

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE MONO COUNTY RTP AND GENERAL PLAN UPDATE



LEAD AGENCY:

Mono County Community Development Department
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NOP ISSUED: 6 June 2014
NOP COMMENTS DUE: 11 July 2014
SCOPING MEETING: 19 June 2014, 10:00 am

Date 6 June 2014
To: Interested Parties
Subject: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report assessing a proposed update to the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Mono County General Plan, and Related Planning Initiatives including Implementing Plans and Regulations.

- ▶ **Permits & Approvals:** Permits & approvals that may be required from your agency & CEQA review requirements associated with those approvals (see NOP §K);
- ▶ **Thresholds of Significance & Issues:** Thresholds of Significance for assessing impacts on resources and the potentially significant effects to be examined;
- ▶ **Alternatives:** Alternatives to the proposed RTP and General Plan updates that merit evaluation in the forthcoming EIR (please see discussion in NOP §L);
- ▶ **Related Projects:** Related projects or actions that should be considered in assessing cumulative effects;
- ▶ **Reference Materials:** Reference materials that should be reviewed to set forth baseline conditions or evaluate potential project impacts or mitigation measures; and
- ▶ **Scope and Content:** The scope and content of planning studies and initiatives to be evaluated in the forthcoming EIR, as discussed in NOP Sections C, F & G.

A. PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION

As Lead Agency, the Mono County Community Development Department ("the County") is planning to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to analyze potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed RTP and General Plan Update project. The County has determined that an EIR will be required because the proposed actions may be associated with potentially significant impacts on the environment.

Given this background, and consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) §15082, the County has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to invite your comments as to the scope and content of environmental information to be provided in the forthcoming EIR. CEQA §15082 requires that the NOP be sent out as soon as the Lead Agency determines that an EIR is required. The purpose of the NOP is to notify agencies, organizations, and individuals that an EIR will be prepared, and to request input on the scope of the environmental analyses to be provided.

In particular, the County is requesting comments from interested agencies, organizations and individuals on the following aspects of the project:

→ **Please let us know if you want to receive copies of environmental documents so that your name can be included on the Distribution List.** Note that the County plans to use online posting and 'CD' copies of environmental documents as much as possible. If you would prefer to receive a hardbound copy of the EIR (at a nominal charge), please note this in your comments.

B. NOP CONTENTS

This NOP contains 16 sections, as listed below:

Section & Title		Section & Title	
A	Purpose of the NOP	I	Proposed EIR Scope
B	NOP Contents	J	Potential Impacts
C	Public Access	K	Update Timeline
D	Scoping Meeting	L	Project Location
E	Purpose of Update	M	Responsible Agencies
F	Scope of Update	N	Alternatives

G	Related Planning	O	How to Comment
H	Purpose of EIR	P	Deadline for Comments

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS

The County and Local Transportation Commission (LTC) have integrated public outreach into the very fabric of the RTP and General Planning process by working with Regional Planning Advisory Committees (RPACs) in each community to develop and update Area Plans that reflect local land use goals and priorities as well as transportation policies and priorities. Policy development has been vetted through the RPACs, and the Land Use Element will incorporate the resulting Area Plan updates to provide more specific guidance for development activities in individual communities; some Specific Plans have also been reviewed and updated.

The local RPAC meetings will continue to be a primary forum for sharing information and obtaining comments about the RTP and General Plan updates. In addition, the County will post EIR documents on the County website for review and downloading. Hard copies of the EIR will also be available at the Crowley Public Library, county offices in Mammoth Lakes and Bridgeport, the June Lake Library, the Lee Vining Library, and the Bridgeport Library. Hardbound copies can also be obtained from the county for a nominal charge (to cover reproduction costs).

The RTP and General Plan updates will take full advantage of web-based communication capabilities. All General Plan and RTP documents (including this NOP, the RTP and General Plan elements, and the full set of studies and initiatives on which the updates are based) will be posted online at the Mono County website at: <http://www.monocounty.org>. Please go to the County "website" to register your email address for automatic updates via the RTP/General Plan (see the web link below), or contact C.D. Ritter (760.924.1800) to receive automatic RTP and General Plan updates via the web.

All RTP & General Plan documents will be posted online at the Mono County website:
<http://monocounty.ca.gov/planning/page/2013-mono-county-general-plan-update>

D. SCOPING MEETING

The County will hold a scoping meeting for this EIR. A scoping meeting will be held June 19 at 10:00 am in the Town/County Conference Room in Mammoth Lakes (437 Old Mammoth Rd., Suite P).

