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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 EIR PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE

Pursuant to 2008 Solano County General Plan objectives, the County of Solano (County) proposes to complete and adopt a Middle Green Valley Specific Plan (Specific Plan). Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, this environmental impact report (EIR) has been prepared by the County to describe the environmental consequences of the County-proposed Specific Plan. The proposed Specific Plan, as described in the *Public Review Draft Middle Green Valley Specific Plan, Fall 2008*, would establish a land use and circulation layout, and associated land use tools such as development clustering, a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)/conservation easement program, and a land conservation trust, which are intended to limit the effects of residential development on the rural character of the valley, including the valley's viewsheds, wildlife habitat, wildlife movement corridors, and agricultural activities.

Implementation of the proposed Specific Plan would require County approval of the Specific Plan and associated County General Plan and Zoning Map amendments to incorporate the Specific Plan. Implementation of the Specific Plan would also ultimately require County establishment and possible internal voter approval of a County Services Area (CSA) to fund and oversee plan area water and sewer service, and County approval of a Master Development Agreement with plan area property owners. Implementation of the Specific Plan may also require local and state agency approvals from the City of Fairfield, Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District, Solano County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), California Department of Public Health, California Department of Fish and Game, and Regional Water Quality Control Board. This EIR has been prepared by the County to provide the CEQA-required environmental documentation for all such local and state approvals.

As used in this EIR, the terms "Middle Green Valley Specific Plan," "Specific Plan," and "project" are intended to be synonymous and refer to all aspects of the current Specific Plan proposal, including all of the approval actions identified above.

The terms "project-level," "individual development" and "site-specific development" as used in this EIR are intended to be synonymous and refer to future individual, discretionary, site-specific, residential, agricultural tourism, agricultural production, public/community, and neighborhood commercial development activities that may occur within the plan area under the provisions of the Specific Plan.

This EIR is intended to serve as a public information and disclosure document identifying those environmental impacts associated with the project that are expected to be significant, and describing mitigation measures and alternatives that could minimize or eliminate significant adverse impacts and increase beneficial effects.<sup>1</sup> Such impacts and needed mitigations are

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<sup>1</sup>CEQA Guidelines section 15149(b).

discussed in this EIR to the level of detail necessary to allow reasoned decisions about the project and conditions of project approval. As a result of the information in this EIR, the Solano County Board of Supervisors may act to approve or deny these various project actions, and/or to establish any associated requirements or conditions of approval considered necessary to mitigate identified project impacts on the environment.

As the Lead Agency, the County also intends this EIR to serve as the CEQA-required environmental documentation for consideration of this project by other Responsible Agencies<sup>1</sup> and Trustee Agencies<sup>2</sup>--e.g., the Solano County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, etc.--that may have limited discretionary authority over future site-specific development proposals facilitated by this Specific Plan.

## 1.2 PROGRAM EIR APPROACH

This EIR has also been formulated as a **program EIR**. A program EIR is a particular EIR approach authorized by section 15168 (Program EIR) of the CEQA Guidelines for use in documenting the environmental implications of community general plans, specific plans, precise plans, and other planning "programs" which involve a series of interrelated actions taken by a governmental authority that can be characterized as one project to achieve an overall program goal. The CEQA-established program EIR concept and authority as they apply to the Middle Green Valley Specific Plan are described in more detail in appendix 23.2 of this EIR (Program EIR Authority).

The approach taken in preparing this EIR under the program EIR authority has been to describe the anticipated broad-based, project areawide and subregional impacts of the proposed Specific Plan. The EIR describes the cumulative, aggregate effects of the combination of potential Specific Plan actions and associated development scenario on project areawide and subregional environmental conditions. Such impacts are described at a level of detail consistent with the level of detail provided in the *Public Review Middle Green Valley Specific Plan* document (Fall 2009).

## 1.3 EIR SCOPE--SIGNIFICANT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

As required by the state CEQA Guidelines, the scope of this program EIR includes all environmental issues to be resolved and all areas of controversy known to the Lead Agency (the County), including those issues and concerns identified as possibly significant by the County in its preliminary environmental review of the project, and by other agencies, organizations, and individuals in response to the County's Notice of Preparation (dated June 6,

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<sup>1</sup>Under CEQA Guidelines, the term "Responsible Agency" includes all public agencies, other than the Lead Agency, which have discretionary approval power over aspects of the project for which the Lead Agency has prepared an EIR.

