

SECTION 8: ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT

8.1 - Introduction

The State CEQA Guidelines requires an EIR to describe a range of alternatives to the proposed project, or to the location of the proposed project, which would feasibly achieve most of the basic objectives of the proposed project, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects identified in the analysis. An EIR is not required to consider every conceivable alternative to a proposed project. Rather, an EIR must consider a reasonable range of alternatives that are potentially feasible; an EIR is not required to consider alternatives that are infeasible.

Alternatives must be considered even if they would impede, to some degree, the attainment of project objectives or be more costly. The determination of feasibility of project alternatives may include, but not be limited to, factors such as site suitability, economic viability, infrastructure, plan consistency, regulatory and jurisdictional limitations, and control of an alternative site, if applicable.

The analysis contained in this section compares each of the alternatives to the project, and includes an analysis of each alternative with respect to each of the environmental issues evaluated for the proposed project. In addition, the analysis of alternatives includes the assumption that all applicable mitigation measures associated with the proposed project would be implemented with an alternative. However, applicable mitigation measures may be scaled to reduce or avoid the potential impacts of the alternative under consideration, and may not precisely match those identified for the proposed project.

One of the alternatives must be identified as an Environmentally Superior Alternative. The Environmentally Superior Alternative is the one that would result in the fewest or least significant environmental impacts. If the Environmentally Superior Alternative that is identified is the No Project Alternative, then an Environmentally Superior Alternative must be selected from the remaining alternatives. Section 8.5 identifies and discusses the Environmentally Superior Alternative and includes Table 8-2 that compares the impacts of the alternatives and Table 8-3 that identifies the feasibility of each project objective by alternative.

The County has eliminated from further consideration the following alternative:

- Different Site Alternative.

The County has included for evaluation the following three alternatives:

- No Project Alternative - No Development;
- Density Transfer Alternative; and
- Reduced Density Alternative.

8.1.1 - Alternative Eliminated from Evaluation

Following is a discussion of the reasons the County has for eliminating the Different Site Alternative.

A Different Site Alternative would be defined by development of the land uses proposed by the North Fork Village-1 Project in a different location, while the NFV-1 project site would remain in its current condition. Analysis of a different site would be meaningful only if development of the proposed uses in a different location would avoid or substantially lessen the potentially significant effects of the proposed project. However, development of alternative locations in the vicinity of the project site would result in physical environmental impacts (i.e. biological, geology and soils, cultural, hydrology/water quality, aesthetic, etc.) that are similar to those associated with the project site, and no significant environmental benefit would be derived. Moreover, because the majority of the project objectives are linked to the vision and objectives associated with the RMAP, a reallocation of proposed project land use and density to another site within the RMAP would be in direct conflict with adopted plans. The RMAP identifies a North Fork Village Core commercial node within the NFV-1 site; relocation of this major node to an alternative site, in particular, represents a substantial deviation from the RMAP Plan, and is considered infeasible by the County.

Further evaluation of this alternative would not provide any meaningful information or environmental benefit, and this alternative is eliminated from further consideration.

8.1.2 - Alternatives Identified for Evaluation

Following is a discussion of the reasons the County has for evaluation of 1) the No Project - No Development Alternative, 2) the Density Transfer Alternative, and 3) the Reduced Density Alternative.

No Project Alternative

The discussion and evaluation of a No Project Alternative is required by the State CEQA Guidelines. Therefore, the County has an obligation to comply with the provisions of CEQA by discussing and evaluating this alternative. This alternative provides a comparison between the environmental impacts of the proposed project in contrast to the environmental impacts that could result from not approving, or denying, the proposed project. Because the decision-making body of the County has discretionary authority over a proposed project and could choose to deny it, the environmental impacts of that action must be disclosed. As a result of this potential decision, the project site could remain in its current state and condition for an undetermined period of time and not be the subject of any further development proposals. Evaluation of this alternative will determine if any significant impacts identified with the proposed project would be eliminated or if any less than significant impacts would be further reduced.

Section 8.2 below, discusses and evaluates the No Project Alternative - No Development.

Density Transfer Alternative

The Density Transfer Alternative assumes the 835 residential units and mixed use/commercial areas in the Oak Ranch and Sierra Crest Neighborhoods of the proposed project would be transferred to the southern portions of the project area, and distributed within the proposed Central Park, Lake Ridge, South Mesa, and South Creek Neighborhoods. As a result, the northern portion of the project site would remain in agricultural open space and the southern portion of the project would become a more dense urban community.

Section 8.3 that follows discusses and evaluates the Density Transfer Alternative.

Reduced Density Alternative

The reason the County selected this alternative is to evaluate the potential for reduced environmental impacts associated with an approximate 28 percent reduction in the number of dwelling units (du) proposed on the site. The proposed project allows up to 2,966 du on 1,437 acres in the Residential Planning Areas.