The scoping meeting is set for June 19, 10 am in the Town/County Conference Room, Mammoth Lakes.

The scoping meeting will include a brief presentation about the RTP and General Plan updates and CEQA review process, and participants will be encouraged to share suggestions and comments regarding scope & focus of the forthcoming EIR.

E. PURPOSE OF THE RTP/GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Government Code §65400 requires each county to "adopt a comprehensive long-term general plan for the physical development of the county." The purpose of the general plan is to establish policies that will guide decisions on future growth, development, and conservation of natural resources on private lands in the unincorporated area of the county in the manner required by law.

The County completed a comprehensive General Plan Update in 1993, along with a Final EIR and a separate Master Environmental Assessment (MEA). The MEA was prepared as a stand-alone document to streamline preparation of future environmental reviews and to facilitate periodic revisions apart from the formal General Plan amendment process.

In 2000, the County comprehensively updated its General Plan Land Use Element. The revisions focused on three key goals: to integrate the zoning & development code into the General Plan, to amend the Land Use Plan accordingly, and to upgrade Land Use maps to provide greater detail for all areas of the county. As part of these revisions, the County prepared a new EIR (showing the same impacts and mitigations as identified in the 1993 EIR) and also updated its MEA. The 2001 MEA contained reformatted text and extensive updates to the environmental baseline data.

County staff informally updated the MEA format and data during 2009-2010, and is updating the MEA once again as part of the current RTP/General Plan updates and environmental review process. The focus of the 2014 update is to ensure that the MEA format complements the larger General Plan, and the MEA content supports the cornerstone objective of streamlining the CEQA process in Mono County through better use of tiering provisions in the CEQA Guidelines. Key goals of the streamlining process are to eliminate the time and cost associated with redundant analyses, and place greater emphasis on protection of the substantial environmental resources in Mono County.

F. SCOPE OF THE RTP/GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

The 2014 update and CEQA documents will review and analyze the Land Use Element, Circulation Element/RTP, Conservation/Open Space Element, Safety Element, Noise Element, Hazardous Waste Management Element, Economic Development Element and Housing Element. Each document is described below:

- **Land Use Element:** The land use element addresses all land use issues through a set of coherent development policies. The element describes the type and intensity of development that may occur, and contains specific policies for each of the community planning areas. The proposed Land Use Element update would: (a) clarify some land use designations and associated development standards; (b) update several area plans to reflect RPAC recommendations; (c) provide a summary of policies from adopted specific plans and repeal

the Conway Ranch Specific Plan; (d) include changes, regulations and policies to respond to new state law requirements; and (e) provide forecasts for projected and ultimate development utilizing refined assumptions and recently developed countywide GIS mapping tools.

- **Circulation Element/Regional Transportation Plan:** Since 1980, the County has used the RTP (prepared by the Local Transportation Commission) as its Circulation Element. Another cornerstone goal of the current update is to ensure that the document addresses infrastructure policies related to capital facilities and communications, infrastructure and community services. The current Circulation Element update proposes to incorporate a new communications policy, policies on capital facilities, and baseline data from recently completed and ongoing Municipal Service Reviews prepared by the Local Agency Formation Commission, including a study of small water service districts.
- **Conservation/Open Space Element:** This element describes how the County will manage open space lands to preserve natural resources, resource production, outdoor recreation, and public health and safety. Policies address a wide range of resources: biological, hydrological, agricultural, mineral, energy, scenic, cultural, air quality, public health and timber. Resource information proposed to be updated in this element will focus on energy policies and Integrated Regional Water Management Plans within the RTP/General Plan study area, as well as compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with emphasis on habitat assessments and mitigation policies to aid in avoiding the listing of additional species, particularly in areas where growth is expected to occur.
- **Safety Element:** This element addresses the special development requirements needed to safeguard areas subject to natural hazards including flooding, seismic and other geologic hazards, wildland and structure fires, and avalanche and volcano hazards. The current Safety Element update proposes to incorporate a multi-hazard mitigation plan update and new standards consistent with Fire Safe Rule 1270 (Fire Safe Regulations) and in keeping with requirements of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 which is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Mitigation planning under this program is required to qualify for disaster assistance.
- **Noise Element:** The Noise Element evaluates existing and projected noise conditions, and contains policies to assure that noise compatibility is part of future land use decisions. The proposed Noise Element update would include new noise readings and corresponding policy adjustments.
- **Hazardous Waste Management Element:** This element is proposed to be folded into the Integrated Waste Management Plan (see Related Planning Initiatives, below).
- **Economic Development Element (EDE):** The EDE update is proposed to consist of countywide policies to strengthen and enhance job opportunities and economic conditions.
- **Housing Element:** This element was recently adopted, with few changes and with separate CEQA documentation, to comply with state deadlines. It has been referenced and integrated where appropriate with other elements (such as the Land Use Element build-out calculations). The RTP and General Plan updates and EIR will summarize and incorporate relevant policy conclusions.