<sup>2</sup>Under CEQA Guidelines, the term "Trustee Agency" means a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by the project which are held in trust by the people of California.

2009).<sup>1</sup> These environmental concerns include (listed in the order that these topics are identified in the CEQA Guidelines and addressed in this EIR):

1. Aesthetics,
2. Agricultural and mineral resources,
3. Air quality,
4. Biological resources,
5. Climate change,
6. Cultural, historic and paleontological resources,
7. Energy,
8. Geology and soils,
9. Hydrology and water quality,
10. Land use and open space,
11. Noise,
12. Population and housing,
13. Public health and safety,
14. Public services and utilities, and
15. Transportation and circulation.

#### **1.4 CEQA REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS**

As also set forth under CEQA, the scope of this program EIR is limited to the description of those project-related impacts and mitigation measures under the above topic headings that can be identified at this time, without being highly speculative. When the details of future individual, site-specific, residential, agricultural tourism, agricultural production, public/community, and neighborhood commercial development actions are sufficiently defined by individual property owners, each action will be subject to its own, project-specific determination by the County that either: (1) it is fully covered within the scope of this program EIR, (2) it is exempt from CEQA (under sections 21080 et al. of the Public Resources Code), (3) it warrants preparation of a Negative Declaration or Mitigated Negative Declaration (under sections 21064.5 et al. of the Public Resources Code), or (4) it warrants preparation of a focused EIR limited to certain site-specific issues. It is intended that this program EIR will provide the County-certified "first tier" environmental document for use by the County as a baseline and context for "tiering" any required subsequent environmental documentation.

CEQA Guidelines section 15168(c) (Program EIR--Use with Later Activities) details how this program EIR can be used with future individual discretionary activities to determine whether additional environmental documentation is needed. Where applicable, feasible mitigation measures and alternatives developed in this program EIR must be incorporated into future activities within the plan area. If the County determines under section 15162 (Subsequent EIRs and Negative Declarations) that no new environmental effects would occur and no new mitigation measures would be required in connection with a later discretionary activity, the County can approve the activity as being within the scope of this program EIR, and no additional

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<sup>1</sup>The Notice of Preparation (NOP) is a CEQA-required brief notice sent by the Lead Agency to notify the Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, and potentially involved federal agencies that the Lead Agency plans to prepare an EIR for the project, and solicits guidance regarding EIR scope and content. The County's NOP for the Middle Green Valley Specific Plan project was sent out on June 6, 2009 and is included in appendix 23.1 of this EIR.

environmental documentation would be required. For such future site-specific discretionary development activities, a checklist (such as the CEQA Guidelines-suggested Initial Study checklist) may be used to determine whether the environmental effects of the activity are covered in this program EIR. If the subsequent discretionary activity would have effects not examined in this program EIR, a Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration or project-specific EIR may be required for the activity.

## 1.5 IMPACT ASSESSMENT ASSUMPTIONS

The purpose of this program EIR is to evaluate the likely cumulative environmental consequences (impacts and benefits) with full realization of the planning area buildout potential anticipated with adoption of the proposed Specific Plan, and to describe mitigation measures and alternatives that could minimize or eliminate potentially significant adverse environmental impacts and increase beneficial effects.<sup>1</sup> The Specific Plan area buildout assumptions used as the basis for the impact analyses in this program EIR are derived from the land use policies, development standards, and design guidelines described by the Draft Specific Plan document.

The impact analyses in this EIR are based on the conservative (most intensive development) assumption that the Specific Plan will be fully successful in meeting its objectives and, as a result, the planning area will fully develop under the parameters set forth in the Specific Plan over the next approximately 20 years--i.e., by 2030. Each impact analysis chapter in this EIR (aesthetics, agricultural, air quality, biological resources, climate change, cultural and historic resources, etc.) includes a description of related existing conditions, followed by a description of Specific Plan-facilitated full development conditions and associated impacts and mitigation needs.

