
4.13 RECREATION

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INTRODUCTION

The following section describes the recreational facilities existing in Merced County and the City of Merced, and assesses the effects on recreation from implementation of the UCP. The section identifies the anticipated demand for recreational facilities resulting from the development proposed in the UCP, considers the physical effects of the increased demand on existing recreational resources, and evaluates the ability of the UCP policies to address anticipated needs. This section also considers the cumulative effect on recreation services and facilities of the implementation of the UCP, in combination with development of the UC Merced campus and other cumulative growth in the region.

Public comments received in response to the Notice of Preparation raised issues related to the impacts of increased demand for recreation and the need for the replacement or expansion of recreational facilities. The potential closure of the Merced Hills Golf Course was also raised.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

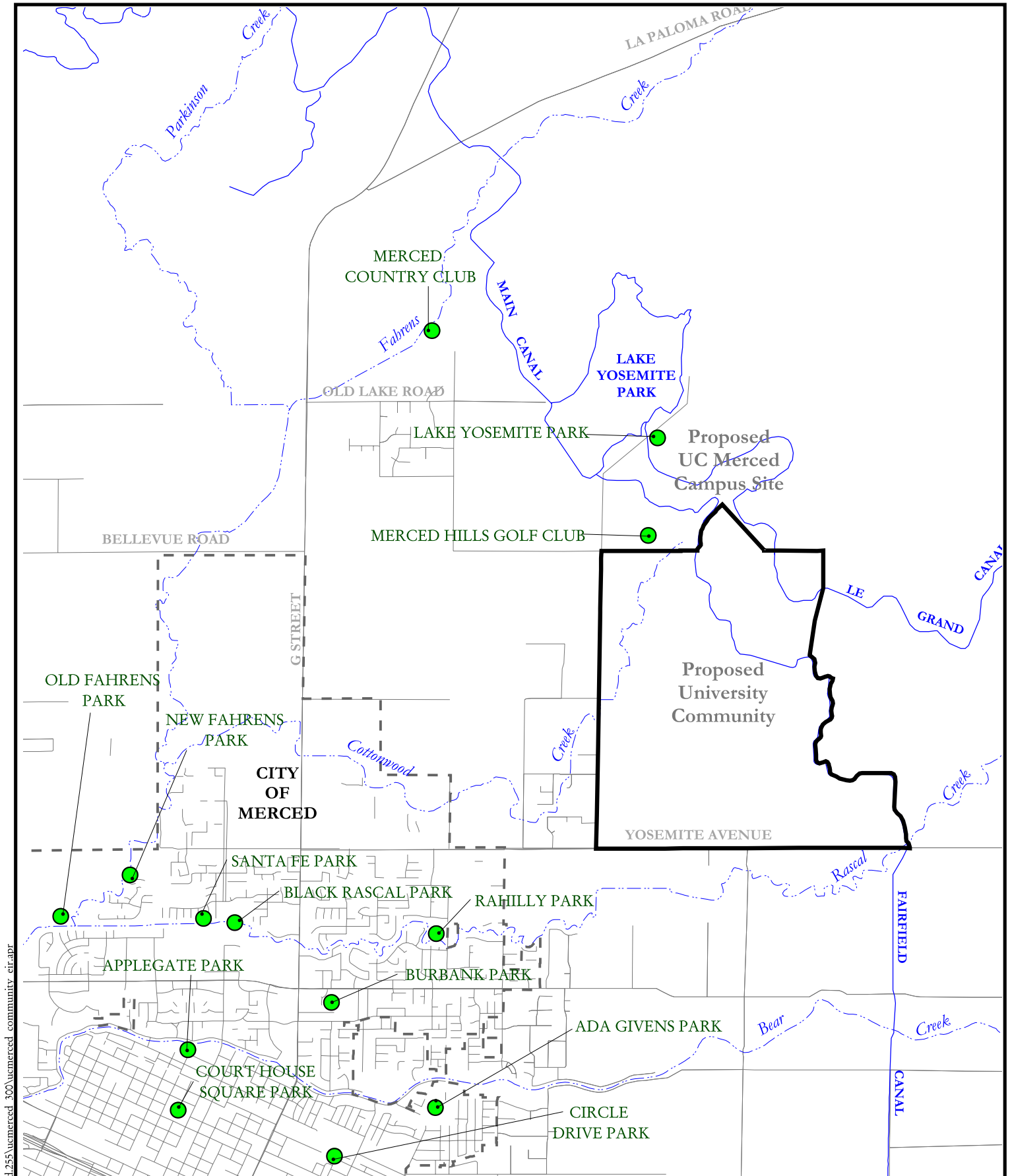
The UCP area is located in the northeastern portion of Merced County, adjacent to and partially on the Merced Hills Golf Course, a privately owned, 18-hole public golf course, and near Lake Yosemite Regional Park. The lands immediately adjacent to the UCP area to the east and south, and within the UCP area, are used for agricultural production or grazing. The northernmost portion of the UCP area is within a portion of the existing Merced Hills Golf Course. The land to the west of the project site is designated Rural Residential Center (RRC) by the County, and is partially developed with large-lot residences. There are no recreation facilities in the RRC to the west of the UCP area. The following is a description of existing recreational facilities in the vicinity of the UCP area, as well as those serving the County and City of Merced. Figure 4.13-1 shows parks and recreation sites in relation to the UCP area.

Regional Recreational Facilities

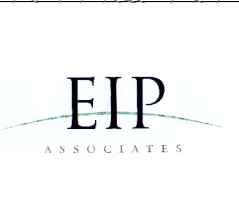
Existing Parks and Recreational Opportunities in Merced County

Table 4.13-1 describes those federal, State, and local public recreation facilities available to residents of Merced County. The parks listed in Table 4.13-1 offer both active and passive recreation opportunities. There are approximately 114,000 acres of recreational lands in the County that offer a variety of amenities such as picnicking, swimming, boating, hunting, bird watching, playgrounds, sports fields and hiking. In addition, two major trail corridors span the County but the trails are incomplete at this time.

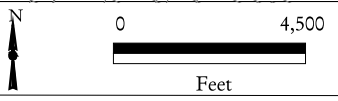
Table 4.13-2 identifies public and private golf courses located in Merced County.



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Source: Merced County, Planning & Comm. Dev. Dept., Roads, Creeks and Canals, Parks and Recreation Sites and County GIS Files, June 18, 99; and EIP Associates, Digitized Community Boundaries and GIS Program, July 24, 01.



- Proposed UCP Area
- City Boundary
- Parks and Recreation Sites

**FIGURE 4.13-1
PARKS AND
RECREATION SITES**
University Community Plan EIR
Merced, CA

TABLE 4.13-1		
PARK AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN THE MERCED REGION		
Park or Recreational Facility	Activities Available	Acres
Federal and State Parks and Recreation Sites		
Merced National Wildlife Refuge	Auto/trail routes, bird watching	8,234 acres
San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (not currently open to the public)		12,800 acres
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge	Auto/trail routes, bird watching	26,340 acres
California State Parks and Recreation (DPR)/Fish and Game (DFG) Sites		
Cottonwood Creek Upper and Lower (DFG) O'Neill Wildlife Area	Hunting, camping, bird watching	6,700 acres
George Hatfield State Recreation Area (DPR)	Bird watching, swimming, fishing, picnicking	46 acres
Great Valley Grasslands State Park (DPR)	Fishing, field trips, research	700 acres
Los Banos Wildlife Area (DFG)	Bird watching	6,130 acres
McConnell State Recreation Area (DPR)	Fishing, picnicking, camping, play areas	78 acres
Mendota Wildlife Area (DFG)	Hunting, bird watching, fishing	11,802 acres
North Grasslands Wildlife Area (DFG)		6,335 acres
San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area (DPR) Los Banos Creek Reservoir	Fishing, camping, picnicking, boating, hunting	28,000 acres
Pacheco State Park	Hiking, mountain biking and equestrian trails, bird watching	2,600 acres
Volta Wildlife Area (DFG) ¹	Hunting, camping, fishing	3,004 acres
West Hilmar Wildlife Area (DFG)	Hunting, fishing	340 acres
Merced County Parks and Recreation Sites		
County Courthouse	Tours, picnicking	6.5 acres
Emory O'Banion	Picnicking	10 acres
South Dos Palos	Picnicking, ball field, library	15 acres
Winton	Picnicking, ball field, concessions	22 acres
Los Banos	Swimming pool, museum, library, play/picnic areas	6 acres
Planada	Picnicking, recreation building, senior citizens hall	5 acres
Merced County Regional Parks		
Hagaman Regional Park	Picnicking, fishing	16 acres
Henderson Regional Park	Fishing, boating, picnicking	74 acres
Lake Yosemite Regional Park	Boating, waterskiing, wind sailing, swimming, canoeing, picnicking	486 acres water, 100 acres developed park
City of Merced Park Facilities		
Fahrens Park	Playground, basketball, restroom	75.0 acres
Applegate Park	Recreation building, playground, picnic shelter, basketball, zoo, tennis, restroom	23.0 acres
Harris-Schmidt	Tennis, picnicking, ball fields, concessions	33 acres
Joe Herb Park	Playground, picnic shelter, ball fields, restroom	27 acres
Youth Sports Complex	Ball fields	9.0 acres
Rahilly Park	Play ground, picnic shelter, restroom	14.7 acres
Burbank Park	Play ground	4.0 acres
Courthouse Square	Open space	7.0 acres

