

2. Introduction

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) provides an assessment of the potential environmental consequences of adoption and implementation of the proposed San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan Update (proposed Project). This assessment is intended to inform and provide guidance for the San Joaquin River Conservancy (Conservancy) as lead agency, and for a wide range of agencies and organizations that could be involved in subsequent development of the San Joaquin River Parkway (Parkway) (see Chapter 3, Project Description) under the proposed Plan. Those agencies include, but are not limited to:

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
- California Department of Transportation (CalTrans)
- California Department of Water Resources
- State Lands Commission
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- California Wildlife Conservation Board
- County of Fresno
- County of Madera
- City of Fresno
- San Joaquin River Restoration Program implementing agencies

This EIR was prepared in accordance with and in fulfillment of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements.

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed Project is an update of the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan and EIR certified and adopted by the Conservancy in December 1997. The vision for the Parkway emerged as a response to concerns about the future of the San Joaquin River, loss of riparian habitat in the San Joaquin Valley, lack of public access to the river for recreational pursuits, and the effects of urban development. The existing San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan's vision and goals still remain, and provide a solid base on which to build. The Project proposes an updated policy framework, addition of new policies, deletion of outdated policies, and modification to existing policies intended to guide future development of the Parkway. Future Parkway development would occur along the approximately 23-mile reach from river mile 267.6 at the Friant Dam to river mile 243.2 at Highway 99, as shown in Figure 3-1 in Chapter 3 of this Draft EIR.

The proposed Project is intended to be a programmatic document that would be implemented in phases over many years, guiding the deliberations and decisions of the Conservancy and other implementing agencies relating to Parkway land acquisitions, plans, designs, improvements, habitat enhancements, operations, maintenance, and

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management. The proposed Project is described in more detail in Chapter 3, Project Description, of this Draft EIR.

2.2 EIR SCOPE

This document is a Program EIR that analyzes potential environmental impacts of the adoption of the proposed Plan. As a Program EIR, this EIR evaluates implementation of the Project. Subsequent environmental review on a site-specific, project-specific basis shall be tiered off this EIR, as necessary, to comply with CEQA. Future site-specific actions will ultimately determine the extent and exact locations of Parkway lands and improvements.

The scope of this EIR was established by the Conservancy through the EIR scoping process, described below in Section 2.4.

2.2.1 POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Pursuant to CEQA Sections 15126.2 and 15126.4, the environmental issues addressed in this EIR include the following :

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

2.2.2 INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

The following documents are incorporated by reference in this Draft EIR, consistent with Section 15150 of the State CEQA Guidelines, and are available for review at the offices of the San Joaquin River Conservancy:

- County of Fresno General Plan
- County of Fresno Municipal Code
- County of Madera General Plan
- County of Madera Municipal Code
- City of Fresno General Plan
- City of Fresno Municipal Code
- City of Fresno Zoning Ordinance
- CEQA Guidelines

This Draft EIR relies upon previously adopted regional and Statewide plans and programs, agency standards, and background studies in its analysis, such as the applicable city and county general plans. Whenever existing environmental documentation or previously-prepared documents and studies are used in the preparation of this Draft EIR, the information is summarized for the convenience of the reader and incorporated by reference. Chapters 4.0 through 4.16 of this Draft EIR provide a complete listing of references utilized in the preparation of this EIR.

