

NATURAL RESOURCE ELEMENT GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT

Notice of Preparation & Initial Study



City of Rancho Cordova
2729 Prospect Park Drive
Rancho Cordova, Ca 95670

May 2008

NOTICE OF PREPARATION &
INITIAL STUDY
FOR THE
NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT
GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT
CITY OF RANCHO CORDOVA, CALIFORNIA



Prepared by:

THE CITY OF RANCHO CORDOVA
2729 Prospect Park Drive
Phone 916.851.8750
Fax 916.851.8762

MAY 2008

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

DATE: May 19, 2008

TO: Responsible Agencies, Organizations and Interested Parties

FROM: City of Rancho Cordova
Contact: Patrick Angell
2729 Prospect Park Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the Rancho Cordova Natural Resources Element General Plan Amendment

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the City of Rancho Cordova will prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to address the impacts of the proposed amendment to the Rancho Cordova General Plan Natural Resources Element.

The project location, description, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

As specified by the CEQA Guidelines, this Notice of Preparation will be circulated for a 30-day review period. The City of Rancho Cordova welcomes public input during this review. In the event that no response or request for additional time is received by any Responsible Agency by the end of the review period, the Lead Agency may presume that the Responsible Agency has no response.

The City of Rancho Cordova will hold a Public Scoping Meeting, concerning the preparation of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the Natural Resources Element General Plan Amendment, on **June 17, 2008 at 5:30 PM** at Rancho Cordova City Hall. City Hall is located at **2729 Prospect Park Drive, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670**.

Comments may be submitted in writing during the review period and addressed to:

Patrick Angell, AICP
Planning Department
City of Rancho Cordova
2729 Prospect Park Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

The comment period closes on:

June 18, 2008

A. PROJECT LOCATION

The City of Rancho Cordova and its General Plan Planning Area (Planning Area) are located in Sacramento County in the north central portion of the State of California (see Figure 1). The City of Rancho Cordova is located entirely within the eastern portion of Sacramento County, covering approximately 20,000 acres. The Planning Area consists of the existing incorporated City and a larger study area (approximately 58,190 acres). The northern boundary of the Planning Area is the American River; the eastern edge of the Planning Area is the Cosumnes River floodplain and the Urban Services Boundary for Sacramento County. The Planning Area ends at Prairie City Road, which is the western boundary of the City of Folsom Sphere of Influence. The communities of Rosemont and Gold River were included in the Planning Area because of their close proximity to Rancho Cordova and the interaction between these communities and future land uses in the City. The Planning Area boundary extends west to Watt Avenue (to include Rosemont) and extends south of Jackson Highway by at least one mile to include entire parcels.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Planning Area is predominately flat with undulating topography near the Cosumnes River floodplain to the south and the American River to the north. The American River Parkway is located along the northern boundary of the Planning Area. Other waterways include Morrison Creek, Laguna Creek, Elder Creek, Buffalo Creek, Frye Creek, Rebel Hill Ditch and the Folsom South Canal. Southern portions of the Planning Area include one of the largest complexes of vernal pools in California. Other natural features in the Planning Area include riparian habitat (primarily located along the American River), oak trees and oak woodlands, grasslands, land areas substantially disturbed from historic gold dredging activities (specifically in the northern and eastern portions of the Planning Area).

U.S. Highway 50 traverses east to west passes through the northern portion of the Planning Area, while State Highway 16 passes through the southern portion of the Planning Area. Sunrise Boulevard, a major thoroughfare running north and south, bisects the Planning Area. Folsom Boulevard, running northeast to southwest, is located in the northern portion of the Planning Area.

