Plan) for the unincorporated non-coastal portion of the County. A copy of the 2007 General Plan is located on the accompanying CD at the end of this EIR.

2.1.1 Purpose of the Environmental Impact Report

The purpose of this EIR is to inform County decision-makers, representatives of other affected/responsible agencies, the public, and other interested parties of the potential environmental effects that may be associated with the 2007 General Plan, mitigation measures to reduce those effects, and a range of alternatives to the project.

According to Section 15002 of the CEQA Guidelines, the basic purposes of CEQA are to:

- Inform government decision-makers and the public about the potential significant environmental effects of proposed activities;
- Identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly reduced;
- Prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring changes in projects through the use of alternatives or mitigation measures when the governing agency finds the changes to be feasible; and
- Disclose to the public the reasons why a governmental agency approved the project in the manner the agency chose if significant environmental effects are involved.

The process of preparing an EIR involves the following discrete steps:

- Issuance of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) soliciting the comments of public agencies and interested organizations and individuals regarding the scope and content of the EIR. The NOP is available for comment for at least 30 days. An NOP was distributed for this EIR on December 2, 2007. The comments to the NOP received from agencies and the public are included in Appendix A of this EIR.
- A scoping meeting to offer an additional opportunity for input prior to preparation of the Draft EIR. A scoping meeting was held at the Planning Department office in Salinas in January 2007.
- Preparation and release for public review and comment of the Draft EIR. The Draft EIR will be available for at least 45 days for public agencies and interested organizations and individuals to review. The county will respond to all pertinent comments in the Final EIR.
- Preparation of the Final EIR. This will contain the Draft EIR, the comments received (and a list of commenters), written responses to comments, and any revisions that are made to the Draft EIR in response to the comments. The County Board of Supervisors will consider the Final EIR prior to taking action on the 2007 General Plan.
- Adoption of findings and a statement of overriding considerations. The Board of Supervisors will adopt a set of “findings” that describe how each significant effect is being addressed. Because the 2007 General Plan will result in significant and unavoidable impacts, the County will also adopt a statement of overriding considerations that explains the specific benefits of adopting the General Plan.

An EIR is an informational document. Each of the following sections of the EIR addresses potential significant adverse environmental impacts associated with development pursuant to the 2007 General Plan. Impacts are disclosed separately for development to the 2030 planning horizon and up to full buildout, which is expected to occur in 2092. The EIR examines the potential effects of the 2007 General Plan in the context of the proposed plan policies. Where the 2007 General Plan policies would not be sufficient to reduce impacts to a less than significant level and there is feasible mitigation that would do so, the EIR identifies that mitigation.

The EIR neither approves nor denies a project. The Monterey County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will use to EIR to inform themselves of the impacts of the 2007 General Plan before taking action on the plan. They will also consider other information and testimony that will arise during deliberations on the proposed plan. After weighing this information, they will then make their decision.

Environmental impacts cannot always be mitigated to a level that is considered less than significant. In accordance with Section 15093(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, if a Lead Agency approves a project that has significant impacts that cannot be mitigated (i.e., significant unavoidable impacts), the agency cannot

approve the project without specifying in writing the project benefits that justify its approval. Because a general plan involves land uses for an entire county, most general plan EIRs identify significant and unavoidable impacts. This EIR is no exception. As mentioned above, prior to approving the 2007 General Plan in its final form, the County will adopt a “statement of overriding considerations” that describes the specific benefits that outweigh the significant and unavoidable impacts of the plan.

2.1.2 Level of Detail

This EIR considers the potential environmental effects of implementing the 2007 General Plan. The CEQA Guidelines provides that “[t]he degree of specificity required in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity involved in the underlying activity which is described in the EIR” (CEQA Guidelines 15146). The 2007 General Plan is a broad statement of policies. Accordingly, this EIR “need not be as detailed as an EIR on ... specific construction projects” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15146). Further actions or procedures necessary to implementing the 2007 General Plan will include the processing of zoning plans, specific plans, tentative tract maps, site design plans, building permits, and/or grading permits.

To keep the analysis of impacts in this Program EIR in perspective, the County of Monterey contains an area of 3,771 square miles. It includes well-established urban, suburban, and rural communities of varying sizes and development intensity. The County has an extensive array of agricultural lands, lands devoted to mineral extraction, and recreational areas. There are rugged mountains, flat valley areas, and expansive natural open space areas. In addition, the County contains large expanses of Federal and State lands and 12 incorporated cities that are not under the land use authority of the County. The analysis in an EIR for a county this size is not intended to be site-specific, but is a more broad analysis. For instance, the traffic analysis determines on a gross level whether development under the 2007 General Plan will result in traffic congestion and where that would occur. It cannot, however, determine the specific street improvements that individual future projects might need in order to avoid their site-specific impacts on the traffic system.

2.1.3 Prior General Plan EIR

A Final EIR was previously prepared and certified by Monterey County for its 2006 General Plan (GPU4) in early 2007. This draft EIR for the 2007 General Plan is a new, stand alone analysis of the potential significant effects of the proposed 2007 General Plan. To the extent applicable, information from the Final EIR, certified for GPU 4, has been utilized.