G. RELATED PLANNING INITIATIVES

In tandem with the RTP/General Plan updates noted above, Mono County and other agencies have also undertaken (or will undertake) a series of planning initiatives to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors throughout and beyond Mono County. The RTP/General Plan update proposes to incorporate relevant information and conclusions from these initiatives, including planning goals and policies where applicable. The scope of related planning initiatives is broad and evolving. The forthcoming EIR will address the initiatives outlined below, and other relevant planning efforts that may arise to the extent that sufficient information becomes available:

- **Integrated Waste Management Plan.** Through this effort, the County proposes to integrate the Hazardous Waste Management Element into the more comprehensive Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP). The IWMP comprises five components:
 - *A Source Reduction and Recycling Element (SRRE) to reduce waste loads;*
 - *A Household Hazardous Waste Element (HHWE) to ensure the safe collection, recycling, treatment, and disposal of hazardous wastes that are generated by households;*
 - *A Countywide Siting Element (CSE) that monitors landfill capacity, ensures that capacity does not fall below 15 years and sets guidelines for the siting of new facilities;*
 - *A Non-Disposal Facility Element (NDFE) that is used (along with the Siting Element) to establish or expand a solid waste disposal facility; and*
 - *A Summary Plan.*The IWMP is being updated to address improvements in recycling & waste reduction and to review options for waste disposal after the closure of the Regional Benton Crossing Landfill. To the extent feasible, this plan will be coordinated with the biomass utilization studies described below.
- **Biomass Utilization:** Mono County and the Eastside Biomass Project Team evaluated the feasibility of a community-scale bioenergy facility (thermal only, combined heat and power, or electricity only) using locally available forest waste biomass, utilizing local labor, and supporting the regional economy. The study concluded that thermal-only alone would be feasible due to sustainable supply requirements. Results of this study will inform an update of energy, forest health, and fire hazard policies in the General Plan.
- **Capital Facilities Policies & Transportation Improvement Projects:** The County is preparing capital improvement policies and formalizing an approval process to enhance long-term project planning coordination. Transportation projects and parking standards (see below) will be key focus areas through the RTP update. The EIR will also review updates to the Municipal Service Reviews and Spheres of Influence for local agencies.
- **Parking Standards Study:** Downtown parking standards have been revised for various Mono County communities as part of the RTP planning effort. This effort is being conducted in tandem with the Scenic Byways and main street revitalization efforts.
- **Scenic Byways Plan:** The County is applying for a federal 'scenic byway' designation for U.S. 395. The plan includes a corridor "brand," a catalogue of scenic values, community

design themes, regional and community stories highlighting local character, and Main Street Revitalization efforts as described more fully below.

- **Main Street Revitalization Efforts:** The main streets in most Mono County communities are also state highways, and must serve the needs of regional mobility as well as local safety and community values. The Main street revitalization efforts focus on identifying innovative community-specific improvements to achieve complete streets, walkable communities, and support local communities. Main Street goals and policies will complement the Scenic Byway planning effort.
- **Main Street Design Handbooks:** The voluntary Main Street design handbook recently developed for Bridgeport has been well-received, and similar design handbooks are in the planning stages for other Main Streets in tandem with the Main Street Planning process noted above.
- **County-wide Trails Planning:** Trail planning is a long-standing priority for Mono County. The RTP and General Plan updates will review ongoing plans and progress in recent years.

Trail planning is a long-standing priority for the LTC and Mono County, and the RTP/ General Plan updates will review a wide range of plans including the 350-mile Eastern Sierra Regional Trail from Topaz Lake to Round Valley.

Key components of the trail planning effort include a proposed 350-mile Eastern Sierra Regional Trail from Topaz Lake to Round Valley, community efforts to create a gateway trail connecting Lee Vining to Yosemite National Park, and numerous local community efforts.

