



## **6.0 LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

### **6.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHORT-TERM USES OF MAN'S ENVIRONMENT AND THE MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY**

If the proposed Project is approved and constructed, a variety of short-term and long-term impacts would occur on a local level. During Project grading and construction, portions of surrounding land uses may be temporarily impacted by increased dust and noise. Short-term erosion may occur during grading. There may also be an increase in vehicle emissions caused by grading and construction activities. However, these disruptions would be temporary, and may be avoided or lessened to a large degree through mitigation cited in this report and through compliance with the Madera County Zoning Ordinance (refer to Section 5.0, *Description of Environmental Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures*).

Ultimate development of the Project site would create long-term environmental consequences associated with development of previously vacant land. Development of the proposed Project and the subsequent long-term effects may impact the physical, aesthetic, and human environments. Long-term physical consequences of development include: increased traffic volumes, increased noise from Project-related mobile (traffic) and stationary (mechanical and landscaping) sources, incremental increased demands for public utilities, and increased energy and natural resource consumption. Long-term visual impacts would occur with the alteration of views across the Project site. Incremental degradation of local and regional air quality would also occur as a result of mobile source emissions generated from project-related traffic and stationary source emissions generated from the natural gas and electricity consumption.

### **6.2 IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES THAT WOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PROPOSED ACTION SHOULD IT BE IMPLEMENTED**

Approval of the proposed Project would cause irreversible environmental changes, resulting in the following:

- Permanent commitment of land that would be physically altered to a residential development and support infrastructure.
- Soil erosion due to grading and construction activities.



- Alteration of the human environment as a consequence of the development process. The Project represents an enhanced commitment to residential uses that would replace vacant land with development.
- Utilization of various new raw materials, such as lumber, sand and gravel for construction. Some of these resources are already being depleted worldwide. The energy consumed in development and maintenance of the site may be considered a permanent investment.
- Incremental increases in vehicular activity in the surrounding circulation system, resulting in associated increases in air emissions and noise levels.

### **6.3 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS**

Section 15126 of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR include a discussion of the project's potential to foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. The CEQA Guidelines also indicate that it must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment. This section provides an analysis of such potential growth-inducing impacts based on criteria suggested in the CEQA Guidelines.

In general terms, a project may foster spatial, economic, or population growth in a geographic area if it meets any one of the following criteria:

- Removal of an impediment to growth (e.g., establishment of an essential public service or the provision of new access to an area);
- Foster economic expansion or growth (e.g., changes in revenue base, employment expansion, etc.);
- Foster population growth (i.e., the construction of additional housing), either directly or indirectly;
- Establishment of a precedent setting action (e.g., an innovation, a change in zoning, or general plan amendment approval); or
- Development of or encroachment on an isolated or adjacent area of open space (being distinct from an "infill" type of project).

Should a project meet any one of the above listed criteria, it may be considered growth inducing. The potential growth-inducing impacts of the proposed Project are evaluated below against these aforementioned criteria.

It is noted that the CEQA Guidelines require an EIR to "discuss the ways" a project could be growth inducing and to "discuss the characteristics of some projects that may encourage...activities that could significantly affect the environment". However, the CEQA Guidelines do not require that an EIR predict (or speculate), specifically where such growth would occur, in what form it would occur, or when it would occur.



The answers to such questions require speculation, which CEQA discourages (refer to CEQA Guidelines §15145).

## **REGIONAL AND LOCAL SETTING**

### **Population**

The Project site is located in the northeast portion of Madera County, which is located in the exact (surveyed) geographical center of the State of California.<sup>1</sup> Madera County's 2000 population was an estimated 123,109 persons, representing a 39.8 percent increase over the 1990 population of 88,090 persons.<sup>2</sup> As of January 2004, the County's population was an estimated 135,262 persons.<sup>3</sup> According to the State of California, Employment Development Department, the County's population is projected to increase to 224,600 persons by the year 2020,<sup>4</sup> representing an approximately 66 percent increase over the County's 2004 population estimate.

The U.S. Census reports data for a wide variety of geographic types, including census tracts. According to the Census 2000, the Project site is located in the southern portion of Census Tract (CT) 1.03. It should be noted that the California Department of Finance (CADO) reports data for counties and cities, however, does not report data for census tracts. Therefore, the Census 2000 data is the most recent data available for CT 1.03.