Park or Recreational Facility	Activities Available	Acres
Ada Givens Park	Play ground, picnic shelter, pool, restroom	10.0 acres
Stephen Leonard Park	Recreation building, playground, pool, basketball, restroom	2.7 acres
McNamara Park	Recreation building, playground, pool, basketball, restroom	7.0 acres
Flanagan Park		3.9 acres
Macias Park	Picnic shelter, basketball, restroom	5.0 acres
Main Street Square		0.5 acres
South Merced Mini-Parks (10)	Play grounds	5.5 acres
Rascal Creek Park (linear park)	Play ground	20.0 acres
Bear Creek Park (linear park)	Open space	8.0 acres
Santa Fe Park (linear park)	Play ground	15.6 acres
Total Acres		114,100.26 acres

Source: Merced County Parks and Recreation Department, 2001.

Course	Type	Green Fees
Forebay, Santa Nella	public course, 9 holes	\$12 - \$20
Madera Municipal	public course, 18 holes	\$19 - \$28
Merced Hills Golf Course	public course, 18 holes	\$17 - \$24
Pheasant Run, Chowchilla	public course, 18 holes	\$25 - \$40
Rancho Del Rey, Atwater	public course, 18 holes	\$20 - \$25
Stevinson Ranch (near Hilmar)	public course, 18 holes	\$65 - \$85

Sources: Virginia Smith Trust, 2001; Forebay Golf Course, 2001; Stevenson Ranch Golf Course, 2001; Pheasant Run Golf Course, 2001.

The County also lists over 40 private facilities offering a range of recreational opportunities including horseback riding and hunting.

Level of Service for Parks in Unincorporated Merced County

Merced County is responsible for provision of parks and recreational facilities for residents of the unincorporated County, and for the provision of regional parks and recreational facilities that serve all County residents. The County General Plan notes that parklands and recreational facilities expansion is limited due to insufficient County funds available for maintenance, and because fees dedicated to park acquisition under the Quimby Act cannot be used for maintenance.²

An examination of specific unincorporated communities in the County reinforces the discussion in the General Plan and confirms the relative low quantity of parks and recreational facilities available to residents of the unincorporated County. Current population figures³ indicate that 31,595 county residents

live in the communities of Delhi, Franklin/Beachwood, Hilmar, Le Grand, Planada, Santa Nella, and Winton. Those seven communities in the unincorporated area of the County currently have approximately 65 acres of parkland. Based upon a County ordinance requiring a minimum of 2.5 acres of parkland per each 1,000 residents, nearly 80 acres of parkland should be available in these areas.

Currently the county has a total population of 215,256⁴ and 190 acres of developed regional parkland in three regional parks (not including the 486 acres of the surface of Lake Yosemite), a ratio of approximately 0.88 acre of regional parkland for each 1,000 residents.

Lake Yosemite Regional Park

Lake Yosemite Regional Park is an important regional recreation facility, serving many thousands of area residents. It is also immediately adjacent to both the site of the proposed University of California, Merced campus and approximately one-quarter mile north of the UCP area.

Lake Yosemite is a 486-acre water-retention facility created and owned by the Merced Irrigation District (MID). MID leases the lake and its shoreline to Merced County for recreational use and development under a 50-year lease that ends in 2026. Visited by over 300,000⁵ people annually, Lake Yosemite Regional Park is approximately 100 acres and is used extensively for water-related recreational activities and picnicking. The County also owns approximately 200 acres of adjacent, undeveloped land to the southeast, which was acquired expressly for, and has for many years been planned for expansion of the Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

The County used its General Funds, State Park Bond revenues, and funds from the US Department of Interior's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program to purchase parkland for Lake Yosemite Regional Park in two increments. The first 55.1 acres was purchased for \$48,600, or approximately \$800 per acre, and transferred to the County on June 26, 1920. Another 205.1 acres was purchased for \$186,500, or approximately \$900 per acre, and transferred to the County on April 10, 1975. No portions of the Park property were donated. Of these 260 acres, 230 are currently leased for grazing, and the remaining acres are in the developed portion of the Park. Under the terms of the state and federal grants, the lands may not be converted to any use other than park lands without prior federal or state approval, as appropriate, and acquisition of replacement parklands of equal value. Conversion of state funded parklands would require state legislation. Conversion of federally funded parklands would require approval of the Department of Interior.

Lake Yosemite Regional Park is open year-round. From April to September the Park is open from 7:30 a.m. until 11:00 p.m.; during winter months the Park is open daylight hours. A daily parking fee of \$4 per car is charged, or a \$30.00 season pass is available. The Park has 2,500 to 3,000 paved and unpaved spaces, including those marked for vehicles with boat trailers. The vehicle charge is in effect every weekend and most weekdays from Easter Sunday through mid-October.⁶

Lake Yosemite Regional Park provides a variety of passive and active recreational facilities and equipment. The Park is unique as it is the only regional park that offers substantial opportunities for swimming and boating. The Park provides power and sail boat facilities, as well as a boat ramp. There is a non-power boat rental concession, two swimming beaches, a walking pier around the Main Beach, a

food concession and first aid buildings, restrooms and drinking water, recreational baseball fields, volleyball courts, bicycling on a paved trail, picnic tables and barbecue pits, fishing for trout stocked by California Department of Fish and Game, playgrounds, rental picnic shelters and a small event center. Powerboats are allowed in defined areas, as are water skiing and jet skis, and there are no maximum engine size or noise restrictions on boat motors or jet skis.

Park revenues from vehicle parking and facility and equipment rental fees are set by County ordinance and support approximately 30 percent of the total cost of Park maintenance. The remainder of the budget is supplied by County General Funds. Other agencies contribute in-kind support to the Park including the Merced County Sheriff's Office and the California Department of Fish and Game. There have been no County-funded capital improvements since the last land acquisition in 1975. In the early 1990s, Parks and Recreation staffing was reduced by half, to 12 people. Maintenance activities barely keep pace with the growth in Park use, and capital improvements have been accomplished only with private funds, State bond monies, or parkland dedication fees.⁷

On holidays and on weekends when the afternoon temperature reaches 100 degrees or above, Park attendance reaches 8,000 to 10,000 patrons per day.⁸ Officials close the Park two to three times per summer on busy holidays when no parking space remains.

While no Park-specific demographic data are available, County staff conducted informal surveys at the toll station, asking drivers about location of residence. Surveys indicate that approximately 85 percent of Park users say they reside in the Merced and Atwater areas. Individuals or groups who rent facilities and equipment, and/or are involved in boating activities are estimated to be those in middle or higher income ranges. The preponderance of those using the two swimming areas and the individual picnic areas are estimated to be from lower-income families. Many of those using the general recreation, non-rental areas of the Park are observed to be Asian, Hispanic and African American. City of Merced Parks and Recreation staff and Merced County Planning staff also observed that the demographic description of these use patterns has remained much the same for several decades.⁹

Merced County has no shared facilities or agreements with neighboring cities regarding parks or open space.¹⁰

Other Recreation Facilities

Merced Hills Golf Course

The Merced Hills Golf Course is a public 18-hole owned by the Merced County Board of Education. The Merced Hills Golf Course is located along the northern boundary of, and partially on, the UCP area. Revenues generated by the Merced Hills Golf Course are used to fund higher education scholarships that are managed and distributed by the Virginia Smith Trust.

Over 47,000 rounds of golf were played at the Merced Hills Golf Course in the most recent year in which records are available, with the number of rounds having increased by over 40 percent in the past three seasons.¹¹ Green fees are \$17 per round on weekdays and \$24 per round on weekends. The Golf Course provides player programs and clinics for youth players and adults. The Golf Course has participated in

several state level "points" events including the Pepsi tour and others that include golfers from throughout the state.

Other Golf Courses in the Region

There are a limited number of other public golf courses in the Merced region. The four closest public 18-hole golf courses include Rancho Del Rey in Atwater, Stevinson Ranch near Hilmar, Madera Municipal in Madera, and Pheasant Run in Chowchilla. There is also a public 9-hole golf course in Santa Nella. There is a wide range of costs for green fees at the public golf courses in the region, with weekday green fees ranging from \$12 at Forebay in Santa Nella to \$65 at Stevinson Ranch, and weekend green fees ranging from \$19 at Forebay to \$85 at Stevinson Ranch. Rancho Del has green fees that are comparable to Merced Hills Golf Course. The Rancho Del Rey golf course is known to be operating at or near capacity. Table 4.13-2 summarizes the public and private golf courses in the region.