- **Resource Efficiency Plan:** This plan will function in the same manner as a Climate Action Plan, but will focus more specifically on reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions as now required by CEQA §15183.5. The County's main goals are to meet CEQA requirements for the RTP and General Plan updates, provide a GHG analysis and mitigation measures sufficient to enable tiering and CEQA streamlining, and identify and prioritize effective GHG reduction measures that also result in cost savings and/or a high return on investment.
- **Landownership Adjustment Report:** The County completed a multi-agency landownership adjustment review in 2010. The current update proposes to incorporate policy changes recommended in the 2010 review.
- **Food Systems Study:** In support of a recent Inyo Mono Advocates for Community Action (IMACA) grant, the County is planning to develop and refine policies to support community agricultural uses including community gardens, ranching, and documentation of the agricultural heritage in Mono County. The study will consider all activities from production to distribution and waste, with a focus on low-income needs.
- **Biological Conservation Policies:** The County proposes to update its Open Space/Conservation Element with biological conservation policies and mitigation strategies based upon the results of focused habitat reviews in selected areas of the County, and specific guidance provided for mitigating impacts to the Bi-State sage grouse, Yosemite toad and yellow-legged frog. To support goals for CEQA tiering, the forthcoming EIR will establish mitigation guidelines for types of habitat; it is anticipated that this approach will better accommodate

sensitive species listings while reducing parcel-specific study requirements.

- **Watershed Plans:** Mono County is one of 30 members of the Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP). The IRWMP is part of a larger statewide effort to identify and implement solutions for water management issues. The Calif. Dept. of Water Resources funds IRWMP projects with grants from the Proposition 84 Stormwater Grant Program, which requires that funds be used to reduce and prevent stormwater contamination of rivers, lakes and streams. Through this effort, watershed plans are being prepared for the East Walker, West Walker, Upper Owens & Mono Watershed basins, and Open Space/ Conservation Element water policies are proposed to be updated to reflect these plans.
- **Grading Regulations:** The County proposes to amend Ordinance No. 13.08.160 to require the use of Best Management Practices in conjunction with specified land clearing and/or earthwork activities, and to allow streamlined approval on applications that meet certain requirements.
- **Repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan:** The Conway Ranch Specific Plan was adopted in 1990, but the project was never developed and the property has since been acquired by Mono County. Grant Funds used to acquire the property have restricted the property in such a way that the approved Specific Plan is effectively null and void, and there is a need to re-designate the lands to an appropriate designation that reflects the current restrictions and intent.

All of the above initiatives are associated with and will be incorporated into the general planning process, and all will be evaluated in the forthcoming EIR.

H. PURPOSE OF THE RTP/GENERAL PLAN EIR

Overview. The adoption or amendment of an RTP, General Plan or General Plan element is subject to CEQA and the Public Resources Code (§21000, et seq.), and an EIR is often required due to the scope and complexity of the general planning process. The primary purpose of an EIR is to inform decision-makers and the public of the potential significant environmental effects that may be associated with implementation of the proposed RTP and General Plan elements, and to identify and set forth less damaging alternatives, and possible ways to reduce or avoid the possible environmental damage.

This process and information enables environmental considerations to influence the development of RTP/General Plan policies, thereby ensuring that the plan's policies will address potential environmental impacts and the means to lessen or avoid such impacts. The timing of the current CEQA process is concurrent with the development and review of proposed changes to the Mono County RTP and General Plan. The County is synchronizing these parallel processes to optimize public participation and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

The primary purpose of an EIR is to inform decision-makers & the public of potentially significant environmental effects that may be associated with implementation of the proposed RTP and General Plan elements, & to identify and set forth less damaging alternatives, and ways to reduce or avoid the possible environmental damage.

General Plan EIR update and Later Tiering. An important purpose of the forthcoming EIR is to facilitate 'tiering' to streamline CEQA compliance for future projects that conform to policies of the updated RTP and General Plan. The tiering concept allows later CEQA documents to incorporate and build upon, rather than repeat, the information contained in the RTP/General Plan EIR. The EIR will provide a detailed outline of how and when the tiering process may be used to fulfill CEQA requirements for later projects.

I. PROPOSED EIR SCOPE AND FOCUS

The forthcoming EIR will be prepared as a full-scope review, considering all potential environmental effects of the proposed RTP and General Plan updates. In keeping with this scope of review, and consistent with CEQA Guidelines §15063, an Initial Study has not been prepared for the plan.

J. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

As was true in the 2000 update, changes proposed for the 2014 RTP/General Plan updates will not substantively modify the County's land use planning or underlying assumptions. The County proposes to refine but not fundamentally change the basic underlying land use goals, policy directions and overall build-out densities. Similarly, the County proposes to update Area Plans based on extensive guidance from the RPACs, but the proposed updates reflect minimal change in overall policy direction and build-out densities.

Provided below is a preliminary description of potential impacts that may be associated with each of the General Plan and RTP revisions. Potential impacts will be analyzed in the forthcoming EIR along with in-depth discussion of the proposed changes, new State laws & major planning issues. Note that the forthcoming EIR will facilitate tiering to the maximum feasible extent. However, project-level CEQA documentation will be prepared as required for all proposed implementation activities.

