

3 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This chapter is organized by environmental resource topic. Each resource topic is addressed in a separate section that presents an integrated discussion of the existing conditions (including environmental setting and regulatory setting) associated with the resource, potential environmental effects of the Project (including direct and indirect impacts) on the resource, and mitigation measures to reduce significant effects.

Cumulative and growth-inducing impacts are discussed in Chapter 4, "Cumulative Impacts," and Chapter 5, "Other CEQA-Mandated Sections," respectively.

APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This Draft EIR identifies and focuses on the environmental impacts associated with the New Zoo at Elk Grove Project, in accordance with CEQA (PRC Section 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Section 15000 et seq.). Sections 3.1 through 3.14 of this Draft EIR present a discussion of regulatory background, existing conditions, environmental impacts associated with construction and operation of the Project, mitigation measures to reduce the level of impact, and the residual level of significance (i.e., after application of mitigation, including impacts that would be significant and unavoidable after application of all feasible mitigation measures). Issues evaluated in these sections consist of the environmental topics identified for review in the notice of preparation (NOP) prepared for the Project as well as responses received on the NOP (see Appendix A of this Draft EIR). Chapter 4 of this Draft EIR, "Cumulative Impacts," presents an analysis of the Project's impacts considered together with the related impacts of other past, present, and probable future projects, as required by Section 15130 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Chapter 5, "Effects Determined to be Less Than Significant" includes an analysis of State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G environmental issue areas scoped out of this EIR during the NOP process. Chapter 6, "Other CEQA-Mandated Sections," includes an analysis of the Project's growth-inducing impacts and significant irreversible environmental effects. Chapter 7, "Alternatives," presents a reasonable range of alternatives and evaluates the environmental effects of those alternatives relative to those of the Project, as required by Section 15126.6 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

The remainder of this chapter addresses the following resource topics:

- ▶ Section 3.1, "Aesthetics";
- ▶ Section 3.2, "Air Quality";
- ▶ Section 3.3, "Biological Resources";
- ▶ Section 3.4, "Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources";
- ▶ Section 3.5, "Energy";
- ▶ Section 3.6, "Geology and Soils";
- ▶ Section 3.7, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change";
- ▶ Section 3.8, "Hazards and Hazardous Materials";
- ▶ Section 3.9, "Hydrology and Water Quality";
- ▶ Section 3.10, "Land Use and Planning";
- ▶ Section 3.11, "Noise and Vibration";
- ▶ Section 3.12, "Public Services";
- ▶ Section 3.13, "Transportation"; and
- ▶ Section 3.14, "Utilities and Service Systems."

Sections 3.1 through 3.14 of this Draft EIR each include the following components.

- ▶ **Regulatory Setting:** This subsection presents information on the laws, regulations, plans, and policies relevant to each resource topic, including federal, State, regional, and City regulations that address potentially adverse environmental impacts.
- ▶ **Environmental Setting:** This subsection describes existing environmental conditions at the Project site and in the surrounding area, in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Section 15125). This setting generally serves as the baseline against which environmental impacts are evaluated. The NOP for the Project was issued on November 21, 2022. Typically, and in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15125, the date on which the NOP is issued is considered appropriate for establishing the baseline.
- ▶ **Impacts and Mitigation Measures:** In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Sections 15126, 15126.2, and 15143), this section identifies the method of analysis to determine whether an impact may occur, and the thresholds of significance used to determine the level of significance of the environmental impacts for each resource topic. The thresholds of significance are based on the checklist presented in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, best available data, applicable regulatory standards, and local practice and standards. The level of each impact is determined by analyzing the effect of the Project on the defined baseline conditions and comparing it to the applicable significance threshold. In determining the level of significance, the analysis assumes that the Project would comply with relevant federal, state, and local ordinances and regulations.

Project impacts and mitigation measures are numbered sequentially in each subsection (e.g., Impact 3.2-1, Impact 3.2-2, Impact 3.2-3, etc.). A summary impact statement precedes a more detailed discussion of each environmental impact. The discussion presents the analysis, rationale, and substantial evidence upon which conclusions are drawn regarding the level of significance of the impact.

An impact would be considered “less than significant” if it would not involve a substantial adverse change in the physical environment. An impact would be “potentially significant” or “significant” if it could or clearly would, respectively, result in a substantial adverse change in the physical environment; both are treated the same under CEQA in terms of procedural requirements and the need to identify feasible mitigation.

This EIR identifies feasible mitigation measures that could avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate for potentially significant or significant adverse impacts. Mitigation measures are not required for effects found to be less than significant. Where feasible mitigation for a significant or potentially significant impact is available, it is described in this EIR following the impact, along with its effectiveness at addressing the impact. Each identified mitigation measure is labeled numerically to correspond with the impact it addresses. Where feasible mitigation is not sufficient to reduce an impact to a less-than-significant level, the impact is identified as significant and unavoidable. The final determination of the level of significance of each impact is presented in bold text in the impact summary and at the end of each impact discussion.

It is important to note that environmental impact analyses under CEQA generally are not required to analyze the impact of existing environmental conditions on a project’s future users or residents unless the proposed project might cause or risk exacerbating environmental hazards or conditions that already exist (CCR Section 15126.2[a]). In those specific instances, it is the project’s impact on the environment and not the environment’s impact on the project that compels an evaluation of how future residents or users could be affected by exacerbated conditions (*California Building Industry Association v. Bay Area Air Quality Management District* [2015] 62 Cal. 4th 369).