According to the Census 2000, CT 1.03's population was an estimated 5,091 persons, which represented 4.1 percent of Madera County's overall population of 123,109 persons (2000).

### **Housing**

The housing stock in Madera County in 2000 was an estimated 40,387 housing units. This represents an increase of approximately 31 percent over the 30,831 housing units estimated in 1990. As of January 2004, the County's housing stock was an estimated 43,598 housing units with a vacancy rate of 10.43 percent.<sup>5</sup> As of January 2004, the average number of persons per household in the unincorporated portion of the County was 3.055 persons per household, while Countywide, this number increased slightly to 3.25 persons per household.

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<sup>1</sup> Madera County website: [www.madera-county.com/facts/index.html](http://www.madera-county.com/facts/index.html), August 27, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census 1990 and 2000.

<sup>3</sup> State of California, Department of Finance, *E-5 City/County Population and Housing Estimates, 2004, Revised 2001-2003, with 2000 DRU Benchmark*. Sacramento, California, May 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Madera County website: [www.madera-county.com/facts/index.html](http://www.madera-county.com/facts/index.html), August 27, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> State of California, Department of Finance, *E-5 City/County Population and Housing Estimates, 2004, Revised 2002 and Revised 2001, with 2000 DRU Benchmarks*. Sacramento, California, May 2004.



In 2000, the total housing stock in CT 1.03 was an estimated 2,492 housing units, or 6.2 percent of the County's total housing stock of 40,387 units. Census Tract 1.03 had a vacancy rate of 18.3 percent and an average number of persons per occupied housing unit of 2.50 persons per household.<sup>6</sup>

### **Employment**

In 2000, the civilian labor force in Madera County totaled approximately 48,600 persons. An estimated 7.1 percent of the County's civilian labor force (6,434 persons) was unemployed at the time of the Census. The majority of the County's labor force (approximately 24.7 percent) was employed in management, professional, and related occupations. The next highest concentration of the labor force (approximately 23.5 percent) was found in sales and office occupations.<sup>7</sup>

In 2000, CT 1.03's civilian labor force consisted of approximately 2,242 persons. At the time of the Census, an estimated 2.7 percent (111 persons) of CT 1.03's civilian labor force was unemployed. Most of CT 1.03's labor force is employed in service occupations (approximately 24.9 percent) and in sales and office occupations (24.4 percent).

### **IMPACT ANALYSIS**

The Project involves conversion of vacant land for development of residential uses (refer to Section 3.0, *Project Description*). More specifically, the Sierra Meadows Estates Project proposes development of 315 dwelling units, roadways and various infrastructure improvements. Project implementation could be considered growth inducing, based on the factors discussed below:

- As discussed in Section 5.7, *Public Services and Utilities*, Project implementation would require the expansion of existing water, wastewater and transportation/circulation facilities to meet increased demands associated with the Project.

Currently, the proposed Project area is not connected to a public wastewater system or non-community wastewater system, nor does it have an on-site sewage disposal system. Thus, to handle the estimated wastewater that would be generated by future residential uses (approximately 129,150 gallons per day (gpd) (peak flow), the Project proposes to construct an on-site wastewater treatment plant (WWTP).<sup>8</sup>

Currently, the golf course and 105 dwelling units that exist in the study area are served water from the Maintenance District No. 46 system, which obtains water from local groundwater wells. The estimated average and maximum-day residential demands for ultimate buildout of Maintenance District No. 46

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census 2000.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Twenty-eight (28) lots included within Phase 1 of the proposed Project would have septic tanks to handle wastewater flows. Additionally, recycled water from the WWTP could be used for supplemental golf course irrigation.



facilities, which includes the proposed Project, are 604,800 gpd and 1,146,600 gpd, respectively. Water supply from Miami Creek, groundwater (wells) and reclaimed water from the wastewater treatment plant (would be used for supplemental golf course irrigation) is proposed to supply water to Maintenance District No. 46 at buildout. Additionally, 300 acre-feet of operational water storage would be required to meet the water demands of Maintenance District No. 46 during consecutive drought years. The proposed water reservoir along with the existing ponds (93 acre-feet) would provide approximately 309 acre-feet of water storage, which would satisfy the necessary water storage required under consecutive drought year conditions.