This update will focus on incorporating guidance and input from community RPACs, new State laws, Caltrans guidance, and major new planning issues.

- **Land Use Element:** No density increases are proposed, though density reductions may occur in some areas. As before, ultimate build-out represents the "worst case" scenario: maximum densities up to 20 units per acre may be permitted in some areas, provided that all applicable services (water, sewer, etc.) are in place and all applicable regulations are met (fire, habitat, etc.). Similarly, potential density reductions would reflect areas of the county where services are lacking and/or regulations cannot be met; in

general these service constraints, external regulations and state policy limitations are anticipated to be most evident in undeveloped areas of the County.

- **Circulation Element/Regional Transportation Plan and Improvements/Capital Facilities Plan:** Key RTP infrastructure improvements are proposed to focus on "asset management" – i.e., maintaining existing roads and highways in good condition. Thus, the plans will emphasize rights-of-way (ROW) maintenance including repaving/restriping/resurfacing of roads to modify lane widths, the addition or relocation of bike lanes and pedestrian pathways, and other similar improvements. The plans will also reflect new and emerging legislation that will reshape the way that roadway level of service and parking requirements are analyzed in order to facilitate walkable communities and efficient transportation. Given the focus on efficiency and safety, environmental effects are anticipated to be largely beneficial: no new roads are proposed, and roadway improvements would be limited to existing community areas. This element will be analyzed in tandem with the related planning initiatives that fall under the Capital Facilities Policies and Transportation Improvement Projects. Tiering will be an important element of this section, with the goal that analyses in the forthcoming EIR would provide sufficient review to meet CEQA requirements for many of the proposed future improvements to existing roadways.
- **Conservation/Open Space Element:** Updates to this element will generally focus on refinements to existing policies. However, the County anticipates that a number of new policy components will be proposed as well, particularly with regard to emerging special-status plant and animal habitats and species (sage grouse and Yosemite toad, for example). In these areas, the County will likely propose standards to mitigate or avoid impacts where feasible (such as setbacks, clustering, landscaping and related controls). In high-value areas where such measures are infeasible, the element may propose broader actions possibly including land acquisition and land trades. These actions would be proposed to reduce the impacts on potentially threatened species and habitats sufficiently to avoid formal listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The County has prioritized avoidance because it anticipates that formal listings, if unavoidable, will substantially increase costs, processing time frames, and the level of difficulty associated with use of lands in the impacted areas.

The Conservation/Open Space Element will also consider various steps to strengthen water supply and watershed protection and conservation. These measures may include ordinances governing landscaping, irrigation, watershed protection, more widespread use of Best Management Practices, and the possibility that the County may be encouraged through state legislation to take a more active role in groundwater management (including well permit issuance). Again, the forthcoming EIR would establish the broad CEQA framework permitting later tiering of project-level decisions. As with all elements of the forthcoming review, the County would welcome input regarding the format, scope and content of these thresholds, mitigations and tiering criteria.
- **Safety Element:** Safety Element updates will include new data on hazards that may impact development potential in various areas of Mono County, and associated public safety concerns. The proposed revisions will reflect updated hazard maps and regulations including new legislation for fire safety and defensible space requirements. The County anticipates that some of the new regulations may limit development and development potential in

more remote areas of Mono County due, for example, to substantially more stringent access requirements for emergency fire response.

- **Noise Element:** The anticipated Noise Element update will focus on new standards and regulations, as well as variations in anticipated noise environments associated with Land Use Element updates. Most of these changes are relatively minor in scope. Communities along Highway 6 may experience more substantive elevation of ambient noise levels due to anticipated future increases in truck traffic between Nevada and southern California. As part of the Noise Element update, the County will consider various steps to mitigate the increased noise levels including reduced speed requirements through established communities and other measures.
- **Economic Development Element (EDE):** Few environmental effects are anticipated in connection with implementation of the updated EDE, since most activities will occur in and be for the benefit of established communities. Mono County generally has sufficient infrastructure and housing to accommodate growth of tourism and services, and through its Housing Element the County has an established mechanism (currently suspended due to recessionary economic conditions) to provide adequate affordable housing for area employees.
- **Housing Element:** The County recently completed its Housing Element update and an associated CEQA review that will be incorporated by reference into the forthcoming EIR. The current Housing Element reflects an easing of the County's obligations for meeting regional housing need, primarily due to continuing the recessionary conditions. However, the County will reinstate compliance requirements for the Affordable Housing Ordinance, primarily within existing communities, when development demands warrant.
- **Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP):** Two components of the IWMP are solely for planning purposes: The SRRE is a menu of actions that may be taken to education residents about the importance and need for waste load reduction; these could include such varied steps as flyers, early education, advertisements, labeling on trash containers, etc. Similarly, the Countywide Siting Element is a tracking tool that enables the County to ensure that waste facility planning efforts remain ahead of need. The remaining two components focus on providing the facilities needed to receive wastes: the HHWE is primarily addressed to non-disposal activities (collection, recycling and treatment) whereas the NDFE is primarily addressed to disposal. For the HHWE, Mono County has placed a high priority on ensuring that facilities are located in proximity to the main population centers (Mammoth and Bridgeport) in order to minimize transportation impacts and maximize opportunities for reuse. The County does not plan to proposed specific facilities in the HHWE at this time; instead, the HHWE will describe the available options. Detailed proposals will be developed in separate planning studies, along with CEQA documentation as needed.

