

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) describes the potential environmental effects that could result from implementation of the proposed Sonoma County General Plan 2020 (*Draft GP 2020*), which provides policy guidelines for the unincorporated portions of Sonoma County to direct growth and development to the year 2020.

The *State CEQA Guidelines* charge public agencies with the responsibility of avoiding or minimizing environmental damage where feasible. As part of this responsibility, public agencies are required to balance various public objectives, including economic, environmental, and social issues. An EIR is integral to that process, informing decision-makers and the general public what significant effects might result from a proposed project. In addition, the document identifies possible means of minimizing any significant effects and presents reasonable alternatives to the project. In making its decision about the project, the lead agency, in this case Sonoma County, must consider the information in this EIR along with any other available information.

1.1 EIR REQUIREMENT

Environmental review in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is required as part of the County's consideration of the *Draft GP 2020*. An Initial Study, completed by Sonoma County on January 3, 2003, confirmed the need for an EIR and determined the topics for analysis (also called impact areas). The Initial Study is included in *Appendix 7.4 Initial Study*. The Initial Study identified the following areas as potentially being significantly impacted by the project:

- Land Use, Population, and Housing
- Transportation
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Hydrology and Water Resources
- Biological Resources
- Geology / Soils
- Agriculture
- Public Services
- Cultural Resources
- Visual Resources
- Energy
- Hazardous Materials

In compliance with CEQA, Sonoma County sent a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on January 7, 2003 to government agencies, special service districts, organizations, and individuals with an interest in or jurisdiction over the project. This step ensured early consultation on the scope of the EIR. The comment period lasted for 30 days after receipt of the NOP, at which point the Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD) scheduled a public scoping meeting for the project, which was held on January 21, 2003. ¹

¹ The NOP and responses to the NOP are available at the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, 2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa CA, 95403.

The Draft EIR has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, including the *CEQA Statutes* (Public Resources Code §§ 21000-21178.1), *State CEQA Guidelines*, and relevant court decisions.

A PROGRAM EIR

CEQA distinguishes between project and program EIRs, defining a program EIR as one that addresses a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and can be related

- Geographically;
- As logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions;
- In connection with the issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or
- As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects that can be mitigated in similar ways.

The *Sonoma County GP 2020 Draft EIR* is a program EIR under Section 15168 of the *State CEQA Guidelines* and evaluates the environmental impacts of the proposed project on a general level rather than a project-specific level. Its analysis is considered the first tier of environmental review, creating the foundation on which future, project-specific CEQA documents can build. A program EIR can be incorporated by reference into subsequently prepared environmental documents to address issues such as cumulative impacts and growth inducing impacts, allowing the subsequent documents to focus on new or site-specific impacts.

The General Plan policies take into account many of the impacts and mitigation measures discussed in this EIR, so that the new plan effectively becomes self-mitigating for many impacts. The EIR was prepared under the direction of the County of Sonoma and is provided for review by the public and by public agencies, as required. The Final EIR must be certified by the Board of Supervisors prior to adoption of the General Plan. Due to the programmatic nature of the General Plan, this EIR has been prepared as a “program” EIR. As described in CEQA Guidelines § 15168(a)(3), a program EIR “may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related...in connection with the issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program.” As a program EIR, this document focuses on the overall effect of the General Plan. This analysis does not examine the effects of site specific projects that may occur within the overall umbrella of this program in the future. The nature of general plans is such that many proposed policies are intended to be general, with details to be worked out during implementation. Thus, many of the impacts and mitigation measures can only be described in general or qualitative terms.

1.2 EIR OBJECTIVITY

In accordance with CEQA, this EIR:

- Assesses the expected impacts of the ultimate environmental changes resulting from the planned population, housing, and employment growth and implementation of the policies in the *Draft GP 2020*;

- Identifies mitigation measures that could avoid or minimize potentially significant environmental impacts; and
- Evaluates alternatives to the proposed project

If an EIR determines that there will be significant impacts as the result of a project, agencies with authority over the project must make one or more of the following findings:

- Changes have been required in the project that would avoid or substantially reduce significant impacts;
- Such changes are the responsibility of another public agency; or
- Specific economic, social, or other considerations make the mitigation measures of the EIR or project alternative(s) infeasible.

After considering the Final EIR, the lead agency shall not approve a project unless all significant effects have been eliminated or reduced where feasible or the agency adopts a statement of overriding considerations finding that economic, legal, social technological or other benefits of the proposed project outweigh its unavoidable adverse environmental effects.

The EIR is a factual, objective, public-disclosure document that takes no position on the merits of the project, but rather provides information on which decisions about the project can be based. The EIR has been prepared according to the professional standards and practices of the EIR consultants' individual disciplines and in conformance with the legal requirements and informational expectations of CEQA and the State and local guidelines in place to implement it. EIR authors are listed in *Appendix 7.1 Report Preparers*.

1.3 INFORMATION USED TO PREPARE THE EIR

The *State CEQA Guidelines* permit any person to submit information to assist in the preparation of an EIR, but require independent review of the information to ensure that it accurately reflects the lead agency's judgment about the environmental impacts of the project. In addition, Sonoma County hosted a significant Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) process over a period of several years in preparing the *Draft GP 2020*. In addition to the CAC, there were several subcommittees addressing a range of issues including Riparian Corridors/Biological Habitat, Agricultural Tourism, Agricultural Processing and Support Services, Water Resources, and Circulation. Public input at these meetings and staff findings were summarized in staff reports that list all the issues raised and their outcomes. As part of this process, independent consultants have also prepared reports on various impact areas that were used in the preparation of this document. Sources listed below are also referenced in *Appendix 7.3 Bibliography*.

Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Public Hearing Draft

This is the document analyzed in this EIR. This document is referenced in this Draft EIR as the *Draft GP 2020*. See *Chapter 3.0 Project Description* for a complete description of this document.

Sonoma County General Plan, March 23, 1989 as amended

This is the existing general plan for Sonoma County. This document is referenced in this Draft EIR as the existing *General Plan*. This document is currently used by the County staff to guide development within the unincorporated portion of the county.

Final EIR Sonoma County General Plan, March 1989

This document analyzes the potential impacts of the existing *General Plan*. It includes the December 1986 Draft EIR and the responses to comments on the Draft EIR.

1.4 PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

Copies of the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Public Hearing Draft and this Draft EIR are available through the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department and online at www.sonoma-county.org. Sonoma County will also circulate the document to public agencies, relevant organizations and interested individuals.

Comments may be submitted in writing or orally at a public hearing to be held by the Sonoma County Planning Commission. Comments should be focused on the adequacy and completeness of the EIR or should address questions about the environmental consequences of project implementation. In this case, “adequacy” is defined as the thoroughness of the EIR in addressing significant environmental effects, identifying mitigation measures for those impacts, and supplying enough information for public officials to make decisions about the merits of the project. In order to keep the documents succinct and useful as decision-making tools, the *State CEQA Guidelines* charge that EIRs focus on a project’s significant impacts and not address every imaginable less-than-significant effect.

Comments on the Draft EIR must be made before the close of the public review period and sent or delivered to:

Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department
Attn: Bob Gaiser
2550 Ventura Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2829

Comments can be sent by email to: Bgaiser@sonoma-county.org

After the close of the public review period, a Final EIR will be prepared that contains all the comments received by the County during the public review period and responses to those comments. This document will be made available to public agencies and the general public so those parties can review the Final EIR before the County certifies it as complete.

No action can be taken on the *Draft GP 2020* until the Final EIR is certified; however, County acceptance of the EIR upon certification does not signal or require approval of the project studied.

1.5 AGENCIES EXPECTED TO USE THE EIR

Sonoma County, in addition to updating its own General Plan, is also affected by plans made for the area by federal, State, regional, and other local agencies. It is important for the success of any plan

that it be coordinated with other organizations making plans for the same area. This is especially true in Sonoma County where several important services, such as water supply, sewage treatment, and regional freeways, are the primary responsibility of other agencies. These agencies may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Federal Agencies

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Federal Aviation Administration
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies

- California Air Resources Board
- California Board of Forestry
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans District 4)
- California Coastal Commission
- California Department of Conservation
- California Department of Fish and Game
- California Department of Forestry
- California Department of Health Services
- California Division of Mines and Geology
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- California Public Utilities Commission
- California State Water Resources Control Board (North Coast Region)
- California Resources Agency
- California States Lands Commission
- California Resources Agency

Regional Agencies

- Association of Bay Area Governments
- Sonoma County Transportation Authority
- Bay Area Air Quality Management District
- San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission
- Marin-Sonoma Mosquito Abatement District
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission
- Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District
- Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit District
- Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District
- Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
- North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Bay Area Regional Water Quality Control Board

Local Agencies

- City of Cloverdale
- City of Cotati
- City of Healdsburg
- City of Petaluma

- City of Rohnert Park
- City of Santa Rosa
- City of Sebastopol
- City of Sonoma
- Town of Windsor
- Water Supply Agencies (including the Sonoma County Water Agency, Bodega Bay Public Utilities District, Sea Ranch Water Company, Occidental Water Company, Geyserville Water Works, Forestville Water District, Sweetwater Springs Water District in the Russian River area, City of Santa Rosa Department of Public Utilities in the urban South Park area, the Town of Windsor in the Airport Industrial Area, California American Water in the Larkfield-Wikiup area, the Penngrove Water Company, and the Valley of the Moon Water District in Sonoma Valley.
- Wastewater Management Agencies (including the Sonoma County Water Agency)
- Numerous school districts (31 elementary districts, three high school districts and six unified districts)

1.6 REPORT ORGANIZATION

After this introduction, the EIR is organized into the following sections.

Chapter 2.0 – Summary of Findings

Outlines the proposed project and provides, in table format, a listing of the impacts, mitigation, and level of significance after mitigation.

Chapter 3.0 – Project Description

Describes the project in greater detail, provides an overview of the general plan update process and objectives, discusses the relationship of the *Draft GP 2020* to other area and regional plans, and introduces the growth projections.

Chapter 4.0 – Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures

Provides the environmental analysis for each of the 13 impact areas, listing the setting and relevant *Draft GP 2020* policies, environmental impacts, levels of significance, mitigation measures, and level of significance after mitigation.

Chapter 5.0 – Alternatives

Discusses the project alternatives and their associated environmental impacts.

Chapter 6.0 – Impact Overview

Beyond the impact discussion in *Chapter 4.0*, this chapter lists growth-inducing impacts, cumulative impacts, significant unavoidable impacts, and significant irreversible environmental changes.

Chapter 7.0 – Appendices

All appendices to the EIR, including the Initial Study.