The Reduced Density Alternative would maintain the mixed use concept by retaining the proposed 172 acres of mixed use and commercial/office use. This Alternative would provide for 2,130 du comprised of approximately 87 units in Very Low designation, 637 units in Low designation, 844 units in the Medium designation, 252 units in the High designation, and 310 units in the Mixed Use designation. For purposes of this analysis, it is assumed the density reductions occur entirely within the proposed Oak Ranch and Sierra Crest neighborhoods in the northern unit of the project site. These neighborhoods comprise the latter phases of proposed project development.

Section 8.4, following, discusses and evaluates this Reduced Density Alternative

8.2 - No Project Alternative

8.2.1 - Description

This alternative is defined by, what would reasonably be expected to occur on the project site in the foreseeable future if a specific plan project were not approved. The environmental effects of the property remaining essentially in its current condition are compared with the environmental effects that would occur if the proposed specific plan project is approved.

The land would remain in grazing use, with little or no improvements to existing structures on the site.

8.2.2 - Impact Evaluation

Following is a comparison of each topical area with the No Project Alternative.

Aesthetics

With the proposed project, the change in the visual character of the site from rural open space to a developed community would result in a significant and unavoidable project and cumulative impact.

The impact of developed home sites on scenic natural vistas within Millerton Lake SRA would remain significant after mitigation. Under the No Project Alternative these impacts would be avoided.

Agriculture

Under the proposed project, a significant impact would occur due to cumulative loss of agricultural land, although no loss of Prime Farmland would occur. Under the No Project Alternative, the loss of agricultural land on the project site would be avoided, although the cumulative loss of such lands within the RMAP would occur with or without the proposed project.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to construction erosion and siltation, water quality in downstream receiving waters, and flooding and storm water runoff were identified; however, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.

Under the No Project Alternative, continued use of the project site for grazing would avoid discharges urban pollutants in storm water altogether. With the proposed project, the potential for cumulative flooding in downstream receiving waters would increase with urban development and increased impermeable surfaces on the project site. However, the potential for significant project flood impacts is mitigated by planned onsite drainage improvements, including detention basins. The No Project Alternative would reduce the already less than significant impacts to hydrology and water quality associated with the proposed project.

Biological Resources

Under the proposed project, significant impacts were identified related to of 1) the direct and cumulative impacts resulting from partial loss of the Hartweg's golden sunburst population onsite, and 2) cumulative loss of non-native grassland and blue oak woodland habitat in conjunction with other future development projects in the vicinity of the project site.

Under the No Project Alternative, the project's contribution to these cumulatively significant impacts would be avoided.

Geology and Soils

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to seismic hazards, erosion and loss of topsoil, and slope stability are mitigated by conformance with building codes, grading standards in the Specific Plan, and conformance with recommendations in site-specific geotechnical studies with future phases of development. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would result in no significant reduction in geology and soils impacts.

Hazards

Under the proposed project, no significant hazards or hazardous materials impacts would remain following mitigation. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would result in no significant reduction in hazards or hazardous materials impacts.

Transportation and Circulation

The conclusion of the NFV-1 project traffic impact study is that “the existing road network can be mitigated to accommodate the proposed Rio Mesa development” (Appendix I, Traffic and Circulation’s Executive Summary). This conclusion is based upon buildout of the RMAP including the proposed NFV-1 project, with full improvements to the RMAP circulation network funded by road impact fees pursuant to the Madera County Board of Supervisors’ adopted Building Impact Fee Program (Ordinance 367-0). At this time, however, the scope of the specific traffic improvements to be provided by the proposed NFV-1 project to reduce project and cumulative impacts has not been identified. Until the timing and nature of these improvements are identified pursuant to a Development Agreement with the County, both the direct project impacts and cumulative impacts on transportation and circulation must be considered significant and adverse.

Under the No Project Alternative, the potential impacts related to transportation and circulation would be avoided.

Noise

Under the proposed project, potentially significant noise impacts from construction-related activities were identified. Cumulatively significant noise increases above current rural ambient levels along RMAP roads were also identified. However, with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance.

Under the No Project Alternative, the potential exposure to persons from construction-related noise impacts and potential to exceed County noise standards would be avoided. Therefore, this alternative would result in avoiding or lessening the less than significant impacts to noise associated with the proposed project.

Air Quality

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts to air quality from short-term, construction activities and long-term operations were identified. Implementation of the recommended mitigation measures would reduce many of the emissions below the thresholds identified by the San Joaquin Valley Unified APCD (SJVUAPCD), thereby reducing the potentially significant impacts below the level of significance. However, with the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, cumulatively significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality would remain after implementation of the proposed project.

Under the No Project Alternative, the potentially significant project and cumulative air quality impacts would be eliminated.

