

4.14 NOISE

4.14.A Effects on Lake Yosemite Regional Park

This response addresses comments LA9-14, LA9-15, as well as other similar comments, which are concerns expressed by Merced County regarding potential noise impacts from campus operations and construction on nearby park users.

The Draft EIR analyzes noise impacts of the proposed campus, both from construction and operations, on adjacent land uses, including Lake Yosemite Regional Park. Since the publication of the Draft EIR, Merced County and the University have agreed to develop changes to the land use plan in the vicinity of the park (see Section 3). The revised plan assigns approximately 55 acres of campus land near the park to recreational rather than academic use. As a result, the distance between building sites on the campus and the park use areas has increased. This revision further reduces campus construction or operational noise effects on the park. However, some construction would nonetheless occur within 300 feet of the park. Campus construction activities occurring at distances less than 300 feet would produce noise levels at the park that would be in excess of 70 decibels, which is the noise threshold for compatibility with parks. The impact of construction within the 300-foot area between the park and the Campus would be significant, and the Draft EIR included a mitigation measure to address this impact. The Draft EIR has been revised to include the added measure that the Campus will coordinate with the Merced County Parks and Recreation Division to reduce the likelihood that planned events at the park are adversely affected by major project construction within 300 feet of the park. Additional mitigation such as restriction of construction to only weekdays is not considered necessary because of the distance between most of the Campus construction sites and the park, and because ambient conditions in the park are noisy on weekends due to the high level of visitation and ski motor boat and personal motorized watercraft (e.g., “jet skis”) use.

The Draft EIR found noise impacts from Campus operations to be less than significant because noise from the day-to-day operations would be low and would not perceptibly increase noise levels at the park. Additionally, the level of activity on the campus would be low in the evenings and on weekends when the most intensive use of the park occurs.

Special events held at the campus stadium could produce high levels of noise. Although the noise from special events held outdoors is loud, it is limited to a short duration (a few hours at a time) rather than noise from a more continuous noise source such as equipment operations or traffic, which is the type of noise for which the L_{dn} was developed. Special event noise is appropriately estimated as equivalent sound level (L_{eq}) and must be also evaluated in terms of frequency of occurrence, the number of receptors who would be affected, and the likely reaction of those exposed to the special event noise.

Because of the attendant crowds, the special events with the highest potential for noise disturbance are expected to take place at the football stadium. As currently planned, the football stadium would be located approximately 5,000 feet from the nearest Lake Yosemite Regional Park boundary. Additionally, the stadium is planned to be located on the opposite side of the Campus from the park, so Campus structures would likely block the direct line-of-sight between park users and the stadium. Without accounting for shielding from intervening structures or terrain, the noise level from the stadium if fully occupied (assuming the NCAA Division I

optimal capacity of 30,000 seats) is estimated to be approximately 55 A-weighted decibels (dBA) at the nearest park boundary during brief periods (a moment or less) of maximum vocal effort. Such levels are expected to be audible but not disruptive at the park. More typical, sustained noise levels during special events are estimated to be approximately 45 dBA or less at the nearest park boundary, which is equivalent to the existing ambient noise levels measured at the park.

It should also be noted that park use on weekends is high and ambient noise levels at these times from recreational activities at the park are high, thus, noise from special events on the Campus should not be bothersome to the park users. Opportunities for passive recreation at the park should also not be adversely affected because, as explained above, noise from the football stadium and other large athletic facilities on Campus would drop to low levels by the time it reaches the Campus edge. Consultation with Merced County Parks and Recreation Division indicates that the park is also used as a site for weddings and the Division has expressed concern that Campus special event noise could affect such activities. Although the University finds the potential for such an impact to be low, it will work with the Division to coordinate the schedule of special events at the park and the Campus to avoid potential nuisance effects. New Mitigation Measure 4.10-2 has been added to this Final EIR in Volume 2, Section 7.

4.14.B Other Concerns

USEPA has requested that noise impacts on biological resources from project construction be evaluated (comment FA1-28). That issue is discussed in Section 4.8.C.