



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED  
1170 WEST OLIVE AVENUE  
SUITE 1  
MERCED, CALIFORNIA 95348-1959  
(209) 724-0516

## **Notice of Preparation Of Environmental Impact Report University of California Merced Campus**

The Regents of the University of California, as lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed development of a campus in Merced County, California. The purpose of this notice is to provide agencies and the public an opportunity to comment on the scope and content of the EIR. Agencies and the public are invited and encouraged to provide written comments. Written comments should be directed to Christopher Adams, Campus Planner-UC Merced, 1170 West Olive, Merced, CA 95348-1959, and should be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 19, 2001. The University will also accept oral comments on the scope and content of the EIR at a scoping meeting that will be held on March 9, 2001 at 10:00 AM in the County of Merced Board of Supervisors Meeting Room, 2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340.

After the University of California completes the draft of the EIR, it will circulate the draft EIR for public review and comment. At the conclusion of the public comment period, the University of California will prepare written responses to comments on the draft EIR.

### **Project Description**

The EIR will be prepared to consider the Regents' proposal to develop a campus in eastern Merced County, to be known as the University of California, Merced. It will combine consideration of long-term campus development with the evaluation of specific construction projects anticipated in the near term, as described below.

The EIR will be prepared as a first tier EIR that will evaluate a proposed Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) for the physical development and operation of a 2,000-acre university campus on the proposed campus site. Environmental impacts from development of roadway, water, wastewater, drainage and utility infrastructure to serve the campus will also be included in the evaluation. The LRDP envisions a student population of 25,000 full-time equivalent students and a faculty and staff population of approximately 6,600.

In addition to evaluating the entire LRDP in a first tier level of analysis, the EIR will provide a detailed project level of analysis of the specific buildings and infrastructure proposed to be completed when the campus opens in 2004. At campus opening, the campus will be designed for approximately 1,000 students and 300 faculty and staff. The University anticipates that the campus population would reach approximately 4,500 students and 720 faculty and staff by 2008. The University currently anticipates that three academic buildings and student housing facilities for approximately 800 students will be constructed for campus opening. The EIR will analyze

these initial developments at a project level. In addition, one or more academic buildings, additional student housing, and a student services facility may also be constructed within the first four years after campus opening. To the extent that specific information is available regarding the additional buildings that may be constructed during that period, the EIR may also serve as the site-specific environmental document for those buildings to be constructed soon after the campus opens.

### **Other Planning Efforts In The Project Vicinity**

The County of Merced is concurrently issuing a Notice of Preparation for an Environmental Impact Report analyzing a University Community Plan (UCP) and Area Plan. The proposed UCP and Area Plan would guide future development of the area adjacent to the proposed campus. The Merced County Board of Supervisors will consider the UCP, Area Plan and UCP/Area Plan EIR for approval and certification. Because preparation and adoption of a UCP and Area Plan is within the County's jurisdiction and authority, the County is the Lead Agency for preparation of the EIR for the UCP and Area Plan.

In December 2000, Merced County Department of Public Works issued a Notice of Preparation of an EIR analyzing a roadway project known as the Campus Parkway. This proposed limited access road would connect Bellevue Road (at Lake Road) with Highway 99 south of the City of Merced. Merced County, Caltrans, and the Federal Highway Administration are the lead agencies for environmental review of the Campus Parkway Project.

Merced County, the University, the Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be collaborating on the development of a regional conservation plan for eastern Merced County under the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act and the federal Endangered Species Act. The Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) will be a multiple year effort and it is not anticipated that it will be sufficiently developed to be addressed in this EIR. The NCCP/HCP and associated actions taken by the participating agencies will be addressed in appropriate CEQA/NEPA documents to be prepared in the future.

### **Proposed Project Location**

The University's proposed campus site is located approximately four miles northeast of the city limits of Merced on property owned by the Virginia Smith Trust and the County of Merced. The site is immediately east of Lake Yosemite Regional Park and a portion of Lake Road. The Merced Hills Golf course is located on the southernmost part of the site. The remainder of the site consists of gently rolling grasslands used for seasonal grazing, a barn, and a corral.