Public Services

Under the proposed project, no significant impacts were identified related to the provision of police or fire service, recreation or library use. However, each of these services will require the construction of new facilities and the payment of development impact fees. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would result in avoiding or lessening the less than significant impacts to public services associated with the proposed project.

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to impacts on school facilities were identified due to the additional school-age children that would be generated. However, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.

Under the No Project Alternative, the additional school-age children would not be generated and there would be no need for additional and/or expanded school facilities. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would avoid the less than significant impacts to school services associated with the proposed project.

Cultural Resources

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts to Native American resources, archaeological resources or paleontological resources could occur during construction-related activities. The project site does not include any historic architectural resources. With the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, potential impacts to Native American Resources, archaeological resources or paleontological resources would be reduced below the level of significance.

Under the No Project Alternative, no development would occur and no disturbance of possible surface or possible subsurface cultural resources would result. Therefore, this alternative would result in avoiding or lessening the less than significant impacts to cultural resources associated with the proposed project.

Utilities

Under the proposed project, no significant impacts were identified related to project water supply, wastewater conveyance and treatment, solid waste landfill capacity, and the provision of electricity and natural gas. However, significant cumulative impacts were identified related to groundwater overdraft and long-term availability of water supplies.

Under the No Project Alternative, water to sustain the limited agricultural use of the site would continue to be provided from the on-site wells, with no further drawdown of groundwater supplies. Cumulatively significant impacts on long-term water supplies would be avoided. Impacts of urban development on natural gas and electricity supplies, solid waste landfill capacity, and wastewater treatment and disposal would be avoided. Therefore, this alternative would result in avoiding the less than significant impacts to these utilities associated with the proposed project.

Land Use and Planning

Under the proposed project, the project site would be developed consistent with the land uses and policies identified in the adopted Rio Mesa Area Plan and County General Plan. The proposed project would provide jobs and housing consistent with policies of the RMAP. With identified mitigation measures, the project would not conflict with uses and activities of the Millerton Lake SRA and the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan. However, consistent with findings of the RMAP EIR, the project would contribute to cumulatively significant human access and recreational activity impacts within the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Under the No Project Alternative, the land uses and many of the policies identified for the site in the RMAP would not be implemented. Development of the site as a New Growth Area under the County's General Plan would not occur. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would be inconsistent with the County General Plan and RMAP. Accordingly, the No Project Alternative would have significant impacts in comparison to the proposed project in relation to Land Use and Planning.

Population and Housing

The proposed project would result in new housing and population growth consistent with the RMAP, and County and regional forecasts. The project does not induce unplanned growth by extending new infrastructure and roads into surrounding agricultural areas outside the RMAP planning area. No displacement of housing or residents from the site would occur. No adverse population and housing impacts would occur.

The No Project Alternative would result in no new housing and population growth at the project site. The No Project Alternative would conflict with RMAP and General Plan policies encouraging new housing opportunities and growth in the RMAP area.

8.2.3 - Conclusions

The No Project Alternative is considered environmentally superior to the proposed project. This is because, even though it would conflict with adopted land use plans and population and housing growth forecasts, the continuation of the existing uses on the project site would eliminate or lessen the significant agriculture, air quality, traffic and circulation, biological, long-term water supply and other public service and utility impacts of the proposed project.

8.3 - Density Transfer Alternative

8.3.1 - Description

The Density Transfer Alternative assumes the 835 residential units and mixed use/commercial areas in the Oak Ranch and Sierra Crest Neighborhoods of the proposed project would be transferred to the southern portions of the project area, and distributed within the proposed Central Park, Lake Ridge, South Mesa and South Creek Neighborhoods. As a result, the northern portion of the project site would remain in agricultural open space and the southern portion of the project would become a more

dense urban community. The total development yield, 2,966 residential units and 172 acres of mixed-use and commercial/office use, would remain the same as the proposed project.

Aesthetics

With the proposed project, the change in the visual character of the site from rural open space to a developed community would result in a significant and unavoidable project and cumulative impact. The impact of developed home sites on scenic natural vistas within Millerton Lake SRA would remain significant after mitigation. Under the Density Transfer Alternative, home sites and mixed use development visible from Millerton Lake SRA would be removed from the northern portion of the project (i.e. proposed project Oak Ranch and Sierra Crest Neighborhoods), thereby reducing this impact. However, the concentration of development density in the remaining development in the southern portion of the project would substantially change in the visual character of the overall project site. Mass grading of large pads to support higher densities would result in filling of natural drainages and substantial loss of planned open space. A more vertical form of development would result that would be difficult to shield or buffer from views from surrounding areas, including Millerton Lake SRA.