There are three private golf clubs in the region, including the Merced Country Club, the 9-hole Executive Course in Hilmar, and the Turlock Golf and Country Club. In addition, Merced County approved the proposed Dry Creek Golf Course (now called Fox Hills) in association with 400 housing units as part of a General Plan Amendment. The Dry Creek Golf Course is planned for an area southwest of Los Banos, but has not been built to date.

Bikeways

The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) *Regional Bicycle Plan (1998)* is a component of the 1990 Merced County General Plan and the 1998 Regional Transportation Plan Update. The MCAG Plan outlines planning and funding for regional bikeways.¹² It addresses existing bikeway conditions, proposes new facilities, and prioritizes future projects and funding from a regional perspective. The priority projects list includes a connection to the UC Merced campus.¹³ The document references Merced County General Plan Circulation Element policies T-2.4, T-2.5, T-2.6, which support alternative transportation.

MCAG's *Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan*, adopted November 1999, was created as an extension of Merced's and Atwater's General Plans, the Regional Bicycle Plan, and the Regional Transportation Plan.¹⁴ There is currently only one regional bikeway – a two-mile path along Lake Road from Yosemite Avenue in Merced to Lake Yosemite Regional Park at the entrance to the proposed University Community.¹⁵ The Plan proposes a regional bikeway system connecting Merced and Atwater with the University of California, Merced campus and UCP area, while completing and interconnecting bikeways within the two cities.¹⁶ The Plan also proposes specific bikeway connections from the City of Merced to the campus using creek ways, various canals, and transmission line rights of way to connect to the existing Lake Road path, the Campus Parkway or Bellevue Road.¹⁷

The City of Merced, with an investment of \$4 million over the past 25 years, has completed over 45 miles of bike routes ending at McKee Road.¹⁸ The City currently has a funding application before Caltrans for an extension of the City's bikeway system to within one-half mile of a future connection with the two-mile regional bikeway that runs along Lake Road to the west of the UCP area.

REGULATORY CONTEXT

Federal Regulations

There are no specific federal standards that apply to provision of parks or recreational facilities.

State Regulations

The California State Government Code Section 65560 provides that the four major functions of open space are to preserve natural resources, manage the production of resources, provide outdoor recreation, and provide public health and safety.

Quimby Act

California Government Code Section 66477, Subdivision Map Act, referred to as the Quimby Act, permits local jurisdictions to require the dedication of land and/or the payment of in-lieu fees solely for park and recreation purposes. The required dedication and/or fee are based upon the residential density, parkland cost, and other factors. Land dedicated and fees collected pursuant to the Quimby Act may only be used for developing new, or rehabilitating existing, park or recreational facilities. The maximum dedication and/or fee allowed under current State law is equivalent to providing three acres of park land per 1,000 persons, unless the park acreage of a municipality exceeds that standard, in which case the maximum dedication is five acres per 1,000 residents.

Local Regulations

Merced County General Plan

The General Plan recognizes that recreational areas are both a vital component of healthy communities and a regional resource. The County has approximately 65,000 acres of regional County parks, and State and Federal Park and recreational areas. Within designated urban areas, the General Plan encourages dual use of both school grounds and drainage basins as park sites in order to maximize the use of valuable land and reduce the amount of designated residential land taken by these required features. The General Plan also recommends coordination of pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trails with other recreation resources in both urban and rural area environments to enhance both access and recreational enjoyment.

The Merced County General Plan (Year 2000)¹⁹ Land Use, Circulation, and Open Space/Conservation elements contain goals, objectives, and policies pertaining to recreation and open space uses. Those relevant to the University Community Plan are presented below:

The General Plan and its urban boundary diagrams serve to establish the land use relationship between the Plan or relevant Community Specific Plan and all property within the County. The Plan recognizes multiple compatible uses such as agricultural support operations, recreational areas, and public or institutional facilities when necessary.²⁰ Those relevant to the UCP area are presented below.

Land Use

Goal 9: Accommodation of public land uses and private facilities, which satisfy specific, County needs.

Objective A: Recreational areas, institutional and public facilities, hazardous and non-hazardous waste facilities, power and communication towers and airports are appropriately located to minimize land use conflicts while satisfying local or regional demands.

Policies:

1. Ensure that adequate local and regional park facilities are available to serve the growing County population.
2. Public recreational areas may be designated “Recreational” on individual urban boundary diagrams; otherwise these areas may be identified by a combining designation through the symbol “R” over the base land use designation on the Land Use Policy Diagram.

Circulation Chapter

Goal 2: A circulation system which provides for a variety of transportation modes for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods throughout the County.

Objective 2.B: An established bikeway system meeting the existing and future needs.

Policies:

7. Encourage the construction of Class I, II or III bike routes as designated in the overall Merced County Bikeway Plan and in Community Specific Plans.
8. The location and construction of bikeways shall be coordinated with incorporated cities and adjacent counties.

Open Space/Conservation Chapter

Goal 3: Open space for recreation, aesthetics, and protection from hazards.

Objective 3.A: Recreational lands are available for local and regional needs.

Policies:

1. Encourage the continuation and expansion of existing public recreation land uses, including but not limited to, public beaches, parks, recreation areas, wild areas and trails.
2. Ensure that adequate local and regional park facilities are available to serve the growing County population.
3. Establish and continue to develop a system of local and regional parks, and other recreation areas throughout the County which balance the relative importance of direct site access with management of sensitive wildlife resources.
4. Non-recreational land uses should be buffered from sensitive public recreation lands through site design and other techniques.

5. Promote the use of energy, communication, transmission and distribution easements as equestrian, bicycle and pedestrian or hiking trails.
6. Areas identified as proposed for the California Recreational Trails System should be reviewed during project proposals for consideration of easements and integration into County recreational facilities.

Objective 3.B: Lands with high aesthetic value are properly managed.

Policies:

1. Stream corridors should be maintained in a natural condition and retain the general character of natural slopes and formations. Regional parks should be used to preserve areas of natural and scenic beauty.
2. Regional parks should be used to preserve areas of natural scenic beauty.

Objective 3.C: Open space lands are used for public recreation.

Policies:

12. Open space recreational uses should be considered appropriate for areas identified as noise impacted.
13. Agriculture shall be considered a compatible land use in public and private recreation areas that must be protected and buffered.

Merced County Ordinance

Under the initial Quimby Act provisions, Merced County Ordinance 1090 was passed in 1982 and requires dedication of parkland or payment of in-lieu fees from new residential development based upon a minimum standard of 2.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The Ordinance applies to residential subdivisions with more than five parcels. Under Section 5 of the Ordinance, residential subdivisions consisting of 50 or fewer lots are considered as qualified for the payment of fees in lieu of land dedication. Those subdivisions with 51 lots or more are considered qualified for the provision of land **or** payment of fees or a combination of both.²¹ Park fees can vary by subdivision as they are based upon appraised land value, and assume 3.2 persons per single family or duplex residence or 2.0 persons per multi-family dwelling unit.

The County has no standard for provision of regional parkland.²²

Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan (Merced County Association of Governments)

As discussed above, the Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan was created as an extension of those cities' general plans, the Regional Bicycle Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan. The Plan incorporates specific City of Merced General Plan transportation policies and implementing actions including encouraging use of bicycles as alternative transportation, providing bicycle support facilities, and maintaining and expanding the existing bicycle circulation system.

PLAN ELEMENTS

The University Community Plan land use table and policies describe the number of acres of parkland in the UCP area, and the nature of land use and recreation planning for the new community of approximately 30,782. The UCP would convert a portion of the Merced Hills Golf Course to urban uses within the UCP area.

The UCP area Land Use table includes 256 net acres of parkland and open space divided roughly evenly among the residential villages.

University Community Plan Recreation Policies

In the UCP, policies are included to provide a range of parks and recreation facilities, to require that parks would be located to serve neighborhoods, and to ensure sufficient parkland acreage would be included in each Specific Plan. The policies listed below deal specifically with parks and recreation facilities and programs for lands within the UCP area.

