
4. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

4.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS

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TOPICS ADDRESSED

The Environmental Analysis section of this EIR discusses the environmental setting, impacts and mitigation measures for each of the following topics:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Mineral Resources
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation and Circulation
- Utilities

Basis of Analysis

The proposed UCP would be adopted by resolution as a component of the County of Merced General Plan. Consistent with Section 15146 of the CEQA Guidelines, the level of detail included in an EIR is guided by the level of specificity of the project under consideration. The proposed UCP establishes the policy and programmatic framework for preparation of subsequent specific plans. While this EIR analyzes full buildout of the UCP area, the UCP does not convey development entitlements; therefore, the level of detail in the impact analysis and the development of mitigation measures is consistent with the evaluation of a plan level document. A more detailed analysis and the development of more specific mitigation measures would occur as part of the separate environmental review process for subsequent specific plans.

This program EIR analyzes the “ultimate” future use of the UCP area, which is assumed to be full buildout of the UCP area. Full buildout is considered to represent maximum likely adverse, and thus considers the full potential environmental impacts of the UCP on issues addressed in Chapter 4 of this EIR. Although the area south of Dunn Road is designated in the UCP as “Future Study Area A” and the outcome of the future study is not known at this time, this EIR assumes full development of that area. Development in the two additional

study areas identified in the Area Plan, one west of Lake Road (“Future Study Area B”) and the other east of the UCP area (“Future Study Area C”), is not analyzed in this EIR, because the UCP does not propose any land uses in these areas and the outcome of the future studies is unknown.

Existing Conditions

The DEIR provides a description of the environmental conditions of the UCP area, as they existed when the NOP was released. As discussed below, the UC Merced campus is assumed in the “no project” baseline, so the DEIR describes the anticipated conditions on the campus site, after campus development. A full description of the UC Merced site and the impacts of UC Merced are provided in the August 2001 UC Merced Long Range Development Plan Environmental Impact Report, available from the University of California, Merced 1170 W. Olive Avenue, Merced CA 95348.

Impact Scenarios Analyzed

Each of the EIR sections analyzes up to 4 scenarios of development for each impact: Baseline Plus Buildout, Baseline Plus 2015, 2015 Cumulative and Cumulative Buildout. The analysis of impacts on roads also considers cumulative 2025 conditions (see Section 4.14 Transportation and Circulation). Consistent with UCP Policy LU 2.1, the UCP will be adopted only after adoption of the UC Merced Long Range Development Plan. Therefore, concurrent development of the UC Merced campus and the University Community is assumed, and the UC Merced campus is included in each of the scenarios. The assumptions for each of these scenarios are described below.

Baseline Plus Buildout Scenario

The Baseline Plus Buildout scenario analyzes impacts associated with buildout of the UCP added to existing conditions in the County plus buildout of the campus.

Baseline Plus 2015 Scenario

The Baseline Plus 2015 scenario includes a discussion of potential impacts based upon projected UCP development at the year 2015 (see Chapter 3, Demographics, for 2015 development projections). Similar to buildout, the Baseline Plus 2015 scenario includes anticipated campus development at 2015.

Cumulative Buildout Scenarios

2015 Cumulative Scenario

The 2015 Cumulative scenario includes a discussion of potential impacts based upon projected UCP development at the year 2015. The baseline in the 2015 Cumulative scenario includes anticipated 2015 development in the County and 2015 development on the UC Merced campus.

2025 Phased Cumulative Scenario

The 2025 Cumulative scenario includes a discussion of the potential impact based upon projected UCP development at the year 2025. The baseline in the 2025 Cumulative scenario includes anticipated 2025 development in the County and 2025 development within the campus. This analysis is provided for planning purposes only in Section 4.14 Transportation and Circulation.

2025 Plus Buildout Cumulative Scenario

The Cumulative Buildout scenario includes a discussion of potential impacts based upon buildout of the UCP. Two approaches are used to develop a “without project” cumulative scenario. For population-related impacts (e.g. traffic, services), development projections provided by the Merced Council of Area Governments (MCAG) are used. Because projections for development within the County only extend to 2025, the baseline for population-related cumulative development is 2025, even though the buildout of both the UCP and the UC Merced campus would occur after the year 2025. Therefore, the baseline in the Cumulative Buildout scenario includes anticipated 2025 development in the County and buildout of the campus. For acreage-based impacts (e.g., agricultural land conversion), buildout of the SUDPs and rural residential centers is assumed in the “without project” scenario, along with buildout of the campus. Like the campus and University Community, buildout of the SUDPs and RRCs would be expected to occur after 2025.

Section Format

Chapter 4 is divided into sections that provide the environmental setting, regulatory setting, standards of significance, impacts to the environmental setting, and feasible mitigation measures for significant impacts. Each section begins with a description of the proposed UCP's **environmental setting** and a **regulatory context** as it pertains to a particular issue. The environmental setting provides a point of reference for assessing the environmental impacts of the proposed UCP and alternatives. The setting discussion addresses the conditions that exist prior to implementation of the proposed UCP. This setting establishes the baseline by which the proposed UCP and alternatives are measured for environmental impacts.

The regulatory context summarizes relevant federal, State, regional, and local laws, ordinances, and regulations that the proposed project must implement and/or observe.

Plan Elements describes the aspects of the UCP as they relate to the impacts being evaluated in the section.

The setting description in each section is followed by an **impacts** and **mitigation** discussion. The impact and mitigation portion of each section includes impact statements, prefaced by a number in bold-faced type. Applicable laws and regulations are identified, followed by the significance of the impact. Mitigation measures included as policies in the UCP are identified, as well as additional mitigation, if necessary. The degree of relief provided by identified mitigation measures is also evaluated. A cumulative analysis is included at the end of each section. An example of the format is shown below.

4.X-1 Statement of impact for the proposed UCP.

Applicable Regulations: State laws, County ordinances, etc.

Significance: Significant or Less than Significant, after applicable regulations.

Mitigation Included in UCP: Includes policies included in the UCP that would reduce environmental impacts.

Significance After Mitigation Included in UCP: Significant or Less than Significant, after implementation of applicable regulations and UCP policies.

Additional Mitigation: Mitigation, if required, beyond regulations and UCP policies.

4.X-1

Recommended mitigation measures are numbered the same as the impact.

Residual Significance: Significant/Less than Significant, after regulations, UCP policies, and mitigation measures.

The above summary is followed by a discussion of the potential impact and description of how applicable regulations, UCP policies, and additional mitigation measures, if identified, would reduce impacts of the proposed UCP.