



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 7, 2002

Contact: James Grant  
Office of Communications  
(209) 724-4406 or (209) 658-4406  
e-mail: james.grant@ucop.edu

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED  
1170 WEST OLIVE AVENUE  
SUITE B  
MERCED, CALIFORNIA 95348-1959  
(209) 724-4400  
(209) 724-4499 FAX  
www.ucmerced.edu

**UC MERCED ISSUES FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT;  
EXTENSIVE VERNAL POOL HABITAT TO BE PRESERVED  
THROUGH INVESTMENT OF MORE THAN \$50 MILLION**

Merced, CA – As part of its final Environmental Impact Report (EIR), officially published today, the University of California, Merced has announced that thousands of acres of vernal pool habitat in eastern Merced County will be preserved in perpetuity as a result of a conservation and mitigation program associated with the creation of the proposed new campus.

The final UC Merced EIR is to be reviewed by the Regents of the University of California for certification in mid-January. The document discusses the impacts of building the campus to serve 25,000 students on the Virginia Smith Trust property near the city of Merced, and describes the proposed mitigation and conservation program.

The conservation and mitigation program associated with creation of the new campus will soon result in the preservation of more than 22,000 acres of vernal pool habitat in eastern Merced County, with thousands of additional acres slated to be preserved in coming years through use of conservation easements.

The conservation measures are supported by several funding elements totaling more than \$50 million: 1) a \$30 million California state fund for acquisition of conservation easements in eastern Merced County; 2) a \$12 million grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to the University enabling the acquisition of the Virginia Smith Trust site outside Merced [a portion of the Packard grant will be applied to conservation measures]; 3) a \$14 million fund for regional habitat conservation planning; and 4) a \$2 million grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to the University for conservation-related purposes. In addition, the University has invested several million dollars in environmental studies leading to a better understanding of the environmental setting in eastern Merced County.

**EIR Completion**

Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the draft of the EIR was initially

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circulated in mid-August to the public and forwarded to various federal and state regulatory agencies for review and comment for a 45-day period. The EIR was also made available to the public at repositories in Sacramento, Merced and Los Banos, and the documents were made available on CD-ROM to interested parties.

In addition, the document was posted on the web site <http://ucmercedplanning.net>. In response to several requests, the public review and comment period was extended an additional week to October 4, 2001.

Approximately 30 people representing elected officials, organizations and individuals provided comments on the draft EIR at the public hearing held on September 13, 2001. In addition, more than 100 letters were received from different agencies, organizations and individuals.

Many of the comments on the draft EIR indicated that the information was comprehensive, clear and easily understood, and expressed strong support for the proposed campus and the associated educational, economic and environmental benefits to the San Joaquin Valley. Other comments raised concerns about the draft EIR's responses to environmental issues, and some objected to the overall proposed project.

In its final form, the final Environmental Impact Report totals five volumes and more than 2,000 pages. The document contains a detailed response to the comments received on the draft EIR, and these responses are organized by resource area. It also contains a revised summary of impacts and mitigation measures, and a mitigation and monitoring reporting program.

Members of the public may order individual CD-ROM copies of the report from UC Merced . The document also will be available on the <http://ucmercedplanning.net> web site within a few days. A copy of the Final EIR will be made available at the UC Merced office, and will be available at the Merced Library's main branch and Los Banos branch as well as at the Merced College Library and the State Clearinghouse in Sacramento.

### **Extensive Conservation Measures**

The \$30 million fund for purchase of conservation easements in connection with the development of the UC Merced campus was approved in the 2000-2001 California state budget. Over the past eight months, approximately \$12 million of this fund has been released by the Wildlife Conservation Board for the acquisition by The Nature Conservancy of more than 17,000 acres of land in eastern Merced County. Additional acquisition of conservation easements in this area is targeted with the remaining \$18 million.

The University will acquire another important major portion of the local vernal pool habitat through the acquisition of the 7,030-acre Virginia Smith Trust property with support from a \$12 million grant committed by the Packard Foundation in March of last year. Of the 7,030 acres, approximately 5,750 will be preserved in perpetuity by the university.

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A \$14 million fund was approved in the 2000-2001 California state budget for the development and implementation of a regional habitat conservation program in eastern Merced County to help manage growth associated with the proposed new UC campus; the fund is primarily administered by Merced County and is overseen by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Last spring, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation provided a \$2 million grant to UC Merced to assist the University in acquiring and managing vernal pool habitat on the Virginia Smith Trust property destined to be preserved as part of the creation of the new campus.

The proposed 2,000-acre campus will be divided into three areas: the 750-acre campus natural reserve will be maintained permanently in an undeveloped state and dedicated to scientific research and education; another 340 acres of the campus' land contiguous to the main campus will be reserved for future unforeseeable needs; and the core campus will consist of 910 acres for academic areas, services and support, housing, athletics and recreation, and circulation and parking.

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