- PP 1.1:** Provide sufficient parkland to meet the recreational needs of the University Community's residents, based on a standard of five acres per thousand residents. Of this, a minimum of three acres per thousand residents shall be developed as community and/or neighborhood parks that contain sports fields and facilities, picnic areas, swimming pools, multi-purpose gymnasiums/buildings, picnic areas, and similar improvements that meet the active recreational needs of the residents. The balance of acreage may be used for passive recreational activities such as hiking and nature observation.
- PP 1.2:** Require that a comprehensive parks and recreation component be defined in each sub-area Specific Plan that reflects concepts depicted on the Illustrative Open Space Concept (Land Use, Figure 9) of the UCP and:
- Defines service standards, park types, design guidelines, landscape standards, and appropriate programming for park facilities based on user demand assessments and community input.
 - Identifies mini, neighborhood, and community park sites in accordance with service standards.
 - Integrates neighborhood parks with neighborhood centers and schools.
 - Links park facilities through an integrated trail network.
 - Defines programming needs for park sites consistent with demographic trends in the University Community.
- PP 1.3:** Require the dedication of neighborhood and community park sites in future phases of development, before the new population to be served by the parks exist.
- PP 1.4:** Require that planned sites for park facilities be developed as part of an interconnected open space system (refer to *LU 9.4*).
- PP 1.5:** Require that neighborhood and community parks are sited, programmed, and developed in an environmentally sensitive fashion that is consistent with overarching principles of the University Community development. Park landscape should emphasize the use of native and drought-tolerant species. Treated wastewater and water captured and detained on site from rainfall should be used as primary sources of irrigation and on-site water

amenity. Park structures should be constructed with recycled materials, to the extent practical.

- PP 1.6:** Provide park facilities programmed with active recreational facilities, including athletic facilities, such as multi-purpose fields, ball fields, multi-purpose courts, and other facilities oriented towards youth leagues and team sports in order that the existing highest recreational need in the Community is addressed.
- PP 2.1:** Require that multi-family residential developments of twenty or more units provide recreational facilities onsite and/or contribute fees towards community recreation facilities.
- PP 2.2:** Require that large-scale commercial developments, such as the proposed Town Centers and Business Centers, integrate common recreational or open space facilities onsite.
- PP 2.3:** Encourage the creation of community gardens.
- PP 3.1:** Create a continuous system of connected open space and recreation areas throughout the University Community. This will integrate active and passive parklands with preserved and restored natural habitats, detention basins, trails, and other open spaces. The precise location of this system shall be defined by each sub-area Specific Plan, in accordance with concepts on the Illustrative Land Use Diagram (refer to Land Use policies).
- PP 4.1:** Develop open space corridors alongside watercourses and valued natural resource areas, as an integral element of the continuous community park system (as defined in Policy PP 3.1).
- PP 4.2:** Provide open space buffers in areas where urban development abuts sensitive natural resource areas (wetlands, vernal pools, and grasslands) and agricultural lands.
- PP 5.1:** Require the siting of park facilities in proximity to school facilities. Sites shall be defined by the sub-area Specific Plans.
- PP 5.2:** Require use agreements between school jurisdiction and park jurisdictions, addressing time and nature of use for recreation facilities, liabilities, and other issues.
- PP 5.3:** Design storm drainage basins to accommodate both passive and active recreational uses during the dry periods (refer to Water-Related Infrastructure policies).
- PP 5.4:** Develop passive recreational facilities in natural resource conservation areas, e.g., nature interpretation, bird watching information, and similar amenities.
- PP 5.5:** Integrate community facilities, such as community centers, auditoriums, day care centers, seniors facilities, and other uses into park facilities.
- PP 5.6:** Encourage opportunities for the shared use of recreation facilities located on the UC Merced campus (Refer to Area-plan policy).
- PP 6.1:** Require that a comprehensive network of pedestrian paths be established linking each portion of the University Community, including the Town Center, UC Merced, Residential Village neighborhoods and centers, schools, and parks.
- PP 6.2:** Require each phase of new development in the University Community to connect with and expand upon existing trail facilities. Locations and improvements shall be defined in the sub-area Specific Plans.

- PP 6.3:** Encourage infrastructure rights-of-way or easements to be designed and developed to accommodate trails where feasible and where compatible with the intended primary use.
- PP 6.4:** Encourage the development of trail facilities in greenway or conservation corridor areas.
- PP 6.5:** Require that new trail facilities provide connections with existing and planned regional trail facilities and those planned by the UC on the university campus.
- PP 7.1:** Conduct a detailed recreation demand analysis in order to match park siting and program characteristics with the needs of Community residents. As parklands are designed, workshops shall be conducted with local residents to receive input regarding their needs, desired facilities/improvements and design character (landscape, buildings, fit with neighborhood, and so on).
- PP 7.2:** Create park facilities programmed with facilities for all age groups, including children and youth, teens, university students, and adults.
- PP 7.3:** Retain local residents as volunteers to maintain and administer park programs (sports director, event organizers, property clean-up, and other) to enhance their ownership of the park.

Recreation

UCP policies to implement onsite parks and recreational facilities have been developed to ensure that the proposed UCP would not affect off-site recreation facilities. Nonetheless, the presence of the University Community, as well as the UC Merced campus in such close proximity to the Lake Yosemite Regional Park, a countywide recreational resource raises concerns about impacts that would be unique to that park. The UCP Area Plan contains policies to address potential effects of the University Community and UC Merced campus on the Lake Yosemite Regional Park. The County of Merced will consider the Area Plan when adopting the University Community Plan as a County General Plan Amendment. Proposed Area Plan recreation policies are shown below.

- ALY 1.1:** Work with UC Merced for the shared use of its on-campus recreational, parking and sports facilities with the Merced community, especially with regards to campus parking in areas bordering Lake Yosemite Regional Park. Such cooperative programming may diminish impacts on the existing Park by providing additional recreational opportunities and shared parking for Park users.
- ALY 1.2:** Encourage UC Merced to provide students, staff, and faculty with active recreational and sports facilities and programs on campus that meet or exceed any recommended standards for the anticipated campus population, concurrent with increases in campus population.
- ALY 1.3:** Cooperate with UC Merced, to the maximum extent possible, to initiate and maintain a cooperative campus-run, water-related program on Lake Yosemite that combines academic programs with student and public recreational water sports activities year round.

- ALY 2.1:** Require that, prior to the transfer of title for any land that is currently or planned to be a part of Lake Yosemite Regional Park, UC Merced develop mechanisms for the acquisition of additional property to replace any parkland lost or impacted by the conversion for campus uses consistent with state and federal grant requirements. Eligible lands include, but are not limited to, lands contiguous with the existing developed Park and property on the Lake itself, subject to approval of the Board of Supervisors.
- ALY 2.2:** Developers of the University Community and UC Merced shall develop additional parkland adjacent to Lake Yosemite to be included within the Lake Yosemite Regional Park in collaboration with UC Merced in order to meet the needs of the University Community and campus populations at a standard of 0.88 acre for each 1,000 residents.
- ALY 2.3:** Work with the City of Merced and UC Merced to expand Lake Yosemite Regional Park in response to impacts associated with buildout of the University Community and UC Merced.
- ALY 2.4:** Encourage UC Merced to designate the County-owned property currently designated for Park expansion as an appropriate buffer for Lake Yosemite Regional Park, including, but not limited to, such lower intensity on-campus uses as athletic fields.
- ALY 2.5:** Monitor the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park associated with increased population and assess those impacts related to the build out of the University Community and UC Merced. The County, UC Merced, and developers shall work cooperatively with the University to assure that development adjacent to lake Yosemite does not result in a net increase to costs to the County or decrease in service level.
- ALY 2.6:** Initiate, develop, and implement a Lake Yosemite Regional Park Master Plan to determine the potential uses, necessary facilities, design standards, and funding strategies for public parkland surrounding Lake Yosemite. The Master Plan shall address active and passive recreation including playing fields, recreational equipment design and placement, a pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian recreational trail system around the Lake and connecting to existing or planned trails, parking and landscape planning and design.
- ALY 3.1:** Work with UC Merced to create a joint task force to meet regularly in a public setting to achieve cooperative goals for recreation and open space planning, parkland and resource acquisition, and the provision of adequate active and passive recreation, parks and open spaces to meet the needs of the population of eastern Merced County and UC Merced.
- ALY 3.2:** Work with the City of Merced to establish recreation fees to apply to all new development, including the University Community, to support the expansion of Lake Yosemite Regional Park.
- ALY 3.3:** Cooperate with UC Merced to maintain the use of Merced Hills Golf Course for as long as feasible (without impacting the schedule for Phase I UC Merced campus development) in planning and siting campus buildings, to allow sufficient time for evaluation of alternative sites.

ALY 3.4: Encourage the development of a public golf course in the vicinity of the University Community, UC Merced, and Lake Yosemite, as warranted by demand for such a facility.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Methods of Analysis

The analysis presented below is based upon the anticipated residential population of the UCP area at buildout of approximately 30,782 residents. This calculation factor is based upon an analysis of population per residence in similar university communities.²³ Using the County minimum standard of 2.5 acres for each 1,000 residents for computing parkland dedication, 30,782 residents would create the need for 77.5 acres of parkland. This total was compared to the Plan policies and to the County standard.