Agriculture

Under the proposed project, a significant impact would occur due to cumulative loss of agricultural land, although no loss of Prime Farmland would occur. Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the loss of agricultural land would be limited to the southern portion of the site. The remaining 898 acres within the northern unit on the project site would be available for continued grazing use. This alternative would slightly reduce the cumulative loss of agricultural lands within the RMAP, though not to less than significant levels.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to construction erosion and siltation, water quality in downstream receiving waters, and flooding and storm water runoff were identified; however, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the retention of the northern portions of the project site in agricultural open space use would result in reduced project impacts related to hydrology and water quality in this area. However, this potential benefit would be offset by potentially greater impacts to natural drainage courses, including Cottonwood Creek, from mass grading and the concentration of urban development in the southern portion of the project site. Therefore, this alternative would have greater impacts to hydrology and water quality than those of the proposed project.

Biological Resources

Under the proposed project, significant impacts were identified related to 1) the direct and cumulative impacts resulting from partial loss of the Hartweg's golden sunburst population onsite, and

2) cumulative loss of non-native grassland and blue oak woodland habitat in conjunction with other future development projects in the vicinity of the project site.

As the blue oak woodland habitat is located almost entirely on the northern portion of the project site, retention of these areas in agricultural open space under the Reduced Density Alternative would reduce the project's cumulative contribution to loss of this habitat type. However, under this alternative, open space-natural areas with non-native grasslands in the southern portion of the project area would be substantially reduced or eliminate. The project impact on Hartweg's golden sunburst in the southern portion of the project site would likely be substantially greater, as the more dense urban development may preclude the ability to retain the proposed 28-acre preserve for this endangered plant. On balance, this alternative would have greater impacts to biological resources than those of the proposed project.

Geology and Soils

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to seismic hazards, erosion and loss of topsoil, and slope stability would be mitigated by conformance with building codes, grading standards in the Specific Plan, and conformance with recommendations in site-specific geotechnical studies with future phases of development. Under the Density Transfer Alternative, development on the steeper slopes and hilltops in the northern unit would be avoided, thereby reducing the potential for erosion, loss of topsoil and slope stability impacts in this area. However, mass grading required to support higher densities in the southern portion of the project site would expose additional soils to erosion and result in additional loss of topsoil. More difficult remedial grading techniques could be required. On the whole, the Density Transfer Alternative would result in geology and soil impacts that are similar to or greater than those of the project.

Hazards

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the project site would still be developed with the same urban type uses as in the proposed project and would result in impacts related to hazards that are similar to those of the proposed project. Fire hazards could be further reduced, however, with the transfer of development from the more remote, hills of the northern project site to the southern portion of the site. Therefore, this alternative would result in hazards impacts that are similar, or slightly reduced, as compared with the less than significant impacts to hazards of the proposed project.

Transportation and Circulation

The Density Transfer Alternative proposes the same level of residential, mixed use and commercial/office development as the proposed project. As a higher proportion of the residential area would be devoted to Medium and High Density uses, the total number of daily vehicle trips attributable to this alternative could be slightly less than the proposed project. This difference would not likely reduce the project's contribution to cumulatively significant traffic and circulation impacts to less than significant levels.

Mitigation measures for the Density Transfer Alternative would be similar to those of the Proposed Project and the Reduced Density Alternative. However, without a Development Agreement with the County assuring that road improvements are provided when needed, potentially significant impacts would remain.

Noise

Under the proposed project, potentially significant noise impacts from construction-related activities were identified. Cumulatively significant noise increases above current rural ambient levels along RMAP roads were also identified. However, with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance.

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, construction-related noise impacts and operational noise from proposed uses and traffic would be concentrated within the southern portion of the project site. Ambient noise would be reduced in the northern portion of the site retained in agricultural open space, but would increase in the southern portion of the site subject to more dense urban development. Therefore, this alternative would not result in further reducing the less than significant noise impacts associated with the proposed project.

Air Quality

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts to air quality that related to short-term, construction activities and to long-term operations were identified. Implementation of the recommended mitigation measures would reduce many of the emissions below the thresholds identified by the San Joaquin Valley Unified APCD, thereby reducing the potentially significant impacts below the level of significance. However, with the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, cumulatively significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality would remain after implementation of the proposed project.

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the project site would still be developed with the same urban uses as in the proposed project, but development would be concentrated in the southern portion of the project area. Air quality impacts from construction activities could increase with emissions from increased mass grading in the southern portion of the project site. The operational impacts would be similar because the number of residential units, mixed use and commercial/office use area and resulting number of vehicle trips would be similar to the proposed project. Air quality impacts associated with the Density Transfer Alternative would be similar to or less than those of the proposed project.

Public Services

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts on school facilities were identified, due to the additional school-age children that would be generated. These impacts are substantially reduced with payment of statutory school impact fees. Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the generation of school-age children and planned school facilities would be similar to the proposed project.

Following implementation of mitigation measures, less than significant demands for fire, police, and library service were identified for the proposed project. Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the demand for these public services would be similar to the proposed project, due to the same overall level of development. With the more compact urban form, however, fire hazards and public safety response times could be slightly reduced.