This site extends to the southwest of the area previously selected by the Regents for the UC Merced campus. The site initially selected is proposed to be revised in order to minimize impacts to sensitive environmental resources. The EIR will supplement the prior environmental impact report, completed and certified in 1995 for the selection of the site (the San Joaquin Campus Site Selection EIR, SCH # 94022033) in order to provide updated information on alternative sites.

### **Alternatives**

Pursuant to the requirements of CEQA, the LRDP EIR will consider "a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives that will foster informed decision making and public participation." (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(a))

The EIR's discussion and analysis of alternatives will include various alternative sizes and configurations for the proposed campus. The EIR will also include (in addition to its discussion and analysis of

alternatives at the proposed preferred site) a discussion and analysis of a range of potentially feasible alternative sites capable of satisfying most of the objectives of the project which may also be capable of reducing or eliminating any significant environmental impacts associated with the proposed project. In developing candidate sites for this analysis, the EIR will evaluate the sites that the University expects to be presented and analyzed as part of the federal permitting process as well as other sites that are identified in the EIR scoping process. The EIR will select from among these candidate sites a set of alternative sites that will be considered in the EIR's detailed discussion and analysis of alternatives. At this time the University anticipates that an area in the northern portion of the City of Merced urban area (in the vicinity of the previously adopted Bellevue Ranch Specific Plan) and a location in and around Castle Airport (formerly the Castle Air Force Base) will be among the sites that will be considered in this detailed discussion and analysis of alternatives. This discussion and analysis of alternatives will evaluate the ability of the identified alternatives to satisfy project objectives, to reduce or avoid identified environmental impacts, as well as their feasibility and practicality.

### **Description of Proposed Land Use Plan**

The proposed LRDP envisions a 2,000-acre campus comprised of three areas:

(1) A main campus area. All campus development proposed by the LRDP would occur within the main campus area. The main campus area would be dedicated to classrooms, faculty and administrative offices, laboratories, libraries, student services, a student center, performing arts, athletic facilities, on-campus student and faculty housing, campus support services and parking. The proposed LRDP would designate approximately 910 acres for main campus uses.

(2) A campus reserve area. No development is planned or proposed within the campus reserve area. This area would remain undeveloped for the foreseeable future but could be used by the University when future needs change. The proposed LRDP would designate approximately 340 acres as campus reserve.

(3) A natural reserve area. The natural reserve area would be maintained permanently in an undeveloped state. This land would be dedicated to environmental conservation, natural preserves and open space. Parts of the natural reserve area may be restored to enhance the value of various environmental resources. The proposed LRDP would designate approximately 750 acres as permanent natural reserve.

### **Actions to be Taken to Implement the Project**

#### **Actions by the University**

Before approving the project, the Regents must certify that the EIR is adequate and complete. If the Regents decides to proceed with the proposed LRDP and construction of the buildings needed for campus opening, it will take formal action to approve the revised site and the UC Merced LRDP, and adopt appropriate findings in support of those decisions. At the same time, or shortly thereafter, the University also will need to approve plans for any specific buildings or campus improvement projects that it decides should be undertaken in order to implement the LRDP.

#### **Actions by Other Entities**

Permits or approvals may be required from state, federal or local agencies, such as the California Department of Fish and Game, the State of California Regional Water Quality Control Board, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced County, the City of Merced, and the Merced Irrigation District.

The federal agency permitting process has been jointly initiated by the University and the County of Merced and will proceed concurrently with the University's environmental review under CEQA. The University anticipates that, in accordance with section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act, a number of different locations and configurations for the proposed campus will be evaluated and those locations and configurations, among others, will be addressed during the process of identifying alternatives for discussion and analysis in the EIR as described in the discussion of the framework for the EIR's analysis of alternatives, set forth above. The University will work closely with federal and state resource agencies in preparing the EIR and anticipates that issues of interest to these agencies will be fully considered throughout the EIR process.

The site may also need to be annexed to one or more service districts to obtain infrastructure or public services. Annexation to an existing service district, or formation of a new service district, would require the approval of that entity and the Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission.