The analysis also presents an evaluation of the impacts of the development of the UCP and cumulative growth on Lake Yosemite Regional Park and other regional parklands in the County. Since no numerical standard for regional parkland has been established by the County, the proposed UCP and cumulative development were assessed in terms of the potential to diminish the existing level of service (0.88 acre of regional park per 1,000 residents).

Additional Baseline Assumptions

The above setting information constitutes a portion of the baseline condition for the UCP. However, as discussed in Section 4.0, Introduction to the Analysis, 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 assumed in the baseline conditions. The existing conditions on the UC Merced campus site and anticipated conditions at buildout of the UC Merced campus are discussed below.

Development of the UC Merced campus would increase the area population. The campus would provide approximately 148 acres of athletic and facilities. Trails and bicycle paths would also be provided. Please refer to the UC Merced LRDP EIR for a complete description of setting and LRDP elements related to recreation.

Standards of Significance

The following standards of significance are based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines.

For purposes of this EIR, impacts would be significant if the proposed UCP would:

- Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment;

- Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that a substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated; or
- Result in the loss of a local public recreational resource or facility.

The first two standards of significance are based on questions about recreational impacts in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. The last standard is a local standard that reflects the recreation policies of the Merced County General Plan and local community needs and concerns. The reflection of local community goals and values, as well as local context, in the consideration of significance is consistent with Section 15064(b,c) of the State CEQA Guidelines. While this standard is, in part, reflects of certain policies of Merced County General Plan, the determination of consistency of the proposed UCP or any actions related to its implementation rests only with the Merced County Board of Supervisors. The determination of consistency with the General Plan will consider environmental information contained in this EIR, as well as other factors related to the social and economic well-being of the County.

Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.13-1 The proposed UCP would increase the demand for community parks and recreation facilities and require the construction of new parks.

Applicable Regulations: County Ordinance 1090

Significance: Less than Significant

Mitigation Included in the UCP: Policies PP1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 5.1 through 5.6, 7.1, and 7.2

Significance After Mitigation Included in the UCP: Less than Significant

Additional Mitigation: None required

Residual Significance: Less than Significant

Baseline Plus Buildout Scenario

Merced County Ordinance 1090 requires dedication of parkland or payment of in lieu fees from new residential developments of greater than 5 units based upon a minimum standard of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents. The UCP area would have an estimated population of 30,782, generating a demand for 77 acres of parkland pursuant to County requirements. The UCP area land use table includes more than 200 acres of parkland, or more than double the minimum County standard. Policy PP 1.1 would require the provision of five (5) acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The UCP would also include another 100 acres for schools (to be adjacent to the community parks), which would provide additional open space and recreational facilities for use by the public.

The UCP includes several additional policies to ensure that recreation areas/opportunities are provided in a manner consistent with the County General Plan. Policies PP 3.1, 4.1, and 4.2 call for connecting open space and recreation areas using trails, providing open space corridors alongside watercourses and natural resource areas, and placing open space buffer zones around sensitive natural resources areas. Policy PP 6.1 would require that pedestrian paths link all parts of the University Community with UC Merced. Policy PP 6.2 would require that each phase of new development in the University Community connect with and expand upon existing trail facilities and that new UCP area trails connect with existing and planned regional trails.

Policies PP 5.1 and 5.2 recommend that park facilities be sited adjacent to schools and that use agreements between school and park jurisdictions include time and use for shared facilities. Policies PP 5.3 and PP 5.4 would require that storm drainages be designed to accommodate recreational uses during dry periods, and that passive recreational facilities be developed in natural resource conservation areas. Policy PP 5.5 recommends that community facilities such as day care centers be integrated into park facilities, and Policy PP 5.6 recommends that recreation facilities be shared with adjacent UC Merced facilities.

These additional policies would ensure that parks in the UCP area provide recreation programs and other services to members of the community, that trails and pedestrian pathways are connected to provide maximum accessibility, that the community recreation potential of school/park sites is maximized for all residents, and that open space provide passive recreation opportunities where possible.

The construction of new parks in the UCP area could create environmental impacts. Park facilities are assumed as part of the development of the entire UCP area and are addressed in the analysis contained in other sections of this EIR that address construction-related impacts. Site-specific impacts would be analyzed further as specific plans are proposed.

Baseline Plus 2015 Scenario

Projected residential development associated with the University Community in 2015 is estimated to be approximately 1,152 dwelling units. Assuming 2.65 persons per dwelling unit on average, a population of 3,053 persons would generate a requirement for 7.6 acres of parkland. It is estimated that, under the Baseline Plus 2015 Scenario, the project would provide an estimated ten acres of parkland, or 25 percent more than County standards.²⁴ UCP Policies PP 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, and 2.2 would apply to all new development as noted above, so the UCP would provide a total of five acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents, double the County's minimum standard. Because the County ordinance and UCP policies would be in place, development at year 2015 would include sufficient parks for the resident population of the University Community.

Policy PP 1.1 requires a total of five acres of parkland for each 1,000 residents, Policy PP 1.2 requires that all subsequent UCP area Specific Plans incorporate a comprehensive parks and recreation component and Policy PP 1.3 requires that park sites in new development be dedicated before the anticipated new population exists. Policies PP 2.1 and 2.2 additionally require multi-family residential and large-scale commercial developments to provide recreational or open space facilities. These policies would ensure that, as development occurs, there would be sufficient parkland and facilities provided to support the

incremental population growth. Finally, Policies PP 7.1 and 7.2 would require that a recreation demand analysis be done to match park siting and program characteristics with community need, and that park facilities be programmed for all age groups.

4.13-2 The proposed UCP would increase the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park and could result in the physical deterioration of the Park.

Applicable Regulations: None

Significance: Significant

Mitigation Included in the UCP: Policies PP 1.1, ALY 2.3, 2.6, and 3.2

Significance After Mitigation Included in the UCP: Less than Significant

Additional Mitigation: None required

Residual Significance: Less than Significant

Baseline Plus Buildout Scenario

Physical Deterioration

As is described above in the Environmental Setting, Lake Yosemite Regional Park is used at maximum capacity during summer weekends, and is occasionally closed to additional users because of a lack of parking.²⁵ An estimated 300,000 people visit the Park annually.

Given the size of the UCP, if the residents of the University Community visited the Park as little as one day per year, there would be an increase in Park use of over 10 percent. In fact, it is likely that residents of the University Community would use the Park at a much higher rate than once per year. Increased use of the Park could result in lack of availability of resources to existing residents due to limitations on the facilities (ie., limited number of rental boats, limited numbers of stocked fish, etc.) and could result in the overuse of facilities resulting in increased need for maintenance and replacement. Given the fact that lack of funds limits the ability of the County to adequately maintain the Park under existing conditions, increased demand and use of high-maintenance facilities could accelerate their physical deterioration.

While Merced County has no formal standard for provision of regional parkland, it is reasonable to evaluate the potential for the proposed UCP to lead to physical deterioration of the Lake Yosemite Regional Park by assessing potential future changes to the existing provision of regional parkland in the County.²⁶ The County has a population of 215,256²⁷ and three regional parks – Hagaman, Henderson and Lake Yosemite – with a total of 190 acres of developed parkland (not including the 486 acres of the surface of Lake Yosemite). Thus, under existing conditions, the County provides approximately 0.88 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 County residents.

The addition of the UCP population of 30,782 would decrease the amount of regional parkland provided per 1,000 County residents from 0.88 to 0.77. In order to maintain the existing ratio of 0.88 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents, an increase in County regional parks of approximately 27 acres would be required; this would represent an increase of approximately 14 percent in County regional parkland. This increased demand would be experienced primarily at Lake Yosemite Regional Park due to its proximity to the UCP area and due to the availability of unique recreational resources such as swimming, boating and the use of special recreational facilities. Since the proposed UCP does not include the provision of regional parkland within the UCP area, the increased use of the Park could lead to physical deterioration of park lands or facilities. This impact would be considered significant.

Mitigation Included in the Proposed UCP

The UCP Area Plan includes a number of policies to ensure (1) that regional park and recreation facilities are adequate to serve the UCP area population consistent with the recreation policies of the General Plan, and (2) that Lake Yosemite Regional Park is not overburdened resulting in deterioration of the park lands or facilities.