The NDFE options will comprise a wider area of review. Due to the high compliance costs associated with new landfill development, the County does not anticipate that the Benton Crossing Landfill (scheduled for closure in 2023) will be replaced with a new facility in Mono County. As alternatives, the NDFE will explore on a preliminary level the options of transporting municipal disposal wastes into Lockwood Nevada (where the existing landfill has adequate capacity to accept county wastes for fifteen years or

longer), and/or into Inyo County (where the existing landfill has adequate long-term capacity to accept county wastes, but where such use may be prohibited by terms of Inyo County's lease). Again, these decisions will not be part of the forthcoming IWMP, but instead will be examined in later planning studies, along with project-level CEQA documentation as required.

- **Biomass Utilization:** The biomass utilization activities are part of the larger resource efficiency planning effort that is eventually intended to yield a zero-net energy use profile for all County activities. As one potential source, the County will further consider Biomass Utilization based on information gained, and compare this with other opportunities to develop the most comprehensive set of tools and resources. A wide range of impacts may be associated with the construction and operation of a thermal-only biomass facility utilization (if selected). The forthcoming EIR will review the types of impacts associated with various biomass alternatives; detailed environmental assessment would be provided in project-level reviews when specific activities are proposed. However, the County's primary focus is on development of alternative fuel programs and sources (rather than on any single component), with an emphasis on low-impact activities including stronger incentives for in-fill and disincentives for sprawl, efficient community and rural transit systems, and other similar policies and programs.
- **Parking Standards Study:** As with the Circulation Element/RTP above, the parking standards study will reflect new and emerging legislation designed to reshape the way that parking requirements are analyzed to facilitate walkable communities and more efficient transportation systems. Again, environmental effects are anticipated to be largely beneficial, with improved signage, possible use of back-in (instead of front-in) angled parking for better visibility, greater use of transit over personal automobiles, and other similar initiatives. Tiering will be an important element of this section, with the goal that analyses in the forthcoming EIR would provide sufficient review to meet CEQA requirements for many of the proposed future parking improvements.
- **Scenic Byways Plan:** The Scenic Byways designation does not involve new regulations or land use requirements; rather it is a form of formal recognition. If approved, the County anticipates use of a new and unified signage program along the Highway 395 corridor, with additional interpretive features and directional information. Direct environmental effects are expected to be minimal, and the forthcoming EIR will facilitate tiering to the maximum possible extent.
- **Main Street Revitalization Efforts:** Highway 395 passes through many Mono County communities, and thus the Main Street Revitalization efforts are closely tied to the Scenic Byways plan as well as the RTP and emerging emphasis on livable and complete communities. Potential impacts may include narrowing of the lanes in some areas, new and/or wider sidewalks, medians, landscaping, street 'furniture' and other elements intended to increase safety and add visual appeal; direct environmental effects are again anticipated to be minimal and CEQA tiering will be a priority of the forthcoming EIR with respect to these improvements.
- **Main Street Design Handbooks:** The Design Handbooks are designed to offer creative ideas in support of the larger Main Street revitalization effort. All components are non-regulatory, with minimal potential for environmental effect; and maximum focus on CEQA tiering.