Utilities

Under the proposed project, no significant impacts were identified related to project water supply, wastewater conveyance and treatment, solid waste landfill capacity, and the provision of electricity and natural gas. However, significant cumulative impacts were identified related to groundwater overdraft and long-term availability of water supplies.

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the project's contribution to significant cumulative demands on groundwater supplies would be similar to the proposed project. The already less than significant impacts of project development on natural gas and electricity supplies, solid waste landfill capacity, and wastewater treatment and disposal would be similar with this alternative.

Cultural Resources

Most of the recorded cultural sites within the project site are located in drainages designated as open space in the project Specific Plan. With the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, potential impacts to Native American Resources, archaeological resources or paleontological resources would be reduced below the level of significance.

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, drainages tributary to Cottonwood Creek in the southern portion of the project site would be filled to support the increased development density. As a result, the potential for direct impacts to cultural sites in the southern portion of the project area would be increased. Therefore, this alternative would result in impacts to cultural resources that are likely to be greater than those of the proposed project are.

Land Use and Planning

Under the proposed project, the project site would be developed consistent with the land uses and policies identified in the adopted Rio Mesa Area Plan and County General Plan. The proposed project would provide jobs and housing consistent with policies of the RMAP. With identified mitigation measures, the project would not conflict with uses and activities of the Millerton Lake SRA and the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan. However, consistent with findings of the RMAP EIR, the project would contribute to cumulatively significant human access and recreational activity impacts within the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the significant cumulative impacts of increased human activity and recreational access within the San Joaquin River Parkway would still occur. The ability to control access from the project site to Millerton Lake SRA would be slightly enhanced with elimination of development from the northern portions of the project adjacent the lake's north shore.

Under the Density Transfer Alternative, the level of residential, mixed use and commercial/office development on the project site would be the same as the proposed project, and the concentration of development in the southern portion of the site could help to reinforce the North Fork Village Core concept in the RMAP. But opportunities for residential densities in the Rural, Very Low, and Low Density categories would be substantially reduced, or eliminated. This would conflict with land use designations for the site in the RMAP, and related policies to encourage a range of housing types and prices. On balance, the Density Transfer Alternative would result in Land Use and Planning impacts that are similar to or greater than those of the proposed project.

Population and Housing

The proposed project would result in new housing and population growth consistent with the RMAP, and County and regional forecasts. The project does not induce unplanned growth by extending new infrastructure and roads into surrounding agricultural areas outside the RMAP planning area. No displacement of housing or residents from the site would occur. No adverse population and housing impacts would occur.

As the Density Transfer Alternative proposes essentially the same level of development as the proposed project, impacts on population and housing would be similar to those of the proposed project.

8.3.2 - Conclusions

The Density Transfer Alternative reduces impacts of development within the northern portion of the project site. However, it fails to reduce substantially any of the significant impacts of the proposed project, including traffic and circulation, air quality, biological resources, long-term water supply and other public services and utilities.

8.4 - Reduced Density Alternative

8.4.1 - Description

This alternative reflects an approximate 28 percent reduction in the total number of dwelling units (du) on the site as compared with the proposed project. The proposed project allows up to 2,966 du within the 2,238-acre site. The Reduced Density Alternative would provide for approximately 2,130 (du) within the site; this represents a gross site density reduction from approximately 1.33 du/acre with the proposed project to 0.95 du/acre under this alternative. In the southern portion of the project area, while retaining the northern portion of the project area in agricultural open space use.

The Reduced Density Alternative would maintain the mixed use concept by retaining the same proposed 172 acres of mixed use and commercial/office use as under the proposed project. This Alternative would provide for 2,130 du comprised of approximately 87 units in Very Low designation, 637 units in Low designation, 844 units in the Medium designation, 252 units in the High designation, and 310 units in the Mixed Use designation. For purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the density reductions occur entirely within the proposed Oak Ranch and Sierra Crest

neighborhoods in the northern unit of the project site. These neighborhoods comprise the latter phases of proposed project development.

8.4.2 - Impact Evaluation

Aesthetics

With the proposed project, the change in the visual character of the site from rural open space to a developed community would result in a significant and unavoidable project and cumulative impact. The impact of developed home sites on scenic natural vistas within Millerton Lake SRA would remain significant after mitigation. Under the Reduced Density Alternative, home sites and mixed use development visible from Millerton Lake SRA would be removed from the northern portion of the project (i.e. proposed project Oak Ranch and Sierra Crest Neighborhoods), thereby substantially reducing this impact. With remaining development in the southern portion of the project, the change in the visual character of the overall project site from rural open space to a developed urban community would remain significant under this alternative.

