

Organization of this Chapter

This chapter describes the regulatory and environmental settings associated with the physical, biological, and social parameters of the Plan Area. Resource considerations in this EIS/EIR were derived from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA, Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, and input received from the public during the scoping period. Based on this information, Placer County and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have determined that the proposed action or alternatives could affect the resources listed below.

- Section 3.1, *Agricultural and Forestry Resources*
- Section 3.2, *Air Quality, Greenhouse Gases, and Climate Change*
- Section 3.3, *Biological Resources*
- Section 3.4, *Cultural and Paleontological Resources*
- Section 3.5, *Hydrology and Water Quality*
- Section 3.6, *Land Use and Planning*
- Section 3.7, *Mineral Resources*
- Section 3.8, *Noise and Vibration*
- Section 3.9, *Population and Housing, Socioeconomics, and Environmental Justice*
- Section 3.10, *Recreation*
- Section 3.11, *Transportation and Circulation*

Analytic Parameters

Definition of Baseline

CEQA

For the purposes of CEQA, the *environmental baseline* is typically defined as the release date of notice of preparation (NOP) to prepare an EIR. For the PCCP EIS/EIR, the later of these two dates was March 10, 2005. However, lead agencies have some flexibility in defining baseline conditions, so long as the conditions are justified and remain relevant throughout the environmental review process. The baseline is developed to assess the significance of impacts of the proposed or alternative actions in relation to the existing conditions at the time of the NOP.

NEPA

Neither NEPA nor the CEQ regulations for implementing NEPA contain a specific directive for using a baseline for determining an action's significant effects on the quality of the human environment. However, the alternatives should present the environmental impacts of the proposal and the alternatives in comparative form, thus sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice among options for the decision-maker and the public (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1502.14). Accordingly, for this document, the point of measurement in this EIS/EIR for determining impacts under NEPA for the proposed action and alternatives is the same as the CEQA baseline.

No Action Alternative and Baseline

The no action alternative differs from the baseline in that, as described in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*, the no action alternative assumes continuation of existing plans, policies, and operations—meaning, for instance, that all general plans would be fully implemented as described in the EIRs for those plans incorporated by reference in this EIS/EIR. The no action alternative incorporates programs adopted during the early stages of development of this EIS/EIR, facilities that are permitted or under construction during the early stages of development of this EIS/EIR, and projects that are permitted or are assumed to be constructed during the permit term for the PCCP, a timeframe that encompasses the planning horizon for the *Placer County General Plan*, *City of Lincoln General Plan*, and other local and regional plans.

Mapping Data

During preparation of the PCCP, the available mapping data for specific environmental resources evolved over the course of several years, as is common in long-term planning processes. This is the case for the mapping of the vernal pool complex land cover for the PCCP. The original land cover mapping for the entire Plan Area was prepared in 2003 based on 2002 aerial photography. The mapping of the Valley portion of the Plan Area was then updated using aerial photography from 2005 and 2009. New aerial photography was acquired in spring 2011 to detect smaller and lower-density vernal pools in disturbed areas; the Valley portion was evaluated and updated using this new aerial photography.

The methodology used in the 2011 mapping of vernal pool complex is best suited for the purposes of the vernal pool complex effects analysis because it was designed to detect smaller and lower-density vernal pool complexes in disturbed areas than previous mapping had detected. The 2011 mapping methodology was based on the deliberations of a Science Advisory Panel that met in January 2009 to discuss issues related to the accurate mapping of vernal pool complex. The Science Advisory Panel was convened at the request of Placer County after a lengthy discussion with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and USFWS about the original vernal pool complex land cover mapping and whether it accurately depicted the extent of vernal pool complexes in western Placer County. Moreover, the 2011 data, which included attributes for resource density and quality, was the information source for the conservation strategy. The effects analysis in the Plan for vernal pool complex is based on this 2011 mapping. The effects analysis for the Foothills portion of the Plan Area is based on original mapping conducted in 2003 (based on 2002 aerial photography) and updated in 2009 by CDFW mapping of rural residential development that had occurred since 2002.

As described in Chapter 3 of the Plan, a regional land cover map (*Baseline Land-Cover Map*) was developed for the Plan and used to estimate the effects of Covered Activities and to develop the

conservation strategy. As described above, this map incorporates data from mapping conducted prior to 2005, with revisions to vernal pool complexes (based on mapping conducted in 2011), and some revisions in the Foothills portion of the Plan Area (based on 2009 mapping). A detailed description of how the data and mapping were developed is presented in Chapter 3 of the Plan.

In summary, the baseline for the analysis in this EIS/EIR is the date of the release of the notice of intent/NOP, which is March 10, 2005, for data in all environmental topics. The 2011 data for the Valley portion of the Plan Area and the 2009 data for the Foothill portion are used to reflect the more recent and more accurate data available for vernal pool complex habitats. This is consistent with the approach taken in the effects analysis for the Plan. This “hybrid” baseline fulfills the goals of using a consistent, legally defensible baseline across both documents, while relying upon the best available scientific information.

Regulatory Setting

The *Regulatory Setting* subsection of each resource section describes the laws, regulations, and policies that affect the resource or the assessment of impacts on the specific resource. General plan discussions list relevant goals and policies (as well as implementation programs if applicable); specific plans and community plans are also discussed where relevant. The subsection establishes the regulatory framework for the analysis of each resource. Regulations that apply to all resource topics, including the federal Endangered Species Act, Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, NEPA, and CEQA, are described in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, and Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*.

Environmental Setting

The *Environmental Setting* subsection of each resource section characterizes the baseline physical environment for the specific resource and describes historic changes and trends affecting it. Existing information is used to describe the baseline for each resource.