2.2 Intended Use of the Environmental Impact Report

This EIR is prepared for the purpose of analyzing, at a broad scale, the proposed 2007 General Plan for the County of Monterey. The EIR will be the foundation for the County's deliberations on and approval of the 2007 General Plan. The CEQA Guidelines provide that "the degree of specificity in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity in the underlying activity that is described in the EIR" (Section 15146). Here, the underlying activity is adoption of a general plan for Monterey County—defined by state law as "a statement of development policies [that] shall include a diagram or diagrams and text setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals" (Government Code Section 65302). With some exceptions, as explained below, the general plan will apply countywide. Accordingly, this EIR does not take a parcel-specific view or provide a parcel-specific analysis of potential impacts resulting from the proposed 2007 General Plan.

The following discretionary actions are anticipated to be taken by Monterey County based on this EIR:

- Adoption of the Monterey County 2007 General Plan.

2.2.1 General Plan Adoption

Adoption of the 2007 General Plan is an action that is the responsibility of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors. The proposed 2007 General Plan will first be considered by the County Planning Commission, which will offer its recommendations to the Board. The Board will take final action on the General Plan. Public hearings will be part of both the Planning Commission and Board deliberations. No other action or permit is necessary in order to approve the general plan.

Prior to considering the 2007 General Plan, the County has contacted Native American tribes to solicit their opinions, as provided by SB 18. The County has also consulted with state and local agencies through the CEQA process. A list of the extensive contacts made during the consultation period is available upon request to the Monterey County Planning Department.

2.2.2 Future Use of this EIR

After certification by the County Board of Supervisors, this EIR may be used by the County and other agencies as a "first tier" document for later projects, as authorized by Section 15183 (projects consistent with a community plan or zoning) of the State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Section 15000, et seq.). As a first tier document, the EIR would be the basis for

later CEQA reviews. Reviews of later proposals under this provision of CEQA would be required to consider any project-specific impacts that were not addressed in the 2007 General Plan EIR.

These later projects are not known at this time. However, they may include County actions such as:

- Rezoning undertaken to make zoning consistent with the 2007 General Plan
- Adoption of plans for Community Areas and Rural Centers, to the extent that such plans are consistent with the 2007 General Plan and recognizing that there will be site-specific impacts needing additional CEQA analysis.
- Adoption of the Capital Infrastructure Financing Plans and similar infrastructure-related plans set out under the 2007 General Plan, with the understanding that site-specific impacts will require additional CEQA analysis.
- Actions to implement the Agricultural Wineries Corridor Plan component of the 2007 General Plan, again recognizing that site-specific impacts will require further CEQA review.

Other agencies may also utilize this EIR for their decisions. The extent to which the EIR is relied upon will depend upon whether the actions are consistent with the 2007 General Plan, there are new project-specific impacts requiring additional CEQA review, and whether the other agency chooses to use the EIR. There are no such proposed actions by other agencies currently known. However, other actions may include:

- Consideration of annexation requests by the Local Agency Formation Commission of Monterey County.

2.3 Environmental Impact Report Focus

Due to the comprehensive nature of the 2007 General Plan, the following topics are addressed in this EIR:

- Land Use
- Agricultural Resources
- Water Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Mineral Resources
- Transportation
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Biological Resources

- Cultural Resources
- Public Services and Utilities
- Parks and Recreation
- Hazardous Materials
- Aesthetics, Light, and Glare
- Population and Housing
- Climate Change

2.4 Document Format

To assist the reader's review of the document, the following describes the format of this Program EIR.

Section 1.0 is an executive summary of the contents and findings contained in this document. It also contains a brief description of the proposed project, areas of controversy, public review procedures, and a summary table listing all project impacts, mitigation measures that have been recommended to reduce any significant impacts of the 2007 General Plan, and the level of significance of each impact following mitigation. This section also briefly describes the alternatives.

Section 2.0 describes this EIR's purpose and legal requirements, as well as its intended use. It contains an outline of the document and a list of the environmental issues that are discussed in this EIR.

Section 3.0 details the description for the 2007 General Plan, including history, setting (land uses), and proposed objectives.

Section 4.0 contains the environmental analysis of the 2007 General Plan, by environmental topic. Discussion of existing setting, thresholds of significance impacts, and mitigation measures by environmental topic (e.g., aesthetics, air quality, and noise) is organized according to the following framework:

- Methodology
- Thresholds of Significance
- Impact Analysis
 - Environmental Topic
 - Impact
 - 2030 Planning Horizon
 - Impact of Development with Policies
 - 2007 General Plan Policies

- Area Plan Policies
 - Significance Determination
 - Mitigation Measures
 - Significance Conclusion
- Buildout
 - Impact of Development with Policies
 - 2007 General Plan Policies
 - Area Plan Policies
 - Significance Determination
 - Mitigation Measures
 - Significance Conclusion

Section 5.0 contains discussion of alternatives to development of the 2007 General Plan. As allowed by CEQA, most of the impacts of these alternatives are evaluated at a more general level than the analyses contained in Section 4.0.