- **County-wide Trails Planning:** *The trails planning effort primarily comprises improvements to existing trail routes and rights-of-way. New linkages may be proposed to achieve the proposed 350-mile continuous Eastern Sierra system as well as the Yosemite gateway trail, and the County may propose new trails in the Antelope Valley as well. The forthcoming EIR will review the types of impacts that may be associated with new trails and trail linkages; it is anticipated that subsequent project-level CEQA review may be required for some segments as will be identified in the forthcoming EIR.*
- **Resource Efficiency Plan:** *As discussed previously for Biomass Energy, the County has embarked on a multi-faceted effort to achieve a zero-net energy use profile for all County activities. To reflect budgetary constraints, the proposed program is incremental in scope and not capital intensive. Instead, the County proposes to focus on infill of existing community areas and affirmative steps to limit sprawl development of areas outside of the established communities and transit systems. Clean energy improvements are integral to the proposed Resource Efficiency plan and reduced energy usage and associated pollutant emission reductions are anticipated to be primary environmental outcomes.*
- **Landownership Adjustment Report:** *A primary long-term objective of the Landownership Adjustment Report is to more closely concentrate Mono County development activities within existing communities and simultaneously reduce the number of outparcels and isolated islands of development. The program is intended to reduce impacts to open space lands, and the associated environmental effects are therefore projected to be largely beneficial.*
- **Food Systems Study:** *No new agricultural lands or ranching areas are proposed in the Food Systems study. Instead, transportation and marketing are the primary tools proposed to expand community involvement in agriculture. Project impacts may include demands on area highways, increased waste loads and associated integrated waste management program demands, and some small-scale development for processing.*
- **Biological Conservation Policies:** *As described more fully above (see Conservation and Open Space Element), the County anticipates a range of new policies and standards designed to avoid the formal listing of several sensitive species and habitats in Mono County. The new proposals are expected to include steps to mitigate or avoid impacts (such as revised setback standards, new requirements for clustering, more restrictive landscaping controls and other similar provisions). In high-value areas where such measures are infeasible, the element may propose broader actions possibly including land acquisition and land trades. All of these steps aim to reduce the impacts on potentially threatened species and habitats sufficiently to avoid formal listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The County has prioritized avoidance activities (with associated environmental benefits) because it anticipates that formal listings, if unavoidable, will substantially increase costs, time frames & level of difficulty associated with use of lands in the impacted areas.*
- **Watershed Plans:** *The County anticipates that watershed protection will be an increasingly important goal in coming years, consistent with emerging state legislation. As part of this effort, counties may be encouraged to take a more active role in groundwater management (including well permit issuance) based on the precept that these resources are best managed at the local level. Additionally, the County proposes that BMPs be more widely*

incorporated into development permits to supplement requirements already in place for runoff and grading. The anticipated watershed planning activities are expected to reduce existing adverse effects and may in some instances result in beneficial impacts particularly with respect to water quality and supply reliability.

In addition to the watershed issues noted above the Mono County Board of Supervisors has discretionary authority, under an agreement with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, for future review of water leases and water transfer activities between regions of the County and Walker Lake in Nevada. This authority will not be a part of the forthcoming EIR, but the forthcoming EIR will establish the framework of future CEQA documentation requirements to be met before the Board considers any actions pursuant to this agreement.

- **Grading Regulations:** *New and more effective BMP controls will be a key element of the proposed updates to the grading regulations, and the associated environmental effects are expected to be beneficial.*
- **Repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan:** *In order to reflect existing property restrictions and uses, it is proposed to replace the 1990 Conway Ranch Specific Plan with an open space designation on all but the existing developed residential parcels, which would be designated single family residential.*

K. RTP/GENERAL PLAN UPDATE TIMELINE

The RTP and General Plan update process will proceed in one phase, and the County anticipates that the process will be completed by mid-to-late 2015 (including the RTP/General Plan updates, related planning initiatives, the EIR and the MEA).

L. PROJECT LOCATION

The project location covers the entirety of Mono County. As shown in the inset map, the county is located in east-central California, on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountains. The county covers about 3,030 square miles of land area but is sparsely settled, with a 2010 population of 14,202. More than half of the county's residents reside in the town of Mammoth Lakes (the only incorporated city). The remaining residents live in unincorporated communities that include Antelope Valley, Swauger Creek/Devil's Gate, Bridgeport Valley, Mono Basin, June Lake, Mammoth vicinity, Upper Owens, Long Valley, Wheeler Crest, Tri-Valley, Benton Hot Springs Valley, and Oasis.

The County shares a long common boundary with the state of Nevada, and also borders onto four Nevada counties (Douglas, Lyon, Mineral and Esmeralda) and five California counties including the counties of Inyo, Fresno, Madera, Tuolumne, and Alpine. Bridgeport is the Mono County seat.