The Project proposes numerous roadways throughout the development, including the extension of Opah Drive (refer to Section 3.0, *Project Description*). Access to presently inaccessible areas would be provided, as a result of the Project's proposed roadway improvements.

Overall, Project implementation would remove impediments to growth, since new essential public services (i.e., new wastewater treatment plant and storage reservoir) would be established, and roadways would be extended, providing new access into areas. Therefore, the proposed Project could be considered growth inducing in this regard.

- Project implementation would foster indirect economic expansion and growth, since the proposed Project would involve the development of residential uses, which would increase the County's revenue base attributable to the future residences' purchases of commercial products and services.
- A project could induce population growth in an area either directly or indirectly. More specifically, the development of new homes could induce population growth directly, whereas the development of employment-generating land uses could induce population growth indirectly. The proposed Sierra Meadows Project would foster population growth, directly since development of 315 dwelling units on the Project site would cause a direct increase in the County's population. Based on an estimate of 3.055 persons per household (CDOF), development of 315 housing units would result in a potential population increase of approximately 962 persons. The Project's projected population growth would represent an approximately 19 percent increase over CT 1.03's 2000 population estimate of 5,091 persons and less than one percent increase over the County's 2000 population estimate of 123,109 persons.

The proposed Project would not be considered growth-inducing in that the population growth fostered by the proposed Project was anticipated by the General Plan, Area Plan and CADOF. As indicated in Table 5.1-1, *Summary of Existing General Plan Designations*, the Project site's residential development potential, based on *existing* General Plan designations, is approximately 832 dwelling units. Comparatively, the Project proposes development of 315 dwelling units, which represents 517 fewer dwelling units, than anticipated under existing General Plan designations. As indicated in Table 5.1-2, *Summary of Existing Area Plan Designations*, the



Project site's residential development potential, based on *existing* Area Plan designations, is approximately 545 dwelling units. Comparatively, the Project proposes development of 315 dwelling units, which represents 201 fewer dwelling units, than anticipated under existing Area Plan designations. Thus, the growth anticipated under both the General Plan and Area Plan would not be exceeded by implementation of the proposed Project.

Additionally, the potential increase in population attributed to the Project would be well within CADOF's anticipated growth projections. As previously noted, CADOF projected the population of Madera County to reach 224,600 persons by 2020. This would represent an increase of approximately 89,338 persons over the County's 2004 population estimate of 135,262 persons. The potential population growth attributed to the Project would be approximately 962 persons, which would represent a less than significant proportion (less than one percent) of the County's projected growth.

As described in Section 5.1, *Land Use*, General Plan and Area Plan Amendments would be required to facilitate development of the proposed Project. It should be noted that although the proposed General Plan and Area Plan Amendments would increase the area's development potential over the development potential under existing designations (refer to Table 5.1-5, *Summary of Change in General Plan Designations*, and Table 5.1-7, *Summary of Change in Area Plan Designations*), the analysis for potential growth-inducing impacts contained herein is based on the development of 315 dwelling units, as proposed by the Project. If the Project site plan were to substantially change (i.e., increase in dwelling units), the future proposal would be subject to compliance with the CEQA Guidelines, as deemed necessary by Madera County, which would include an evaluation of potential growth-inducing impacts.

- The 142-acre Sierra Meadows Golf Course and Country Club are centrally located between the northern and southern portions of the Project site. Also, approximately 58 residential sites within the Ahwahnee Country Club Estates Subdivision have been developed (Fall 2004) adjacent to the golf course. Thus, the Project does not propose development in an isolated area of open space. However, vacant lands and open space exist to the north, south, east and west of the Project site. The Project proposes development that would encroach into an adjacent area of open space. Therefore, the proposed Project could be considered growth inducing in this regard.

Overall, Project implementation could be considered growth inducing inasmuch as it would remove an impediment to growth and would encroach into an adjacent area of open space. However, the Project would not be considered growth inducing with respect to fostering population growth, since the General Plan, Area Plan and CADOF projected growth in the Project area to a greater degree than proposed by the Project.