Section 6.0 contains discussions of additional topics required by CEQA, including unavoidable effects of the 2007 General Plan, significant irreversible environmental changes, growth inducing impacts, cumulative impacts, and consistency with regional plans.

Sections 7.0 through 11.0 contain listings of organizations and persons consulted in preparation of the, the EIR preparers, references, glossary, and acronyms.

The Appendices contain copies of the NOP and comment letters, and technical reports.

2.5 Approach to the Impact Analysis

The County has relied primarily on growth projections in the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) 2004 Regional Forecast as the basis for determining potential impacts to resources that would result from implementation of the 2007 General Plan. Where appropriate, data regarding trends have also been incorporated into the analysis. The AMBAG 2004 Regional Forecast was utilized by AMBAG in an iterative process with local, regional and state agencies as the basis for its certified traffic model. That model projects traffic to the year 2030.

In December 2007, AMBAG received a revised forecast from the California Department of Finance (DOF) which, based upon updated population data and employment statistics, projected a considerable decline in population and

employment growth for the region. Consistent with the data provided by DOF, the AMBAG Board adopted a revised forecast in April 2008. This revised forecast will provide the basis for a future update of the regional traffic model; however, revising the model will require a lengthy iterative process and therefore is not available for use by the County in preparation of this Draft EIR for the 2007 General Plan.

The 2004 forecast projected a 35,123 person increase in population from 2000 to 2030 and 28,198 new jobs. The 2008 forecast projects a 13,204 person increase in population from 2000 to 2030 and 17,909 new jobs. The projected growth in population for AMBAG 2008 (13,204) is 62% less than AMBAG 2004 projections (35,123). The projected growth in employment for AMBAG 2008 is 36% less than AMBAG 2004 projections (28,198 versus 17,909).

The County considered modifying its EIR analysis to reflect the revised forecast. However, for the purposes of this EIR, the County will utilize the AMBAG 2004 population projections. There are three reasons for doing so. First, AMBAG 2004 projections form the basis for the regionally approved traffic model. Using these projections provides consistency between population and traffic assumptions. Second, the adopted Housing Element of the Monterey County General Plan is based on the 2004 population projections. Using the same projections retains internal consistency between the elements of the General Plan. Third, the 2004 AMBAG projections are somewhat higher than those of both the California Department of Finance and AMBAGs 2008 projections. Using the higher projections for purpose of CEQA analysis leads to more conservative results.

Since changes to the traffic model require a lengthy iterative process among all of the jurisdictions and transportation agencies, it was not feasible for the County to unilaterally adjust the regional traffic model to fit with the revised 2008 projections. Rather than proceed with two different sets of data, which might have resulted in some internal inconsistencies for the EIR analysis, the County decided to utilize the 2004 forecast for its impact analysis. This will result in an assessment of potential impacts between today (baseline) and 2030 that exceeds likely impacts and therefore is a more conservative approach. For example, traffic volumes in the 2004 model are greater than would likely occur based upon the reduced growth projections of the 2008 forecast.

The State encourages jurisdictions to revise their general plans periodically. Typically in California, General Plans are comprehensively updated every 20 year and the typical planning horizon for most general plans is a twenty-year timeframe. Housing Elements are required to be updated at least every 5 years. A general plan theoretically allows more growth in a jurisdiction than is likely to occur in any 20-year timeframe. Full buildout, or development that could occur to the maximum density allowed on every residential parcel, is a concept that requires making assumption about the rate of growth, socio-economic changes, international competition and personal preferences of the residents of an area. It also must factor in a number of resource constraints, e.g., availability of water, and other infrastructure constraints.

The analysis for the EIR also distinguishes between reasonably foreseeable growth from 2006 to the horizon year for the General Plan of 2030 (end date for the certified traffic model) and growth beyond 2030 (full buildout). Growth to 2030 is again calculated in accordance with the AMBAG 2004 forecast. In order to determine the theoretical year in which full buildout would occur, the County has utilized the same rate of growth assumed in the 2004 AMBAG forecast from 2006 up to 2030 and projected that out to the future beyond 2030. Using the AMBAG growth estimates and assumption that there are 2.78 persons per house, there would be 417 new units per year in the unincorporated County between 2006 and 2030. There is no official Department of Finance projection for growth at the end of the century in Monterey County. However, it was necessary to comply with the requirement to evaluate the impacts of the General Plan at full buildout. Using the same assumptions as the 2006–2030 timeframe, buildout (74,573 residential units) would occur in 62 years or in 2092.

For purposes of this analysis, the EIR did not factor in the economic, social, technological and political factors that could change the rate of growth in either direction. With respect to impacts between 2030 and 2092, the discussion in each section reflects that assumptions about changes in projections that would occur in the future, and the variety of factors acting on the policy landscape, including potential technological advances, are speculative. Nevertheless, the analysis has examined impacts based upon what the County believes is the “worst case” scenario for growth into the future (e.g., growth will proceed at the same rate as the AMBAG 2004 forecast without taking into consideration availability of water, job availability, global economic factors or other potential infrastructure constraints).