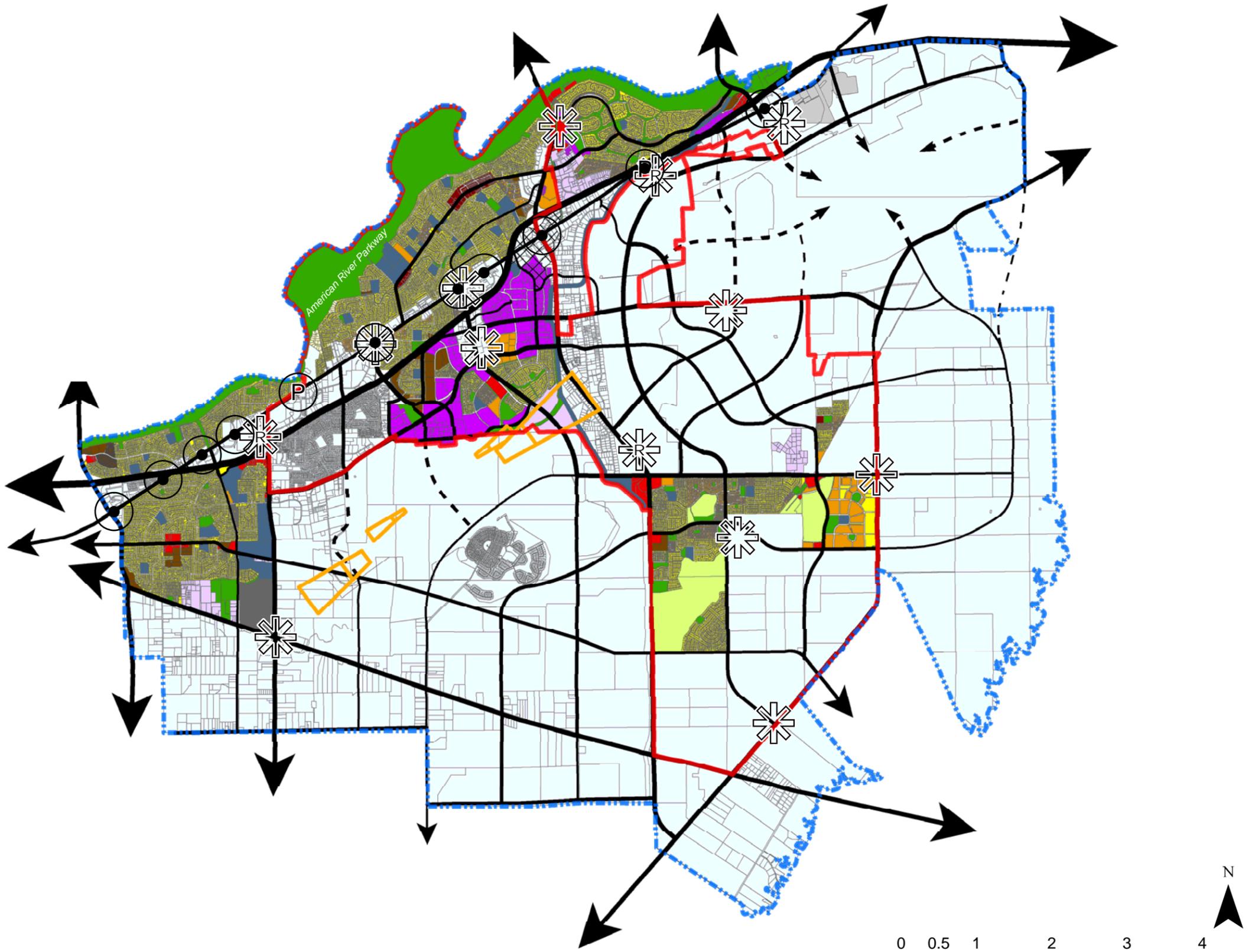
The Planning Area currently includes but is not limited to land uses such as residential, commercial, office, industrial, and agricultural. The majority of developed area is located in the northern portion of the Planning Area with approved and proposed urban development south of Highway 50 and east of Sunrise Boulevard in the south central portion of the Planning Area. While the northern portion of the Planning Area is developed, vast regions to the south and east are primarily undeveloped. The reader is referred to the Rancho Cordova General Plan Draft EIR Section 4.1 (Land Use) for a description of land use and applicable land use plans throughout the Planning Area.

Located in the Planning Area, and a portion within the existing city limits, is the site of the existing Aerojet/GenCorp operations. This area has been used for rocket testing and development operations since the 1950's that resulted in soil and groundwater contamination through much of the area. Also located within the Planning Area, but outside of current city limits, is the former site of Mather Field Air Force Base. The former air base includes the still operating Mather Field Airport.

Legend

- Estate Residential (0.51-2.0 du/acre = minimum half-acre to 2-acre lots)
- Low Density Residential (2.1-6.0 du/acre)
- Medium Density Residential (6.1-18.0 du/acre)
- High Density Residential (18.1-40.0 du/acre)
- Commercial Mixed Use
- Village Center Mixed Use
- Office Mixed Use
- Light Industry
- Heavy Industry
- Mining
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Parks and Open Space
- Natural Resources

- ✱ Local Town Center
- ✱ Regional Town Center
- ✱ Transit Oriented Town Center
- Light Rail Stations
- Ⓟ Proposed/Potential Light Rail Stations
- Rancho Cordova City Limits
- General Plan Planning Area Boundary
- Mather Airport Safety Zones
- Convention Overlay
- Planning Areas (see Figure LU-2)
- Roads
- Roads Foreseeable After 2030