Agriculture

Under the proposed project, a significant impact would occur due to cumulative loss of agricultural land, although no loss of Prime Farmland would occur. Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the loss of agricultural land would be limited to the southern portion of the site. The remaining 898 acres within the northern unit on the project site would be available for continued grazing use. This alternative would slightly reduce the cumulative loss of agricultural lands within the RMAP, though not to less than significant levels.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to construction erosion and siltation, water quality in downstream receiving waters, and flooding and storm water runoff were identified; however, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the retention of the steeper, northern portions of the project site in agricultural open space use would result in further reduced project impacts related to hydrology and water quality. This is due to the reduced potential for stormwater runoff, erosion, and siltation impacts to Millerton Lake. Therefore, this alternative would further reduce the less than significant impacts to hydrology and water quality associated with the proposed project.

Biological Resources

Under the proposed project, significant impacts were identified related to of 1) the direct and cumulative impacts resulting from partial loss of the Hartweg's golden sunburst population onsite, and 2) cumulative loss of non-native grassland and blue oak woodland habitat in conjunction with other future development projects in the vicinity of the project site.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the project impact on Hartweg's golden sunburst in the southern portion of the project site would still occur, as would the loss of non-native grassland in this area. However, as the blue oak woodland habitat is located almost entirely on the northern portion of the project site, retention of these areas in agricultural open space would reduce the project's cumulative contribution to loss of this habitat type to less than significant.

Geology and Soils

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts related to seismic hazards, erosion and loss of topsoil, and slope stability would be mitigated by conformance with building codes, grading standards in the Specific Plan, and conformance with recommendations in site-specific geotechnical studies with future phases of development. Under the Reduced Density Alternative, development on the steeper slopes and hilltops in the northern unit would be avoided, thereby further reducing the potential for erosion, loss of topsoil and slope stability impacts. Therefore, the Reduced Density Alternative would further reduce the less than significant geology and soils impacts of the proposed project.

Hazards

Under the proposed project, no significant hazards or hazardous materials impacts would remain following mitigation.

The Reduced Density Alternative would retain the grassland and woodland slopes and hilltops in the steeper northern portion of the project site in agricultural open space, thereby potentially further reducing the less than significant fire hazard impacts of the proposed project. All other hazard impacts would be similar to the proposed project. Therefore, this alternative would result in hazards impacts that are similar, or slightly reduced, as compared with the less than significant impacts to hazards of the proposed project.

Transportation and Circulation

The Reduced Density Alternative would reduce the total number of daily trips in comparison to both the proposed project and the Density Transfer Alternative, and would likely decrease peak hour trips in comparison to the proposed project.

The Reduced Density Alternative has the potential to reduce traffic impacts associated with the Proposed Project, but would still require mitigation. Mitigation measures for the Reduced Density Alternative would be similar to those of the Proposed Project and the Density Transfer Alternative. However, without a Development Agreement with the County assuring that road improvements are provided when needed, potentially significant impacts would remain.

Noise

Under the proposed project, potentially significant noise impacts from construction-related activities were identified. Cumulatively significant noise increases above current rural ambient levels along

RMAP roads were also identified. However, with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the potential exposure to persons from construction-related noise impacts and potential to exceed County noise standards would be reduced with the retention of the northern portion of the site in agricultural open space. Therefore, this alternative would result in further reducing the less than significant noise impacts associated with the proposed project.

Air Quality

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts to air quality that related to short-term, construction activities and to long-term operations were identified. Implementation of the recommended mitigation measures would reduce many of the emissions below the thresholds identified by the San Joaquin Valley Unified APCD, thereby reducing the potentially significant impacts below the level of significance. However, with the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, the following cumulatively significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality would remain after implementation of the proposed project.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the project site would still be developed with the same urban uses as in the proposed project but there would be less residential development. Air quality impacts from construction activities would be reduced with retention of the northern unit of the site in agricultural open space. The operational impacts would be less because the number of residential units and the number of vehicle trips would be less than the proposed project. Although air quality impacts associated with the Reduced Density Alternative have not been quantified, it is assumed that the significant air quality impacts associated with the project would be lessened, although not below identified impact significance thresholds.

Public Services

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the project site would still be developed with residential that would result in the generation of school-age children but to a lesser degree. Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts on school facilities were identified due to the additional school-age children that would be generated, but these impacts would be reduced below the level of significance with implementation of statutory school impact fees. Therefore, this alternative would result in further reducing the less than significant impacts to schools associated with the proposed project.

Following implementation of mitigation measures, less than significant demands for fire, police, and library service were identified for the proposed project. Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the demand for other public services generally would decline due to the lower number of dwelling units and reduced service demands associated with retention of the northern portion of the site in agricultural open space. The amount of mixed use and commercial/office space in the Reduced Density Alternative is the same as in the Proposed Project, and the planning factors for public services are typically based on population. Therefore, Reduced Density Alternative would result in

further reducing the less than significant impacts related to public services associated with the proposed project.