M. LEAD AND RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

LEAD AGENCY: Mono County is the designated Lead Agency for the project. In order to implement the project, the County will be required to certify that the Final EIR has been prepared

in compliance with CEQA, approve the proposed RTP and General Plan updates, approve the proposed Mitigation Implementation & Reporting Program, adopt findings, and verify that water supplies are adequate to serve the project.



RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES: The Mono LTC, with approval authority over the RTP, will be the principal Responsible Agency for the project. In addition to the Lead Agency approvals listed above and approval of the RTP, the EIR may be used by other public agencies that will consider separate permits and approvals required to implement various RTP and General Plan components. Additional Responsible Agencies under CEQA may include:

- Caltrans (to monitor the RTP planning process and approve actions that would impact the right of way of State Highways);
- The California Resources Agency (for activities involving natural, historical and cultural resources);
- U.S. Forest Service (for actions that would impact public lands managed by the USFS);
- Bureau of Land Management (for actions that would impact public lands managed by the BLM);
- Town of Mammoth Lakes (for actions that would impact lands within the Town boundaries, particularly those related to transportation);
- The California Housing & Community Development Department (for activities that may impact housing supply, affordability and condition);
- The Public Utilities Commission (for activities that may involve privately owned electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water, railroad, rail transit, and passenger transportation companies);
- The California Dept. of Conservation and related divisions (for activities pertaining to the state's geology, seismology and mineral resources);
- The California Energy Commission (for activities that may impact energy demands, conservation & energy efficiency, energy technology, renewable energy resources & technologies, thermal power plants and energy emergencies);

- California Highway Patrol (for activities that may affect public safety, traffic & emergency response, and public property and infrastructure integrity and safety);
- California Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection (for activities that may impact fire protection, emergency response, and stewardship of wildlands for fire safety);
- Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (for activities that may impact water quality, the beneficial use of water resources, and management of water quality problems associated with human activities);
- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPA) for activities involving resources that may have historic significance;
- U.S. Federal Highway Administration (for actions pertaining to the Scenic Byway designation);
- City of Los Angeles (for actions that would impact lands owned by the City);
- Great Basin Air Pollution Control District (for actions that would require consistency with the adopted air quality management plans);
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (for special species and habitat studies); and
- Local special districts (fire, water, public utility) for activities that may impact service capacities/ resources or require district permits

TRUSTEE AGENCIES: A "trustee agency" is a public agency with jurisdiction by law over natural resources held in trust for the people of the State of California. Trustee agencies that may have jurisdiction over resources associated with the RTP and General Plan updates include:

- The California Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, for activities that may involve fish & wildlife of the state, designated rare or endangered native plants, game refuges, ecological reserves, and other areas administered by CDFW;
- The State Lands Commission, with regard to State-owned "sovereign" lands, such as the beds of navigable waters and State school lands; and
- The State Dept. of Parks and Recreation, for activities that may impact resources of the State Park System.

→ Please let us know if your agency has jurisdiction or approval authority over lands and/or actions that may be impacted by the forthcoming RTP and General Plan updates and related planning initiatives.

N. PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

CEQA §15126.6 sets forth the requirements for analyzing alternatives in an EIR as follows: "An EIR shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives." The potentially significant impacts associated with the RTP and General Plan updates will be identified as part of the environmental review process. As a result, the range of alternatives will depend on findings in the forthcoming EIR.

Within this context, the County anticipates that alternatives will be based on planning options considered by the various community RPACs in developing the adopted Area Plans for each community. In addition, the EIR will consider the mandatory 'No Project Alternative,' and the County anticipates consideration of at least one alternative for meeting requirements of the Endangered Species Act. The County invites you to submit comments concerning the range of alternatives to be analyzed in the forthcoming EIR.

O. HOW TO RESPOND TO THIS NOP

Please send your responses to this NOP by email, by postal mail, by fax or by hand delivery. Addresses and contact information are provided below:

Mono County Community Development Department
Post Office Box 347 ♦ Mammoth Lakes, California 93546
Care of: Wendy Sugimura
E-Mail: cdritter@mono.ca.gov
Telephone: 760.924.1800 ♦ Fax #: 760.924.1801
For Hand Delivery: 437 Old Mammoth Rd., Suite P
Minaret Village Mall

Español comentarios son bienvenidos y deben ser dirigidas a la atención de Cedro Barager en el Departamento de Desarrollo Comunitario de Mono County.

P. DEADLINE TO SUBMIT NOP COMMENTS

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, **your response to this Notice of Preparation (NOP) must be sent at the earliest possible date and no later than July 11 (35 days from posting of this notice).** Please include the name, telephone number and address of a contact person so that we can follow up if questions arise. The schedule calls for the Draft EIR to be distributed for public review in 2015.