Source: City of Rancho Cordova Planning Department, 2006



City of Rancho Cordova
Planning Department

Figure 1
Draft General Plan Land Use Map

C. BACKGROUND OF THE RANCHO CORDOVA GENERAL PLAN AND ITS ASSOCIATED EIR

The City of Rancho Cordova commenced preparation of the General Plan in May 2004. Preparation of the General Plan included preparation of technical reports on the land use, demographics, economic conditions, and natural resource conditions of the Planning Area. General Plan visioning and policy provisions were developed by the City through several public workshops and meetings held before the General Plan Advisory Committee, Planning Commission and City Council. The General Plan was adopted June 26, 2006 and includes the State-required elements (Land Use, Housing, Circulation, Conservation, Open Space, Safety and Noise) as well as five additional elements. The adoption of the General Plan included the adoption of the General Plan Land Use Map (see General Plan Land Use Element page 15 and 16) and the associated 16 Planning Area conceptual land plans (see General Plan Land Use Element pages 49 through 94) that set the land use vision of the City, as well as the Roadway System and Sizing Map (see General Plan Circulation Element page 11) for roadway improvements, Bikeways and Trails Plan (see General Plan Circulation Element page 15) and Transit System Map (see General Plan Circulation Element page 19).

The environmental effects of the adoption and implementation of the General Plan were disclosed and analyzed in the Rancho Cordova General Plan Draft and Final EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2005022137) (referred to as "General Plan EIR"). The Draft EIR identified General Plan policies and action items that provide mitigation of identified significant environmental impacts, as well as identified mitigation measures in the form of additional policies and action items for significant impacts (see Draft EIR pages 2.0-7 through -52). Some General Plan policies, action items and mitigation measures were refined as a result of input during public review as identified in the Final EIR (see Final EIR pages 2.0-8 through -57). However, there were several significant environmental effects that were identified as significant and unavoidable in the areas of land use, agriculture, population/housing/employment, traffic, air quality, noise, aggregate resources, water supply, biological resources, cultural resources, wastewater, and visual resources. The Rancho Cordova City Council adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations with the adoption of the General Plan which identified specific benefits that outweighed these significant impacts, including the following: (see City of Rancho Cordova Resolution No. 116-2006):

- Provision of needed residential dwelling units to meet regional housing needs and provide diverse housing opportunities.
- General Plan provides comprehensive land use and transportation planning that maintains a compact urban form inside the Planning Area and implements Smart Growth principles.
- Economic benefits from the implementation of the General Plan through retention of existing businesses and jobs as well as attraction new jobs and businesses.
- The General Plan would accommodate regional growth by proposing a concentrated development pattern that balances employment, residential, retail and recreational uses, linked to transportation system improvements. Benefits include reduction in vehicle miles traveled in region.
- Provision of significant park acreage as well as establishment of open space for mitigation for impacts on natural resources.

D. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Since adoption of the General Plan, the City has conducted a series of reviews of the General Plan as part of its implementation (required under California Government Code Section 65400) as well as to ensure internally consistency of the elements and policy provisions. The City has identified the following Natural Resource Element policies and action items that in their current form could be interpreted in such a manner that would be counter to General Plan anticipated and planned urban development and transportation system improvements for the entire City identified in the General Plan Land Use Map (see General Plan Land Use Element page 15 and 16) and the associated 16 Planning Area conceptual land plans (see General Plan Land Use Element pages 49 through 94) that set the land use vision of the City, as well as the Roadway System and Sizing Map (see General Plan Circulation Element page 11), Bikeways and Trails Plan (see General Plan Circulation Element page 15) and Transit System Map (see General Plan Circulation Element page 19). An example of such an interpretation issue occurred in a trial court decision (*California Native Plant Society v. City of Rancho Cordova, et al.*) associated with the interpretation of General Plan Natural Resource Element Actions NR.1.1.3 and NR.1.7.1.

Action NR.1.1.1 - Incorporate large habitat preserves and interconnected wildlife corridors in new development areas to provide ample space for animal movement.

Action NR.1.1.3 - As part of the consideration of development applications for individual Planning Areas containing habitats that support special-status plant and animal species that are planned to be preserved, the City shall require that these preserved habitats have interconnections with other habitat areas in order to maintain the viability of the preserved habitat to support the special-status species identified. The determination of the design and size of the “interconnections” shall be made by the City, as recommended by a qualified professional, and will include consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Action NR.1.7.1 - For those areas in which special status species are found or likely to occur or where the presence of species can be reasonably inferred, the City shall require mitigation of impacts to those species that ensure that the project does not contribute to the decline of the affected species populations in the region to the extent that their decline would impact the viability of the regional population. Mitigation shall be designed by the City in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and shall emphasize a multi-species approach to the maximum extent feasible. This may include development or participation in a habitat conservation plan.

Policy NR.1.10 - The City shall avoid the placement of new roadways within habitat preserves to the maximum extent feasible.

Policy NR.1.11 - In such cases where habitat preserves are crossed by a roadway, or where two adjacent preserves are separated by a roadway, the roadway shall be designed or updated with wildlife passable fencing separating the roadway from the preserve and/or shall incorporate design features that allow for the movement of wildlife across or beneath the road without causing a hazard for vehicles and pedestrians on the roadway.