The full references associated with the sources cited in Sections 3.1 through 3.14 are presented in Chapter 8, “References,” organized by section number.

EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

CEQA allows a lead agency to limit the detail of discussion of environmental effects that are not potentially significant (PRC Section 21100, CCR Section 15128). Following research and analysis of technical studies and data, it was determined that the Project would not result in significant environmental impacts on the resources identified below. Accordingly, these resources are not addressed in later sections of this Draft EIR.

Agriculture and Forestry Resources

The Project site is designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance (DOC 2023). Although the site is designated for agricultural uses it does not include any active agricultural or farming activities. The site is currently used for cattle grazing from April to December.

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 provides streamlined review of projects. Section 15183 states that, where a project is consistent with the use and density established for a property under an existing general plan for which a city has already certified an EIR, additional environmental review is not required "except as might be necessary to examine whether there are project-specific significant effects which are peculiar to the project or its site." The SEIR certified for the City of Elk Grove General Plan Amendments and Update of Vehicle Miles Traveled Standards Project (SCH No. 2022020463) evaluated the potential for impacts on agricultural resources in the City's Livable Employment Area (LEA) Community Plan Area, including the Project site. The SEIR identified the Project site as a New Zoo and identified the loss of Farmland of Statewide Importance and conversion from grazing land to development of a zoo (City of Elk Grove 2023). Therefore, the Project would not result in any new or increased impacts from the loss of farmland on the Project site. As required by General Plan SEIR projects within the LEA Community Plan, such as the New Zoo, would be required to adhere to mitigation in the General Plan SEIR to address potential impacts to farmland. General Plan Mitigation Measure 3.11-1 includes protection of one acre of existing farmland of equal or higher quality for each acre of Farmland of Statewide Importance that would be developed in the LEA Community Plan Area. In accordance with Mitigation Measure 3.11-1, as a project within the LEA Community Plan Area, the Project applicant would be required to protect farmland in Sacramento County in perpetuity at a ratio of at least 1:1. Therefore, there are no agricultural impacts particular to the project and further analysis is not required pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15183.

There are approximately 2,892 acres of agricultural land under Williamson Act Contract in the Planning Area, of which 172 acres are in the City limits (DOC 2023). Active Williamson Act properties are located south of Kammerer Road in the LEA Community Plan Area and South and West Study Areas of the City (City of Elk Grove 2023). Therefore, the Project site is not located on land under a Williamson Act Contract. No forestry resources or timberlands are on the Project site or in the Project area (City of Elk Grove 2023). Because this issue was evaluated in the City of Elk Grove General Plan Amendments and Update of Vehicle Miles Traveled Standards Project SEIR and the Project would be required to adhere to General Plan policies and mitigation measures from the SEIR as part of development in the LEA Community Plan Area no additional or particular agricultural impacts would occur as a result of implementing the Project. This issue is not discussed in this Draft SEIR.

Mineral Resources

The California Department of Conservation Division of Mines and Geology (now CGS) has developed guidelines for the classification and designation of mineral lands, known as Mineral Resource Zones (MRZs), and retains publications of the SMARA Mineral Land Classification Project dealing with mineral resources in California. Based on mapping by CGS, the Project site is within an area classified as MRZ-3, which indicates areas containing known or inferred concrete aggregate resources of undetermined mineral resource significance (CGS 2018). Inferred mineral resources within the City are Portland cement concrete-grade aggregate composed of Lower Unit Riverbank Formation alluvium deposits (City of Elk Grove 2018). According to the City's General Plan, there are no mineral deposits or mineral extraction activities located within the City (City of Elk Grove 2018). The Project site consists of a fallow field and is not currently utilized for mineral resource extraction. Therefore, no impacts on mineral resources would occur.

Population and Housing

The Project would not include residential development or result in an increase in the City's population. The Project site is a vacant site surrounded by vacant land uses. Development of the Project would not remove any existing residences. However, the Project would also include the hiring of approximately 50 to 200 new employees, for a total of 150 to 300 employees at the New Zoo. The minimal number of new employees required for the Project are anticipated to be from the Sacramento region. Project employment would not induce population or housing. The New Zoo would not create structures, such as roadways, that could physically divide an established community. Proposed off-site improvements would include roadway improvements and pedestrian and bicycle facilities that would occur within the existing roadways right-of-way. The Project would have no impacts related to physical division of an established community. Therefore, there would be no impact related to population and housing, and this issue is not discussed in this Draft EIR.

Recreation

The Project has no residential components and would not result in an increase in population. Therefore, the Project would not substantially increase the use of or physically affect existing parks and recreational facilities. In addition, the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment would not be required. Furthermore, implementation of the Project would increase recreational opportunities in Elk Grove by providing a zoo and educational opportunities that would benefit the immediate community. This issue is not discussed further.

Wildfire

The Project site is not located in or near a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone or a State Responsibility Area (CAL FIRE 2022). The nearest Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone is over 10 miles southeast of the Project site (CAL FIRE 2022). Therefore, there would not be a significant impact related to wildfire, and this issue is not discussed in this Draft EIR.