## 1.6 IMPACT ASSESSMENT BASELINE

CEQA Guidelines section 15125(a) and (e) stipulate that the existing environmental setting (the environmental conditions in the project vicinity at the time the environmental analysis is begun--i.e., June 6, 2009, the date the County's Notice of Preparation was released) should constitute the baseline physical conditions by which it is determined whether an impact is significant. Pursuant to this guideline, all impact assessments in this EIR are based on comparison of the projected future "with project" conditions (i.e., full development under the proposed Specific Plan) with the existing environmental setting rather than with the future "without project" condition (i.e., buildout under existing zoning). For a generalized comparison of anticipated future "with project" conditions with future "without project" conditions (i.e., with what would be expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the Specific Plan were not approved--i.e., under current zoning), see the discussion of Alternative 19.2, Current Zoning Development Scenario, in chapter 19 of this EIR (Alternatives to the Proposed Action).

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<sup>1</sup>CEQA Guidelines section 15149(b).

## 1.7 "SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS" AND OTHER KEY EIR TERMINOLOGY

This program EIR identifies those adverse environmental impacts that are expected to be "significant," and corresponding mitigation measures warranted to eliminate or reduce those impacts to less-than-significant levels. Where it is determined in this EIR that a particular impact cannot be mitigated to a less-than-significant level, the EIR identifies that impact as "unavoidable." Section 20.2 of the EIR (Significant Unavoidable Impacts) includes a summary list of all significant adverse project impacts identified as "unavoidable." Identified significant adverse impacts that are not listed in section 20.2 as "unavoidable" can be mitigated to a less-than-significant level by implementation of the associated mitigation measure or measures identified in this EIR.

These particular EIR terms ("significant," "unavoidable," "mitigation") and other key CEQA terminology used in this report are defined in the box on the following page.

## 1.8 REPORT ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

The impact and mitigation information in this EIR is generally organized in chapters under the 15 environmental headings listed above (aesthetics, agricultural and mineral resources, air quality, biological resources, etc.). Each environmental chapter includes sections describing the following for that issue:

- (1) the environmental setting;
- (2) pertinent plans and policies; and
- (3) impacts and mitigation measures (impacts anticipated with the proposed project--i.e., under the 2030 full development scenario, based on identified CEQA-based significance criteria, and measures recommended to mitigate potential significant adverse impacts).

In addition, this report includes an **alternatives to the proposed action** chapter (chapter 19) and a chapter summarizing the EIR information in terms of various **CEQA-required assessment considerations**, including project "growth-inducing impacts," "significant unavoidable adverse impacts," "irreversible environmental changes," "cumulative impacts," and "effects found not to be significant" (chapter 20).

### **DEFINITIONS OF KEY EIR TERMINOLOGY**

**Significant/Potentially Significant Impact**

"Significant effect on the environment" means a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance. (CEQA Guidelines, section 15382.) *"An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment. A social or economic change related to a physical change may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant."* (CEQA Guidelines, section 15382.)

**Significant Cumulative Impact**

"Cumulative impacts" are defined as *"two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts."* (CEQA Guidelines, section 15355.)

**Unavoidable Significant Impact**

"Unavoidable significant impacts" are defined as those significant adverse environmental impacts for which either no mitigation or only partial mitigation is feasible. If the project is to be approved without imposing an alternative design, the Lead Agency (the County) must include in the record of the project approval a written statement of the specific reasons to support its action--i.e., a "statement of overriding considerations." (CEQA Guidelines, sections 15126.2(b) and 15093(b).)

**Significance Criteria**

The criteria used in this EIR to determine whether an impact is or is not *"significant"* are based on (a) CEQA-stipulated "mandatory findings of significance"--i.e., where any of the specific conditions occur under which the Legislature and the Secretary of Resources have determined to constitute a potentially significant effect on the environment, which are listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15065; (b) the relationship of the project effect to the adopted policies, ordinances and standards of the County and of responsible agencies; and/or (c) commonly accepted practice and the professional judgment of the EIR authors and Lead Agency staff.

**Mitigation Measures**

For each significant impact, the EIR must identify a specific "mitigation" measure or set of measures capable of *"(a) avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action; (b) minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation; (c) rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the impacted environment; (d) reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation or maintenance operations during the life of the action; or (e) compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments."* (CEQA Guidelines, section 15370.)

SOURCE: Wagstaff and Associates, 2009.