### **Probable Environmental Effects**

The EIR will evaluate the environmental effects of developing and operating the entire campus as proposed in the LRDP, as well as the effects of developing specific components of the LRDP that are proposed for construction. The following describes the potential environmental impacts of development and operation that will be evaluated and discussed in the draft EIR.

- Aesthetics

The campus site is rural and largely uninhabited. The EIR will examine the visual effects of developing buildings and other uses on the site, including aesthetic effects, view obstruction, and the effects of night lighting.

- Air Quality

Campus related traffic and campus operations will contribute to air pollution. The EIR will evaluate emissions from traffic and campus operations, and their impacts.

- Biological Resources

The EIR will examine the project's effects on wetlands and other aquatic resources. In addition, grading and construction could remove other important wildlife habitat. Campus buildings and other facilities could also create barriers to the movement of wildlife. The EIR will examine these biological issues, including analysis of endangered, threatened or rare wildlife species. The EIR also will describe the plant species that occur within and adjacent to the campus site and evaluate potential impacts on those species from campus development, including analysis of endangered, threatened or rare plant species.

- Cultural Resources

Excavation and grading could disturb previously unidentified prehistoric and cultural resources. The EIR will evaluate potential effects of campus construction on such resources.

- Geology and Soils

The EIR will evaluate whether development of the campus and related facilities could result in the adverse effects on the environment such as erosion, landslides or other forms of ground failure.

- Hydrology and Water Quality

Construction of impervious surfaces, such as buildings, roads and parking lots will alter on-site drainage and runoff patterns and may also alter the quality of storm water runoff. The EIR will examine the environmental effects of constructing and operating infrastructure necessary to convey and release storm water, the effects of increased storm water flows, including any potential for flooding and other hydrological impacts to receiving waters, and any potential effects of campus storm water on surface and groundwater quality.

- Land Use

The EIR will describe the current uses of the campus site and surrounding areas and will describe the way in which development of the campus and supporting infrastructure will change existing land uses. This discussion will include an analysis of the extent to which development of the campus and supporting infrastructure could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use.

- Noise

The EIR will evaluate the effects of increases in noise levels that could result from campus-related traffic and any other significant noise sources associated with operation of the campus.

- Population and Housing/Growth Inducement

The EIR will describe the growth that will be induced as a result of the increase in population (students, faculty, staff and their families) directly related to development and operation of the campus. This analysis will examine growth inducing effects both with and without development of housing, commercial and retail facilities in a nearby University Community. The EIR will also describe other growth that may be indirectly induced by development and operation of the University.

- Public Services

The increased population associated with the campus will increase demand for all public services. The EIR will evaluate changes to the physical environment that may result from expansion of such services.

- Recreation

Development of the campus could eventually necessitate closure of the existing golf course on the proposed site. Construction and operation of the new campus also may affect recreational use of Lake Yosemite. The EIR will evaluate the physical effects the project will have on recreational facilities.

- Transportation/Traffic

The development of the campus will increase motor vehicle traffic in the surrounding area. The EIR will evaluate the impacts of increased motor vehicle traffic on area roadways and freeway segments.

- Utilities and Service Systems

The EIR will examine the environmental effects of supplying the campus with natural gas, electricity and communications systems, including the environmental effects of constructing new infrastructure to provide these utilities to the campus. The EIR will examine the environmental effects of treating and disposing of

sewage generated by the campus, including the environmental impacts of constructing and operating infrastructure necessary to convey and treat sewage as well as the impacts of disposing of treated sewage. The EIR will examine the environmental effects of supplying the campus with water, including the environmental impacts of constructing infrastructure necessary to supply to water to the campus.

- Construction Impacts

The EIR will evaluate construction-related impacts, including potential traffic congestion and noise from construction vehicles.

- Cumulative Impacts

The EIR will examine the cumulative impacts of development of probable future projects in the area as those impacts might combine or cumulate with the environmental impacts associated with development and operation of the campus. This analysis will include the cumulative impacts arising from development of off-campus housing, commercial and retail facilities induced by development and operation of the University, and development of the Campus Parkway project proposed by Merced County.

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[Attached map](#)