Policy ALY 2.3 would require the County of Merced to offset the increased demand on Lake Yosemite Regional Park as a result of the University Community population by developing additional park acreage in Lake Yosemite Regional Park. Policy ALY 2.3 states that County of Merced would work with the City of Merced and UC to expand Lake Yosemite Regional Park to accommodate impacts associated with development of the UCP and UC Merced. Policy ALY 2.6 and its implementation plan would require the County to initiate, develop and implement a Lake Yosemite Regional Park Master Plan to determine the potential uses, necessary facilities, design standards, and funding strategies for public parkland surrounding Lake Yosemite. The Master Plan would address active and passive recreation including playing fields, recreational equipment design and placement, a pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian recreational trail system around the Lake and connecting to existing or planned trails, parking and landscape planning and design. And finally, Policy ALY 3.2 states that the County would work with the City to establish recreation fees to apply to all new development in Merced County including the UCP to expand regional parklands and recreational facilities such as Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

The policies listed above would, if successfully implemented, increase the County's resources for planning, expanding, improving and maintaining its regional parks, including Lake Yosemite Regional Park. The Area Plan policies noted above would offset the impacts that the UCP area population would have on Lake Yosemite Regional Park, and would ensure that the proposed UCP would not result in or accelerate the physical deterioration of the Park.

Baseline Plus 2015 Scenario

Projected residential development associated with the University Community in 2015 is estimated to be 1,152 dwelling units – substantially less than the approximately 31,000 residents anticipated at UCP area buildout. Assuming 2.65 persons per dwelling unit on average, the associated population would be 3,053 persons.

These UCP area residents would increase demand for regional parks and recreational facilities, especially those facilities at Lake Yosemite Regional Park due to its close proximity to the University Community. The additional 3,053 persons in the University Community would decrease the amount of regional parkland per 1,000 residents in the County; approximately 2.7 acres of additional regional parkland would be required to maintain the existing amounts of regional parkland per capita in the County. Community parks and recreation facilities would be provided in the UCP area, but since regional parks and recreational facilities are unique and would not be specifically provided within the University Community, the additional parks in the University Community would not offset the increase the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park. These increases could cause deterioration of the lands and facilities at Lake Yosemite Park would be considered a significant impact..

To ensure mitigation of impacts to Lake Yosemite Regional Park from the incremental 2015 UCP area population increase, the UCP includes the policies described above which would apply to all development within the UCP area and would ensure that 2015 development would not adversely affect regional parks.

4.13-3 The proposed UCP would eliminate a portion of the Merced Hills Golf Course.

Applicable Regulations: None available

Significance: Significant

Mitigation Included in the UCP: Policies ALY 3.3 and 3.4

Significance After Mitigation Included in the UCP: Significant

Additional Mitigation: None available

Residual Significance: Significant and Unavoidable

Baseline Plus Buildout Scenario

The Merced Hills Golf Course is a public recreational facility that provides affordable golfing recreation to citizens of the Merced region. The closest other public golf course, Rancho Del Rey in Atwater operates at or near capacity. Other existing public golf courses that have existing unused capacity are well outside the Merced/Atwater vicinity. There are no other public golf courses being planned in the immediate project vicinity; one new golf course is planned in the west County, near Santa Nella.

The UC Merced campus would be developed on a portion of the Merced Hills Golf Course, an existing public recreation land use. In addition, a portion of the UCP area (the Town Center) would be developed on the approximately 50 acres of the Golf Course not included in the UC Merced campus. Over time the Golf Course would be taken out of operation due to campus development. Although it is assumed that the campus would be present as a condition for development of the University Community, the loss of use of the portion of the Golf Course that would be attributable to a portion of the UCP (the Town Center) would contribute to a loss of the Merced Hills Golf Course, a local public recreation facility. Thus, this is considered a significant impact.

Mitigation Included in the UCP

The UCP includes policies intended to lessen the effects of the loss of this public golf course due to the development of the UC Merced campus. Policy ALY 3.3 requires the County to cooperate with UC Merced to maintain the use of the Merced Hills Golf Course for as long as possible in order to allow adequate time to evaluate the potential of alternative sites for golf course development. In addition, Policy ALY 3.4 encourages the development of a public golf course in the vicinity of the UCP area as is warranted by demand. Implementation of these measures would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level; as such, this impact is considered significant and unavoidable.

Baseline Plus 2015 Scenario

Since construction of the Town Center, located immediately south of the UC Merced campus and on land currently occupied by the Merced Hills Golf Course, would be targeted as the first phase of development, it is likely that all of the effects of the University Community on the Merced Hills Golf Course would take place by 2015. As such, the impacts of the Baseline Plus 2015 scenario would be essentially the same as those described for the Baseline Plus Buildout scenario.

Cumulative Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The cumulative context for recreation facilities assumes buildout of the County of Merced General Plan, the proposed University of California, Merced campus, and the growth allowed under the City of Merced Vision 2015 General Plan.

4.13-4 The proposed UCP would, in combination with other development in Merced County including UC Merced, contribute to demand for community parks and recreation facilities and require the construction of new community parks.

Applicable Regulations: County Ordinance 1090

Significance: Less than Significant

Mitigation Included in the UCP: Policies PP 1.1, 5.2, 1.3, 2.1, and 2.2

Significance After Mitigation Included in the UCP: Less than Significant

Additional Mitigation: None required

Residual Significance: Less than Significant

Cumulative Buildout Scenario

The County of Merced minimum standard for dedication of parkland within residential development is 2.5 acres per 1,000 people. Currently, communities in the unincorporated area of the County do not have

parkland available consistent with this standard. In the UCP area, however, parkland would exceed the County standard and, further, would meet additional requirements for timing and location as outlined in the UCP policies cited above.

As is described in Chapter 3, Merced County population is anticipated to grow from 215,256 today to approximately 351,488 in year 2025 (without the campus or community), an increment of 136,232 persons. In order to meet the standard, a total of 340 additional acres of developed parkland would be required. With the community, the population would be 398,420 (assuming the on-campus population of 16,150). The population generated by community would require an additional 77 acres. The campus demand would be 40 acres. The University Community, by buildout, is anticipated to provide approximately 256 acres of developed parks and open space.

The policies described in Impact 4.13-1 above, would provide adequate parkland for the growth within the UCP area and would provide support for further development of regional parks in the County, but would not address the lack of parkland for other County communities. Although there would be a shortfall of parkland in the County relative to County standards, the UCP's contribution to the overall park acreage would increase the parkland per person average in the County. Therefore, the contribution of the UCP to this impact would not be cumulatively considerable and this impact would be less than significant.

2015 Cumulative Scenario

Through year 2015, UCP area population growth, along with that of the County, the City of Merced, and UC Merced would exacerbate the pressure on Lake Yosemite Regional Park. As is described in Chapter 3, the County population is anticipated to grow from 215,256 today to approximately 296,564 in year 2015, without development of the UC Merced campus and the University Community. Through year 2015, the campus and community would add an additional 4,678 residents and 3,053 residents, respectively. Assuming 2.5 acres of community parkland per 1,000 residents, these two projects would generate a demand for approximately 19.3 acres of community parks, with 7.6 acres attributable to the University Community and 11.7 acres attributable to the resident population of the UC Merced campus. In combination with other countywide growth, the year 2015 population of the County would increase from 296,564 to 304,295, and would represent an increase of 89,039 over the population of Merced County today. Maintenance of the County standard for community parks for the year 2015 population of Merced County would require the addition of approximately 223 acres of community parkland; the University Community and UC Merced would represent approximately 8.7 percent of this cumulative year 2015 demand for community parks.

The policies described above would provide more than adequate community parkland for the growth within the UCP area. Further, the development of recreational facilities and open space on the UC Merced campus would offset any additional demand for community parks created by the campus. The development of community parks in the UCP and UC Merced campus would not address the lack of parkland for other County communities. Although there would be a shortfall of parkland in the County relative to County standards, the UCP's contribution to the overall park acreage would increase the parkland per person average in the

County. Therefore, the contribution of the UCP would not be cumulatively considerable and this cumulative impact would be less than significant.

4.13-5 The proposed UCP, in combination with other development in Merced County, including UC Merced, would contribute to the cumulative increase in the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park and could result in the physical deterioration of the Park .

Applicable Regulations: None available

Significance: Significant

Mitigation Included in the UCP: Policies ALY 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1 through 2.5, 3.1, 3.3, and 3.4

Significance After Mitigation Included in the UCP: Significant

Additional Mitigation: None required

Residual Significance: Significant and Unavoidable

Cumulative Buildout Scenario

Physical Deterioration

As is describe above in the Environmental Setting, Lake Yosemite Regional Park is used at maximum capacity during summer weekends, and is occasionally closed to additional users because of a lack of parking.²⁸ An estimated 300,000 people visit the Park annually.

Given the size of the UCP, if the residents of the University Community and on-campus residents of the campus visited the Park as little as one day per year, there would be an increase in Park use of nearly 16 percent. In fact, it is likely that residents of the University Community and the UC Merced campus would use the Park at a much higher rate than once per year. In addition, additional residents in other parts of the County, including the incorporated cities of Merced and Atwater, would increase use of the Park. If the 183,164 new residents in the County through year 2025 (including the UCP, UC Merced, and other regional growth) were to visit the Park once a year, there would be an increase of approximately 60 percent in annual visits to the Park.

