

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

This section discusses the possible environmental effects of adopting and implementing the proposed Tuolumne County General Plan Update for the specific issue areas that have the potential to experience significant impacts.

“Significant effect” is defined by *CEQA Guidelines* §15382 as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment, but may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant.”

The assessment of each issue area begins with an italicized introduction that summarizes the environmental effects considered for that issue area. This is followed by the setting and impact analysis. Within the impact analysis, the first subsection identifies the methodologies used and the “significance thresholds”, which are those criteria adopted by the County, other agencies, universally recognized, or developed specifically for this analysis to determine whether potential effects are significant. The next subsection describes each impact of the proposed project, mitigation measures for significant impacts, and the level of significance after mitigation. Each effect under consideration for an issue area is separately listed in bold text, with the discussion of the effect and its significance following. Each bolded impact listing also contains a statement of the significance determination for the environmental impact as follows:

Class I - Unavoidably Significant: *An impact that cannot be reduced to below the significance threshold level with implementation of reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires a Statement of Overriding Considerations to be issued if the project is approved per §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines.*

Class II - Significant but Mitigable: *An impact that can be reduced to below the significance threshold level with implementation of reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires findings to be made under §15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines.*

Class III - Not Significant: *An impact that may be adverse, but does not exceed the significance threshold levels and does not require mitigation measures. However, mitigation measures that could further lessen the environmental effect may be suggested if readily available and easily achievable.*

Class IV - No Impact or Beneficial: *No impact would occur or the project would have a beneficial effect.*

Following each environmental effect discussion is a listing of recommended mitigation measures (if required) and the residual effects or level of significance remaining after the implementation of the measures. In those cases where the mitigation measure for an impact could have a significant environmental impact in another issue area, this impact is discussed as a residual effect. The impact analysis concludes with a discussion of cumulative effects, which



evaluates the impacts associated with the proposed project in conjunction with other future development in the area.

Please refer to the Executive Summary for this EIR, which clearly summarizes all impacts and mitigation measures that apply to implementing the proposed General Plan Update.

Because the proposed project is a General Plan update, cumulative impacts are treated somewhat differently than would be the case for a project-specific development. Section 15130 of the *CEQA Guidelines* provides the following direction relative to cumulative impact analysis:

Impacts should be based on a summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document, or in a prior environmental document which has been adopted or certified, which described or evaluated regional or areawide conditions contributing to the cumulative impact...

By its nature, a general plan considers cumulative impacts insofar as it considers cumulative development that could occur within a County's plan area. Therefore, the analysis of project impacts also constitutes the cumulative analysis and this EIR does not contain a separate analysis of cumulative impacts. In addition to cumulative development within Tuolumne County, the analysis of traffic and related impacts (such as noise) considers the effects of regional traffic growth.