Utilities

Under the proposed project, no significant impacts were identified related to project water supply, wastewater conveyance and treatment, solid waste landfill capacity, and the provision of electricity and natural gas. However, significant cumulative impacts were identified related to groundwater overdraft and long-term availability of water supplies.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the project's contribution to cumulative demands on groundwater supplies would be reduced, though not to less than significant levels. The already less than significant impacts of project development on natural gas and electricity supplies, solid waste landfill capacity, and wastewater treatment and disposal would be further reduced with this alternative.

Cultural Resources

Under the proposed project, potentially significant impacts to Native American resources, archaeological resources or paleontological resources could occur during construction-related activities. The project site does not include any historic architectural resources. With the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, potential impacts to Native American Resources, archaeological resources or paleontological resources would be reduced below the level of significance.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the potential for direct impacts to several cultural sites in the northern portion of the project area near Millerton Lake SRA would be avoided. Therefore, this alternative would result in further reducing the less than significant impacts to cultural resources associated with the proposed project.

Land Use and Planning

Under the proposed project, the project site would be developed consistent with the land uses and policies identified in the adopted Rio Mesa Area Plan and County General Plan. The proposed project would provide jobs and housing consistent with policies of the RMAP. With identified mitigation measures, the project would not conflict with uses and activities of the Millerton Lake SRA and the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan. However, consistent with findings of the RMAP EIR, the project would contribute to cumulatively significant human access and recreational activity impacts within the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the significant cumulative impacts of increased human activity and recreational access within the San Joaquin River Parkway would be incrementally reduced, though not to less than significant levels.

Under the Reduced Density Alternative, the level of residential development on the project site would be further reduced relative to allocations in the RMAP (i.e. from approximately 3,994 units to 2,130 units). This reduction is substantial in light of the level of development envisioned for the site by the RMAP, and related RMAP and General Plan policies to provide new housing and employment opportunities. On balance, the Reduced Density Alternative would result in Land Use and Planning impacts that are greater than those of the proposed project.

Population and Housing

The proposed project would result in new housing and population growth consistent with the RMAP, and County and regional forecasts. The project does not induce unplanned growth by extending new infrastructure and roads into surrounding agricultural areas outside the RMAP planning area. No displacement of housing or residents from the site would occur. No adverse population and housing impacts would occur.

The Reduced Density Alternative would reduce housing and population on the project site, diminishing the ability to achieve RMAP buildout consistent with housing and population forecasts. This alternative would not reduce any adverse population and housing impacts.

8.4.3 - Conclusions

The Reduced Density Alternative would reduce significant cumulative impacts to agriculture, air quality, traffic and circulation, biological resources, long-term water supply and other public services and utilities. Impacts to land use and planning, and population and housing would be greater. On the whole, the Reduced Density Alternative is considered an environmentally superior alternative.

8.5 - Environmentally Superior Alternative

As previously discussed in Section 8.1, Introduction, the State CEQA Guidelines requires that one of the alternatives be identified as the Environmentally Superior Alternative. In addition, if the Environmentally Superior Alternative identified is the No Project Alternative, then an Environmentally Superior Alternative must also be identified from the remaining alternatives.

Table 8-1 provides a summary of the major attributes and environmental factors for the four alternatives considered.

Table 8-1: Summary Comparison of Project Alternatives

Environmental Issue	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
Total Residential Units	2,966	0	2,966	2,130
Population	8,899	0	8,899	6,390
Commercial Square Footage	1.5 million sq ft	0	1.5 million sq ft	1.5 million sq ft

Table 8-1 (Cont.): Summary Comparison of Project Alternatives

Environmental Issue	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
Total Employment	3,350	0	3,350	3,350
Jobs/Housing Ratio	1.13	0	1.13	1.57
Daily Vehicle Trips	N/A	0	N/A	N/A
Impacted Intersections	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total Students (K-12)	2,308	N/A	2,308	1,646
Additional Police Officers	Approx. 6	N/A	Approx. 6	Approx. 4
Water Usage*	1,355 ACA	N/A	1,355 ACA	957 ACA
Sewage Usage	683,489 GPD	0	683,489 GPD	509,380 GPD
Solid Waste Generation	11.5 TPD	N/A	11.5 TPD	7.2 TPD
ACA = Acre Foot Annually GPD = Gallons Per Day TPD = Tons Per Day N/A = Not Available * Based on acreage of use, not amount of development.				

Table 8-2 provides a summary of each alternative related to the environmental issues evaluated in Section 5, Environmental Impact Analysis, of the DEIR, and includes the level of significance associated with the proposed project in order to facilitate a thorough comparison of the alternatives. Refer to Section 5 of this document for a detailed discussion of each environmental issue.