Increased use of the Park could result in lack of availability of resources to existing residents due to inherent limitations on the use of Park facilities (ie., limited number of rental boats, limited numbers of stocked fish, etc.) and could result in the overuse of park lands and facilities resulting in increased need for maintenance, repair and replacement. Given the fact that the current availability of funds limits the ability of the County to adequately maintain the Park under existing conditions, increased use of park lands and facilities could accelerate their physical deterioration.

In order to assess the ways in which cumulative development could cause the physical deterioration of Lake Yosemite Regional Park, three specific issues are considered: (1) availability of regional parklands,

including Lake Yosemite, for future population, (2) effects of cumulative development on the capacity and character of Lake Yosemite Regional Park, and (3) effects of cumulative development on the capability of the County to expand Lake Yosemite Regional Park to meet the demands of the growing County population.

Availability of Regional Parks for Future Population

While, Merced County has no formal standard for provision of regional parkland, it is reasonable to consider the relationship of the proposed UCP to the above policy by assessing potential future changes to the existing provision regional parkland in the County.²⁹ The County has a population of 215,256³⁰ and three regional parks – Hagaman, Henderson and Lake Yosemite – with a total of 190 acres of developed parkland (not including the 486 acres of the surface of Lake Yosemite). Thus, under existing conditions the County provides approximately 0.88 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 County residents.

UCP area population growth, along with that of the County, the City of Merced, and UC Merced would increase the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park. As is described in Chapter 3, the County population is anticipated to grow from 215,256 today to approximately 351,488 in year 2025, without development of the UC Merced campus and the University Community. This population (without the University Community or the campus) would decrease the amount of regional parkland provided per 1,000 residents from 0.88 to 0.73.

At Buildout, the UC Merced campus and the University Community would add an additional 16,150 residents and 30,782 residents, respectively. Combined with the above countywide growth, the population of the County would increase from 351,488 to 398,420, and would represent an increase of 183,164 over the population of Merced County today. This population (including the UCP and UC Merced) would decrease the amount of regional parkland provided per 1,000 residents from 0.88 to 0.48. In order to maintain the same availability of regional parklands to the future population of Merced County as exists today an addition of approximately 161.2 acres of regional parkland would be required; the University Community and UC Merced would represent approximately 26 percent of this cumulative need. The UCP and UC Merced population at Buildout would contribute the demand for approximately 41.3 acres of regional parkland, with 27.1 acres attributable to the University Community and 14.2 acres attributable to the resident population of the UC Merced campus.

The presence of the UC Merced campus would likely increase demand on Lake Yosemite Regional Park due to usage by students, faculty and staff. While the campus has indicated that on-campus open spaces and recreational fields and facilities will be available to the public to some degree, those recreational resources would have a tendency to off-set campus demand for developed, active recreational parks (soccer fields, baseball diamonds, etc.). Active recreational facilities and parklands, while an important component of the park demand created by new growth in Merced, including UC Merced, do not constitute the entirety of the demand for parks generated by cumulative growth. The type of recreational activities that take place at regional parks (i.e., passive recreation such as picnicking, swimming or boating on Lake Yosemite, fishing at Lake Yosemite, etc.) would not be supported by on-campus recreational lands or facilities.

Thus, the combined effect of the UCP, UC Merced and countywide population growth, including that projected to occur within incorporated cities, would decrease the relative availability of regional parkland to existing and future County residents, and could accelerate the physical deterioration of Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

Capacity and Character of Lake Yosemite Regional Park

In addition, the presence of the UC Merced campus may diminish the value of the park as a regional recreational resource by creating an urban fabric of buildings and landscaped spaces along the Park's southern and eastern edges. This would have the result of changing the character of the park from one defined by the visual connection to the wide open spaces of eastern Merced County's rolling rangelands to an urban park experience. The importance of adjacent open spaces to County regional parks is reflected in the Merced County General Plan Open Space Element. Open Space Goal 3, Objective 3.B, Policy 8 states:

Regional parks should be used to preserve areas of natural scenic beauty.

This change in character of the lands adjacent to Lake Yosemite Regional Park from open spaces to developed university campus could have the effect of changing the character of the park itself from a regional park to a large urban park. This change and the presence of campus buildings and other uses immediately adjacent to the regional park may inhibit the use of the park by some of its current users as well as future County residents (especially those unaffiliated with UC Merced), in essence reducing the capacity of the Lake Yosemite Regional Park, and diminishing the ability of the County to ensure the availability of adequate regional park facilities to meet the needs of the County population. This change in the character of the Park would constitute a physical deterioration of Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

Ability of the County to Expand Lake Yosemite Regional Park

Over the years, the County has acquired approximately 260 acres of land adjacent to Lake Yosemite Regional Park with the express intent of expanding the Park to meet the needs of the growing County. In recent years, County fiscal and human resources have not been sufficient to maintain and expand the Park. The development of UC Merced, as proposed, would necessitate the urbanization of approximately 208 acres of the land that was previously acquired by the County expressly for the purposes of expanding Lake Yosemite Regional Park. As such, unless otherwise mitigated, the development of UC Merced would eliminate the potential to expand Lake Yosemite Regional Park as has been long planned by the County to meet the needs of the increasing County population. The conversion of land purchased for the purposes of expanding Lake Yosemite Regional Park without establishment of comparable replacement land would diminish the ability of the County to ensure the availability of adequate regional park facilities to meet the needs of the County population, and could contribute to the overuse and physical deterioration of the Park.

Conclusion

Changes in use, physical character, and expansion capacity of Lake Yosemite Regional Park described above, caused by cumulative development, including the UCP, UC Merced and countywide growth, would create a significant impact on regional recreational resources.

Mitigation Included in the UCP

A number of UCP policies address the cumulative impacts on Lake Yosemite Regional Park. The UCP Area Plan Policies ALY 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and 3.2 would offset the contribution that the UCP area population would make to the cumulative impact on Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

Policies ALY 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 encourage UC Merced to provide on campus recreation and sports facilities sufficient to meet the needs of the campus community, to share campus recreational facilities with the Merced community, and support a campus-run water-related recreation and academic program at Lake Yosemite Regional Park for the benefit of the campus and the community at large.

UCP Area Plan Policy ALY 2.1, would ensure that prior to the transfer of title to any land that is currently or planned to be part of the Lake Yosemite Regional Park, the County of Merced would require the University of California to develop appropriate mechanisms for acquiring additional property to replace that parkland lost to conversion to campus uses.

Policies ALY 2.2 and 2.3 require the County to work with UC Merced to develop approximately 41.3 acres of additional parklands in Lake Yosemite Regional Park to offset the increased demand of the UCP and UC Merced campus. Policy ALY 3.2 would require the County to work with the City of Merced to establish a system of development fees to mitigate the cumulative impact on County regional parks, including Lake Yosemite Regional Park. Through the implementation of these policies, UCP area contribution to the impact on regional parks would be less than significant.

Policies ALY 2.4 and 2.5 encourage UC Merced to convert adjacent park land to athletic fields, surface parking lots or other lower intensity uses, and recommend that the County monitor Lake Yosemite Regional Park for impacts and potential costs related to increased use and offset those increased costs by obtaining a campus contribution to the County General Fund. Finally, in Policy ALY 3.1, the County and UC Merced would create a joint task force to meet the recreation needs of eastern Merced County.

Significance Conclusion

With implementation of these additional policies, it would be possible to further plan for and mitigate impacts on Lake Yosemite Regional Park as incremental population increases occur in eastern Merced County. Because Policy ALY 2.1 would require the replacement of undeveloped parkland by UC Merced to offset the undeveloped parkland being used for campus development, the loss of that parkland would be mitigated to a level of insignificance. Because the UCP would provide for expanded parklands at Lake Yosemite Regional Park, the contribution of the UCP to the cumulative impact on Lake Yosemite Regional Park would not be considerable. However the implementation of UCP policies that encourage UC Merced to similarly provide development of additional parkland cannot be assured by the County.

Further, the deleterious changes to the character of Lake Yosemite Regional Park as a result of cumulative development, particularly the proximity of the UC Merced campus to the regional park, would not be mitigated to a level of insignificance. Finally, other cumulative growth in the region, including growth in the north Merced area, would generate unmitigated impacts due to increased use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park and could lead to the physical deterioration of, and thus this cumulative impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

2015 Cumulative Scenario

Through year 2015, UCP area population growth, along with that of the County, the City of Merced, and the UC Merced would exacerbate the pressure on Lake Yosemite Regional Park. As is described in Chapter 3, the County population is anticipated to grow from 215,256 today to approximately 296,564 in year 2015, without development of the UC Merced campus and the University Community. Through year 2015, the campus and community would add an additional 4,678 residents and 3,053 residents, respectively, decreasing the amount of regional parkland per 1,000 residents in the County; approximately 6.8 acres of additional regional parkland would be required to maintain the existing amounts of regional parkland per capita in the County. Assuming 0.88 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents, these two projects would generate a demand for approximately 6.8 acres of regional park, with 2.7 acres attributable to the University Community and 4.1 acres attributable to the resident population of the UC Merced campus.

