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## **3.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

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The following is an introduction to the environmental analysis for the proposed projects, including a discussion of general assumptions used in the environmental analysis and a discussion regarding the cumulative analysis. The reader is referred to the individual technical sections of this Draft EIR (Sections 4.0 through 15.0) for further information on the specific assumptions and methodologies used in the analysis for each particular technical subject.

### **ANALYSIS ASSUMPTIONS USED TO EVALUATE THE IMPACTS OF THE PROJECTS**

#### **BASELINE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS ASSUMED IN THE DRAFT EIR**

Section 15125(a) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines requires that an EIR include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the projects as they exist at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The CEQA Guidelines also specify that this description of the physical environmental conditions will normally serve as the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether impacts of a project are considered significant. The Notice of Preparation of the EIR for the proposed projects was published on January 6, 2016. Consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15125, each technical section of this EIR (Sections 4.0 through 15.0) contains a description of the physical setting at the time of NOP publication, in this case, January 6, 2016. Impacts associated with implementation of the proposed projects are measured against the existing conditions at the time the NOP was published.

#### **STRUCTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS**

Sections 4.0 through 15.0 of this Draft EIR contain an evaluation of the direct and indirect environmental effects resulting from the implementation of the proposed projects. These sections also describe feasible mitigation measures and identify whether significant environmental effects of the projects would remain after application of the feasible mitigation measures. The individual technical sections of the Draft EIR include the following information:

#### **General Environmental Conditions and Regulations**

This subsection includes a regional description of the physical setting associated with the technical area of discussion that applies to all three project sites, consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15125. This subsection also identifies federal, state, regional, and local plans, policies, laws, and regulations that apply to the technical area of discussion and all three project sites.

#### **Impact Methodology**

This subsection lists the standards used to determine the significance of each project impact and is based on CEQA Guidelines Appendix G as well as any specific significance thresholds adopted by the County. This subsection also includes a description of the methodology used to analyze the impacts of the projects for the subject technical section.

#### **Project-Specific Impact Analysis**

A subsection is provided for each of the proposed projects. These subsections include additional site-specific environmental setting descriptions, if applicable, and a summary of any site-specific regulations which were not discussed in the General Environmental Conditions and Regulations subsection.

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This subsection then identifies direct and indirect environmental effects associated with implementation of each of the proposed projects. The previously identified standards of significance are used to determine whether the environmental effects are considered "significant" and require the application of mitigation measures. Each environmental impact is identified numerically and with an abbreviation for which project it applies (e.g., Impact 4.1.1 (AS) – Adversely Affect a Scenic Vista and/or Substantially Degrade the Visual Character of the Site) and is supported by substantial evidence.

This Draft EIR uses the following terminology to describe environmental effects of the proposed projects:

- **Standards of Significance:** 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 the CEQA Guidelines; factual or scientific information; regulatory performance standards of local, state, and federal agencies; and County goals, objectives, and policies.
- **Less Than Significant Impact:** A less than significant impact would cause no substantial change in the environment. No mitigation is required.
- **Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated:** An impact that can be reduced to a less than significant level with mitigation identified in the EIR.
- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact:** A significant and unavoidable impact would result in a substantial change in the environment that cannot be avoided or mitigated to a less than significant level if the individual project is implemented. A significant and unavoidable impact could occur if feasible mitigation is identified for the project, but does not reduce the impact to a less than significant level, or there is no mitigation available.
- **Cumulatively Significant Impact:** A cumulatively significant impact would result in a new substantial change in the environment from effects of the individual project when evaluated in the context of reasonably foreseeable development in the surrounding area.

Mitigation measures for the proposed projects were developed through a review of the environmental effects of the projects by consultants with technical expertise, as well as by environmental professionals. In some cases, the mitigation measures identified consist of "performance standards" that identify clear requirements that would avoid or minimize significant environmental effects (the use of performance standard mitigation is allowed under CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4(a) and is supported by case law *Rio Vista Farm Bureau Center v. City of Solano* ([1st Dist. 1992] 5 Cal. App. 4th at pp. 371, 375–376 [7 Cal. Rptr. 2d 307])).

#### INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

This Draft EIR uses technical information and analyses from a previously certified EIR that are relevant to the consideration of environmental effects of the proposed projects, as provided by CEQA Guidelines Section 15150 [Incorporation by Reference]]. The following EIR has been utilized in this Draft EIR:

- Nevada County General Plan Final Environmental Impact Report, dated March 1995 (State Clearinghouse Number 1995102136)

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By utilizing provisions of the CEQA Guidelines, the County, in preparing this Draft EIR, has been able to make maximum feasible and appropriate use of the technical information in the above-referenced EIR. This EIR and other referenced materials are available for review upon request at the County of Nevada Community Development Agency, 950 Maidu Avenue, Suite 170, Nevada City, California, and are also available on the County's website at [www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/cda/planning](http://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/cda/planning).

#### APPROACH TO THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

##### **Definition of Cumulative Setting**

CEQA Guidelines Section 15130 requires that EIRs include an analysis of the cumulative impacts of a project when the project's effect is considered cumulatively considerable. The project sites and surrounding areas were included in the Nevada County General Plan planning area, and the development of each site was considered in the cumulative context of the General Plan EIR. Thus, this document generally uses the same cumulative context as the General Plan (i.e., the unincorporated areas of Nevada County). However, the cumulative setting varies by project site and by environmental issue area and, depending on the resources affected and any relevant boundaries, such as the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District (NSAQMD) for air quality resources and the Nevada Irrigation District (NID) for water supply. Each technical section of the Draft EIR (Sections 4.0 through 15.0) includes a description of the geographic extent of the cumulative setting for that resource based on the characteristics of the environmental issues under consideration, as set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(b).

##### **Consideration of Cumulative Impacts**

Each technical section in the Draft EIR considers whether the projects' effect on anticipated cumulative setting conditions would be cumulatively considerable (i.e., a significant effect). The determination of the projects' impact on cumulative conditions is based on applicable public agency standards, consultation with public agencies, and/or expert opinion. Each technical section of the EIR summarizes the cumulative impacts associated with development of the projects for that topic area.

#### EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

CEQA Guidelines Section 15128 requires an EIR to briefly describe any possible significant effects that were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in the EIR. For purposes of this Draft EIR, the following topics were eliminated from further evaluation in the scoping phase of the environmental analysis:

- **Population and Housing:** None of the proposed projects include residential uses, nor would they create a substantial number of new jobs which could require the construction of residential and support uses to serve new residents. Furthermore, none of the project sites currently contain any residential uses that would be removed to accommodate the proposed developments. Therefore, it was determined that none of the proposed projects would have the potential to result in substantial direct or indirect population growth or displace any housing or people. This topic is not addressed further in the EIR.

**Mineral Resources:** Numerous metals and other minerals have been mined in the county throughout its history, including gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, chromite, barite, quartz, and aggregate. Areas of the county are divided into Mineral Resource Zone (MRZ) categories that reflect varying degrees of mineral potential. According to the Mineral Land Classification Map of

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Western Nevada County published by the California Division of Mines and Geology (1990), none of the project sites is located in an area mapped as MRZ-2 for any mineral commodity (Loyd and Clinkenbeard 1990: Plate 2a). There are no active mineral resource extraction operations in the vicinity of any of the project sites. Therefore, it was determined that the proposed projects would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource or a locally important mineral resource recovery site. This topic is not addressed further in the EIR.

**REFERENCES**

Loyd, Ralph and John Clinkenbeard. 1990. Mineral Land Classification of Nevada County. California Department of Conservation, Division of Mines and Geology Special Report 164.

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