2.3 REPORT ORGANIZATION

This EIR is organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1. Executive Summary.** Summarizes the background and description of the proposed Plan, the format of this EIR, alternatives, any critical issues remaining to be resolved as a part of the proposed action, and the potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures identified for the Project. A Summary Table describing recommended mitigation measures and indicating the level of significance of environmental impacts before and after mitigation is also included for clarity.
- **Chapter 2. Introduction.** Provides a preface and overview describing both the intended use of the document and the review and certification process of both the proposed Project and the EIR.
- **Chapter 3. Project Description.** Describes the proposed Project in detail, including a summary of the chapters of the Project and a listing of proposed changes.
- **Chapter 4. Environmental Assessment.** Organized into 16 chapters corresponding to the environmental resource categories identified in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, this section provides a description of the physical environmental conditions in the Parkway Area as they existed at the time the Notice of Preparation was published, from both a local and regional perspective, as well as analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Project and recommended mitigation measures, if required, to reduce their significance. The environmental setting included in each chapter provides baseline physical conditions from which the lead agency determines the significance of environmental impacts resulting from the proposed Project. Each chapter also includes a description of the thresholds used to determine if a significant impact would occur; the methodology to identify and evaluate the potential impacts of the Project; and the potential cumulative impacts associated with the proposed Project and other existing, approved, and proposed development in the area.

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- **Chapter 5. Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts.** Describes the significant unavoidable adverse impacts of the proposed Project.
- **Chapter 6. Alternatives to the Proposed Project.** Considers two alternatives to the proposed Project, including the CEQA-required “No Project Alternative” and the Increased Natural Reserves Alternative.
- **Chapter 7. CEQA-Mandated Sections.** Discusses growth inducement, cumulative impacts, unavoidable significant effects, and significant irreversible changes as a result of the proposed Project. Additionally, this section identifies environmental issues scoped out pursuant to CEQA Section 15128.
- **Chapter 8. Report Preparation.** Identifies the preparers of this EIR.

2.4 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

2.4.1 NOTICE OF PREPARATION AND INITIAL STUDY

In compliance with Section 21080.4 of the California Public Resources Code, the Conservancy circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR for the proposed Project to the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) State Clearinghouse and interested agencies and persons on June 17, 2013 for a 30-day review period. The NOP and scoping process solicited comments from identified responsible and trustee agencies, as well as other interested parties, regarding the scope of the Draft EIR. Appendix A of this Draft EIR contains the NOP and Initial Study, and Appendix B contains the comments received by the Conservancy in response to the NOP.

2.4.2 DRAFT EIR SCOPING MEETINGS

A scoping meeting is helpful to identify possible alternatives, mitigation measures, and significant effects to be analyzed in the EIR. The Conservancy held a public EIR scoping meeting on July 9, 2013 to consult with persons or organizations who may be concerned with the environmental effects of the Plan at which the Conservancy and EIR Consultant Team were present to address and answer questions regarding the proposed Project.

2.4.3 DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR will be available for review by the public and interested parties, agencies, and organizations for a period of 60 days, as required by State law. Written comments on the Draft EIR are encouraged for incorporation into the Final EIR and should be submitted by mail or email to:

Ms. Melinda Marks, Executive Officer
San Joaquin River Conservancy
5469 E. Olive Avenue
Fresno, CA 93727
melinda.marks@sjrc.ca.gov

The Draft EIR will also be posted online on the Conservancy's website, www.sjrc.ca.gov.

2.4.4 FINAL EIR

Upon completion of the 45-day review period, the Conservancy will review all written comments received and prepare written responses for each comment. A Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) will then be prepared, incorporating all of the comments received, response to the comments, and any changes to the Draft EIR that result from the comments received. The Final EIR will then be presented to the San Joaquin River Conservancy Governing Board (Board) for potential certification as the environmental document for the Plan. All persons who commented on the Draft EIR will be notified of the availability of the Final EIR and the date of the public hearing before the Board.

All responses to comments submitted on the Draft EIR by agencies will be provided to those agencies at least 10 days prior to final action on the Plan. The Board will make findings regarding the extent and nature of the impacts as presented in the Final EIR. The Final EIR will need to be certified as complete by the Board prior to making a decision to approve or deny the proposed Plan. Public input is encouraged at all public hearings before the Board.

2.4.5 MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM

Public Resources Code Section 21081.6 requires that the lead agency adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) for any project for which it has made findings pursuant to Public Resources Code 21081. Such a program is intended to ensure the implementation of all mitigation measures adopted through the preparation of an EIR. The MMRP for the proposed Project will be completed as part of the Final EIR prior to the Board's consideration of the proposed Plan.

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