Table 8-2: Impact Summary Comparison of Project Alternatives

Environmental Issue	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
Aesthetics/Visual	SIG (P,C)	L	G	L
Agricultural Resources	SIG (C)	L	L	L
Hydrology and Water Quality	LTS	L	G	L
Biological Resources	SIG (P,C)	L	G	L
Geology and Soils	LTS	L	S	L
Mineral Resources	LTS	S	S	S
Hazards	LTS	L	L	L
Transportation and Circulation	SIG (C)	L	S	L
Noise	LTS	L	S	L
Air Quality	SIG (P,C)	L	G	L
Public Services	LTS	L	S	L
Utilities	SIG (C)	L	S	S

Table 8-2 (Cont.): Impact Summary Comparison of Project Alternatives

Environmental Issue	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
Cultural Resources	LTS	L	G	S
Land Use Planning	LTS	G	S	G
Recreation	LTS	L	S	S
Population and Housing	LTS	L	S	S
L = Lesser impact than the proposed project G = Greater impact than the proposed project SIG = Significant C = Cumulative impact		S = Similar impact as the proposed project LTS = Less Than Significant P = Project impact		

A project alternative must be able to feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the proposed project. Table 8-3 provides an assessment of the ability of each of the alternatives to achieve the basic objectives identified in Section 3.4, Project Objectives, of the Draft EIR. For reference, the objectives are repeated in this table.

Table 8-3: Objective Feasibility Comparison

Objectives	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
Land Use Planning				
OBJ-1. Create a new community that allows for residential and commercial development, while preserving significant natural resources and open area.	Yes	No	No	Yes
OBJ-2. Accommodate projected regional growth in a location that is consistent with the approved County of Madera General Plan and the approved RMAP.	Yes	No	Yes	No
OBJ-3. Provide development and transitional land use patterns that do not conflict with adjoining properties and existing and proposed land uses.	Yes	No	No	Yes
OBJ-4. Establish land uses which permit a wide range of housing densities, types, styles, prices, and tenancy (for sale and rental).	Yes	No	No	Yes
OBJ-5. Designate sites for needed public facilities, including an elementary school, wastewater treatment, and recreation areas.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
OBJ-6. Create a highly livable, pedestrian friendly environment, which encourages alternatives to the automobile by incorporating unique site designs, and enhanced pedestrian access between land uses, trails, and streets	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Table 8-3 (Cont.): Objective Feasibility Comparison

Objectives	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
OBJ-7. Cluster development within the site to preserve regionally significant natural resource areas and sensitive habitat.	Yes	No	No	Yes
Economic				
OBJ-8. Provide a variety of residential homes to respond to changing economic and market conditions throughout project phasing and buildout.	Yes	No	No	Yes
OBJ-9. Provide a walkable community through the use of innovative traffic calming techniques such as narrow streets and medians designed to slow traffic and provide added pedestrian walkways and trails.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
OBJ-10. Provide a tax base that allows the County of Madera to provide public services.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Mobility				
OBJ-11. Provide a safe, efficient, and aesthetically attractive street system with convenient connections to adjoining regional transportation routes.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
OBJ-12. Provide an efficient street circulation system that minimizes impacts on residential neighborhoods and environmentally sensitive areas.	Yes	No	No	Yes
OBJ-13. Provide a system of pedestrian and bicycle trails which are segregated from vehicle traffic and which connect with supporting commercial, recreational, and other public facilities, to serve as an alternative to the automobile to surrounding residential uses.	Yes	No	No	Yes
Parks, Recreation & Open Space				
OBJ-14. Provide for the recreational use of open area that is compatible with protection of significant natural resources.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
OBJ-15. Provide a range of recreational opportunities, including trails, active and passive area, and small neighborhood “pocket” parks convenient and accessible to residents.	Yes	No	No	Yes
OBJ-16. Provide an interconnected system of pedestrian, bicycle, and hiking trails.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Resource Conservation				
OBJ-17. Consistent with the RMAP, protect significant natural resources within the NFV-1 Specific Plan.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 8-3 (Cont.): Objective Feasibility Comparison

Objectives	Proposed Project	No Project	Density Transfer Alternative	Reduced Density Alternative
OBJ-18. Identify, protect and enhance important historical, archaeological, paleontological, and cultural sites and their contributing environment.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OBJ-19. Promote water conservation through sound engineering and biologic practices.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OBJ-20. Create tertiary reclaimed water to be used on common, open space lands to conserve groundwater.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
OBJ-21. Protect and create additional wetland communities by integrating engineered storm drainage with enhanced biologic systems and to promote groundwater recharge.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
No = Unable to feasibly attain the objective. Yes = Able to feasibly attain the objective				

Based on the analysis contained in this section, the Environmentally Superior Alternative is the No Project Alternative. The Environmentally Superior Alternative from the remaining alternatives, which includes the proposed project, is the Reduced Density Alternative.