In combination with other countywide growth, the year 2015 population of the County would increase to 304,295, representing an increase of 89,039 over the population of Merced County today. Maintenance of the same availability of regional parklands and recreational resources to the year 2015 population of Merced County as exists today would require the addition of approximately 78.4 acres of regional parkland; the University Community and UC Merced would represent approximately 8.6 percent of this cumulative year 2015 demand for regional parks. These increases and the lack of the provision of regional parkland could cause deterioration of the lands and facilities at Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

As is described above, the development of the campus buildings and urban spaces would change the character of the lands adjacent to Lake Yosemite Regional Park from open spaces to developed university campus and could have the effect of changing the character of the park itself from a regional park to a large urban park. Through year 2015, the campus would have a student enrollment of approximately 8,650 students, approximately one-third of the Buildout enrollment of 25,000. Assuming that land development would be proportional to the growth in student enrollment, approximately 300 acres of land would be developed. The location of development would be a key element in the degree of effect to the Park, however the potential exists for development to have taken place on the immediate eastern and southern edges of the Park. The presence of campus buildings and other uses immediately adjacent to the regional park by year 2015 may inhibit the use of the park by some of its current users as well as future County residents (especially those unaffiliated with UC Merced), in essence reducing the capacity of the Lake Yosemite Regional Park to meet the needs of County residents for regional park experiences. As is discussed under the Cumulative Buildout Scenario, above, this would lead to the physical deterioration of the Park.

Implementation of the policies described above would mitigate impacts on Lake Yosemite Regional Park associated with incremental population increases that would occur due to the UCP. However, implementation of measures that would mitigate population increases in the Merced region, including UC Merced, cannot be guaranteed. Further, the deleterious changes to the character Lake Yosemite Regional Park as a result of cumulative development, particularly the proximity of the UC Merced campus to the regional park, would not be mitigated to a level of insignificance. Thus, the cumulative impacts on Lake Yosemite Regional Park would remain significant and unavoidable.

Environmental Effects of Mitigation Measures

It should be noted that Policy ALY 2.1 calls for the acquisition of replacement parkland that could be part of the Lake Yosemite Regional Park, and Policy ALY 2.2 calls for the actual development of additional parkland in order to offset increased demand generated by the UCP and UC Merced. The exact location and nature of the implementation of these measures is currently not known, however, the measures would be required to be undertaken on lands adjacent to or near Lake Yosemite. There are no additional lands around Lake Yosemite that are under public ownership. Lands near Lake Yosemite are privately owned. One parcel adjacent to Lake Yosemite is currently the subject of a development proposal, the Lake Yosemite Estates project. An EIR is currently in preparation for this urban development project. While the availability of this land or other lands in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite for park-related uses is unknown, lands on the north or west of Lake Yosemite would meet the requirements, if available.

In the event that Policies ALY 2.1 and 2.2 were implemented through acquisition and development of lands in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite, some environmental impacts could be anticipated. The lands in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite are known to contain vernal pools and other wetland habitats. It is likely that endangered species known from vernal pools and similar habitats in the existing University Community SUDP also exist on other lands in this area. Development of parklands in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite could adversely affect wetland habitats and resident endangered plant and animal species. Further, development of park uses in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite could require access on existing roads in the area, such as Golf Road and/or Old Lake Road. As a result, increased traffic, particularly on weekends year-round and on summer weekdays could result in higher levels of congestion and traffic-related noise on small, residential streets.

At this time, the availability of land in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite for park development is unknown. Further, the configuration of any acquisition for parklands is unknown. Finally, the future design of park uses in this area has not been conceptualized. Thus, any further or more detailed analysis of environmental effects of Policies ALY 2.1 and 2.2 would be speculative.

4.13-6 The proposed UCP, in combination with the UC Merced campus, would eliminate the Merced Hills Golf Course.

Applicable Regulations: None available

Significance: Significant

Mitigation Included in the UCP: Policies ALY 3.3 and 3.4

Significance After Mitigation Included in the UCP: Significant

Additional Mitigation: None available

Residual Significance: Significant and Unavoidable

Cumulative Buildout Scenario

The Merced Hills Golf Course is a public recreational facility that provides affordable golfing recreation to citizens of the Merced region.

The UC Merced campus and approximately 50 acres of the UCP area Town Center would be developed on the Merced Hills Golf Course. In combination, the development of the campus and the University Community would result in the conversion of the Merced Hills Golf Course to urban and academic uses. The loss of the Merced Hills Golf Course due to its conversion to urban and academic uses would represent a loss of a public recreational land use. This would be considered a significant impact.

The UCP includes policies intended to address the adverse effects of the loss of this public golf course due to the development of the UC Merced campus. Policy ALY 3.3 requires the County to cooperate with UC Merced to maintain the use of the Merced Hills Golf Course for as long as possible in order to allow adequate time to evaluate the potential of alternative sites for golf course development. In addition, Policy ALY 3.4 requires the County to encourage the development of a public golf course in the vicinity of the UCP area as is warranted by demand. Even with implementation of Policies ALY 3.3 and 3.4, the public recreational resource of the Merced Hills Golf Course would be lost. Therefore, this cumulative impact would be considered significant and unavoidable.

2015 Cumulative Scenario

Since construction of the Town Center, located immediately south of the UC Merced campus and on land currently occupied by the Merced Hills Golf Course, would be targeted as the first phase of development, it is likely that all of the effects of the University Community on the Merced Hills Golf Course would take place by 2015. As such, the impacts of the 2015 Cumulative scenario would be essentially the same as those described above for the Cumulative Buildout Scenario. This cumulative impact would be considered significant and unavoidable.

ENDNOTES

1. Merced County General Plan Year 2000, pages VI-24a and 24b; Greg Kauffman, California State Department of Parks and Recreation, McConnell State Park, April 23, 2001, personal communication; www.parks.ca.gov accessed April 16, 2001; Loni Hext, California Department of Fish and Game, April 23, 2001, personal communication; www.dfg.ca.gov accessed April 23, 2001.
2. *Merced County General Plan*, 1989, page I-26.
3. Merced County Association of Governments, www.mcag.cog.ca.us, accessed June 6, 2001.
4. Merced County Association of Governments, www.mcag.cog.ca.us, accessed June 6, 2001.
5. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, June 6, 2001.
6. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County Parks and Recreation Department, Personal communication, March 15, 2001.
7. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, May 25, 2001.
8. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, March 15, 2001.
9. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, March 15, 2001; personal communication, Craig Smith, Assistant City Manager, City of Merced, and former Director, City of Merced Parks and Recreation, March 16, 2001.
10. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, May 25, 2001.
11. Terry Bates, Executive Director, Virginia Smith Trust, personal communication, May 16, 2001.
12. Merced County Association of Governments, *Regional Bicycle Plan*, December 17, 1998.
13. Merced County Association of Governments, *Regional Bicycle Plan*, December 17, 1998, pages VI-10, 11 and 12.
14. Merced County Association of Governments, *Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan*, adopted November 1999, page 2, and personal communication, Monica Cooke, MCAG, April 11, 2001.
15. Merced County Association of Governments, *Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan*, adopted November 1999, page 37.

16. Merced County Association of Governments, *Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan*, adopted November 1999, p. 37.
17. Merced County Association of Governments, *Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan*, adopted November 1999, page 27.
18. Merced County Association of Governments, *Merced and Atwater Bicycle Plan*, adopted November 1999, page 37.
19. *Merced County General Plan Year 2000*, pages I-34, 50, VI 28, 33, 34.
20. *Merced County General Plan Year 2000*, page I-34.
21. Merced County Ordinance #1090, 1982, *Local Recreational Park Land Space and/or Fee Obligation Ordinance*, page 1-5.
22. Merced County Ordinance #1090, 1982, *Local Recreational Park Land Space and/or Fee Obligation Ordinance*, page 1-5.
23. Economic & Planning Systems, Inc., *Draft Economic Background Report, Merced University Community Plan, UC Merced*, March 27, 2001.
24. Economic Planning Systems, written correspondence, May 31, 2001.
25. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, May 25, 2001.
26. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, June 6, 2001.
27. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, June 6, 2001.
28. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, May 25, 2001.
29. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, June 6, 2001.
30. George Rodrigues, Director, Merced County, Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication, June 6, 2001.