Policy NR.2.2 - Ensure that direct and indirect effects to wetland habitats are minimized by environmentally sensitive project siting and design, to the maximum extent feasible.

Policy NR.3.2 - In general, the City will encourage the preservation of existing location, topography, and meandering alignment of creeks. Where necessary, and if consistent with other City policies, the creation and realignment of creek corridors shall be constructed to recreate the character of the natural creek corridor. Channelization and the use of concrete within creek corridors shall not be supported.

The following amended language (see underline for text that has been added and strikeout for text that has been deleted) is proposed to be made to these General Plan policy provisions in order to clarify the City's original intent of these policy provisions, to ensure consistency with planned urban development and associated land use patterns and transportation system improvement provided in the Land Use and Circulation elements of the General Plan, and consistency with the impacts and conclusions of environmental effects identified in the Rancho Cordova General Plan EIR (see Draft EIR pages 4.10-43, 4.10-52, 4.10-56, 4.10-60 and -61 and Final EIR pages 3.0-229, -230 and -234). No other amendments to the General Plan elements, policy provisions, land use maps or transportation improvement maps are proposed that would alter the extent of residential and non-residential growth or the development footprint that was evaluated in the Rancho Cordova General Plan EIR.

General amendment for the Natural Resources Element – The term “feasible” as used in the Natural Resources Element of the City General Plan shall be defined as follows: “Feasible” means capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social and technological factors.

Action NR.1.1.1 — Incorporate ~~large~~ habitat preserves and interconnected wildlife corridors in new development areas to allow provide ample space for animal movement where feasible and as necessary for viability of protected species.

Action NR.1.1.3 — As part of the consideration of development applications for individual Planning Areas containing habitats that support special-status plant and animal species that are planned to be preserved, the City ~~shall~~ may require that these preserved habitats have interconnections with other habitat areas ~~in order to maintain~~ where feasible and appropriate to promote the viability of the preserved habitat to support the special-status species identified. The determination of the design and size of the “interconnections” shall be made by the City, ~~as recommended by~~ with the consideration of a recommendation from a qualified professional, ~~and will include consultation with the~~ after the California Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are provided with an opportunity to comment.

Action NR.1.7.1 — For those areas in which special status species are found or likely to occur ~~or where the presence of species can be reasonably inferred~~, the City shall require feasible mitigation of impacts to those species that ensure that the project does not contribute to the decline of the affected species ~~populations in the region to the extent~~ such that their decline would impact the viability of ~~the regional population the~~ species. Feasible mitigation shall be designed determined by the City ~~in coordination with~~ after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) are provided an opportunity to comment, and may shall

emphasize a multi-species approach ~~to the maximum extent feasible~~. This may include development or participation in a habitat conservation plan.

Policy NR.1.10 — ~~The City shall avoid the placement of new roadways within habitat preserves to the maximum extent feasible.~~ shall be discouraged, but is not prohibited. This Policy shall not apply to roadways shown in the Circulation Element or needed to meet goals or policies of the Circulation Element.

Policy NR.1.11 — ~~In such cases where habitat preserves are crossed by a roadway, or where two adjacent preserves are separated by a roadway~~ where a new roadway crosses a habitat preserve or separates two adjacent preserves, the roadway shall include design features, where feasible and appropriate, ~~be designed or updated with wildlife passable fencing separating the roadway from the preserve and/or shall incorporate design features that~~ to allow for the movement of wildlife across or beneath the road without causing a hazard for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians on the roadway.

Policy NR.2.2 — Ensure that direct and indirect effects to wetland habitats are ~~minimized~~ mitigated to the extent feasible by environmentally sensitive project siting and design ~~or other measures, to the maximum extent feasible.~~

Policy NR.3.2 — In general, the City will encourage the preservation of existing location, topography, and meandering alignment of natural creeks. ~~Where necessary, and if consistent with other City policies, the creation~~ The modification, re-creation and realignment of creek corridors shall ~~be constructed to~~ recreate the character of the natural creek corridor- to the extent feasible, appropriate and consistent with other City policies. Channelization and the use of concrete within creek corridors shall ~~not be supported~~ be discouraged, but is not prohibited.

E. POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The Natural Resources Element General Plan Amendment project (Amendments) has the potential to result in significant impacts to the environment. City staff has prepared an Initial Study for the project, which is attached as Appendix A. Since a Final EIR has previously been certified for the General Plan, the Initial Study analyzes whether further environmental review is required for the Amendments. The Initial Study determines whether a subsequent EIR or supplemental EIR must be prepared for the Amendments under the criteria set forth in Public Resources Code Section 21166 and State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15168, 15162 and 15163. The Initial Study concludes that the Amendments may potentially result in an increase in impacts to biological resources from those identified in the General Plan EIR and a supplemental EIR should be prepared to analyze those biological impacts.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A- Initial Study