

# 1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Gaviota Coast Plan (proposed Plan). The proposed Plan is described in detail in Chapter 2, Project Description. This introduction provides the following information about the EIR: the purpose and intended uses; legal authority; the type, scope, content, and format of the document; and finally the review process and approach.

## 1.1 Project Background

The proposed Plan has been prepared by the County of Santa Barbara (County) to provide a regulatory framework for the Gaviota Coast (Plan Area), which encompasses 158 square miles (101,199 acres) of unincorporated land within the County of Santa Barbara. The Plan Area is bounded by Eagle Canyon on the East, Jalama Beach County Park on the West, the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains on the North, and the Pacific Ocean on the South.

The Santa Barbara County 1980 Comprehensive Plan (Comprehensive Plan) is implemented in part by regionally focused community plans prepared with input from local citizens through a public process and a volunteer Planning Advisory Committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors. Currently, unincorporated land in the Gaviota Coast is not covered by a community plan. The proposed Plan is therefore intended to provide a vision and implementing policies to guide land use for the Gaviota Coast over a 20-year planning horizon (2015–2035).

To develop the proposed Plan, the Gaviota Coast Planning Advisory Committee (GavPAC) was formed in October 2009 by the Board of Supervisors. The role of the GavPAC was to receive community input, review, and comment on planning issues in the Plan Area, which was used by County staff to help draft the proposed Plan. The GavPAC received community input and provided an advisory function to the County of Santa Barbara Planning & Development Department, the County Planning Commission, and the County Board of Supervisors, regarding land use policy and discretionary projects that affect the Plan Area. For the proposed Plan, the GavPAC held a series of 68 noticed public hearings, one all-day workshop, and 56 GavPAC subcommittee meetings (concerning visual resources, agriculture, and recreation and trails subcommittees).

A key goal of the proposed Plan is to maintain the rural character of the area that is dominated by working agriculture and natural landscapes. The Plan provides a local vision for lasting protection of the Gaviota Coast, in part, through the development of new policies, programs, and planning tools specific to the Plan Area that take into account resource protection, coastal access, continuation and enhancement of working agriculture, and private property use.

According to the Plan, the vision for the Plan Area is to:

- Protect and ensure continued suitability and productivity of agricultural lands.
- Protect and enhance interconnected habitat areas and watersheds from the ridgeline to the ocean.
- Preserve and enhance public access to the coast, including a robust interconnected coastal and inland trail system.
- Preserve and enhance important scenic views of the valley, mountains and coastal open spaces.
- Ensure public infrastructure is scaled to the community and water and wastewater systems are protected, enhanced and sustainably managed and maintained.
- Protect, enhance, and preserve important cultural and historic resources.
- Ensure the transportation system is well-planned and maintained and the traffic level of service standards are consistent with the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Support a safe, complete, pedestrian-friendly, and sustainably managed and maintained transportation system that provides full multimodal access to the community, and connections regionally and between commercial and residential areas.

## 1.2 EIR Purpose and Intended Uses

CEQA Guidelines Section 15124(d) requires that an EIR define those agencies that are expected to use the EIR in their decision making. These include “lead,” “responsible,” and “trustee” agencies. The County is the “lead” agency for the project as it has the principal responsibility for approving or denying the project. The County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will use this EIR as a basis for this determination to approve or deny the project, and the County will continue to reference this EIR to assess subsequent project proposals and the need for further environmental review. This EIR may be used as a basis for approvals or permits by other governmental agencies besides the County that may be required as part of project development.

A “trustee agency” refers to a state agency that has jurisdiction over natural resources held in trust for the people of California, but does not have discretionary approval over the project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15386). Trustee agencies that may have approval authority over components of individual projects that could be accommodated under the Plan include the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, which has jurisdiction over biological resources, including waters of the state and rare and endangered species, and the California Department

of Parks and Recreation, which manages the state's 279 parks, beaches, trails, wildlife areas, open spaces, off highway vehicle areas, and historic sites.

Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, have jurisdiction over certain projects and activities that may affect federally protected species or waters of the U.S. A "responsible agency" refers to public agencies other than the "lead agency" that have discretionary approval over the project. For example, the California Department of Transportation is a responsible agency that has discretionary approval on any improvements to the state highway system necessary to accommodate future buildout under the proposed Plan, such as issuing an encroachment permit along Highways 101 or 1. Other responsible agencies include the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) for review of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requests, and review of septic systems subject to RWQCB permitting.

### **1.3 EIR Legal Authority**

This EIR discusses the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Plan. The County is the lead agency under CEQA for preparation and certification of the EIR. Consistent with the CEQA Statutes and Guidelines and in accordance with the County's Guidelines for the Implementation of CEQA (1970, as amended), this EIR has been prepared in order to:

- Inform the public of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Plan;
- Identify actions to mitigate or avoid potential proposed Plan impacts; and
- Identify reasonable alternatives to the proposed Plan that can reduce or avoid potentially significant environmental impacts, while achieving project objectives.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15064 requires the preparation of an EIR when projects such as the Plan are anticipated to have potentially significant impacts on the environment. EIRs are prepared in order to "identify the significant effects on the environment of a project, to identify alternatives to the project, and to indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be mitigated or avoided" (CEQA Guidelines Section 15064). An EIR is intended to serve as an informational document for decision-makers and the general public regarding the environmental consequences of a project.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15151 requires that preparation of an EIR include a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information that enables them to make a decision based on the environmental consequences of a project. Accordingly, CEQA Guidelines Section 15151, states:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the

environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible.

While CEQA Guidelines Section 15021 requires that major consideration be given to avoiding environmental impacts, the lead agency and responsible agencies (agencies that have discretionary approval or permitting authority over the proposed project) must balance adverse environmental effects against other public objectives, including economic and social goals, in determining whether and in what manner a project should be approved.

## **1.4 EIR Type, Scope, Content, and Format**

Starting on Tuesday, June 11, 2013, the County Planning Commission held a series of public hearings to consider a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors regarding initiation of the proposed Plan as the recommended project description for environmental review. The Initiation Draft of the proposed Plan includes amendments to the Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan, Land Use and Development Code (LUDC), and Local Coastal Program (LCP), including amendments to County land use and zoning maps. Public comments on the Initiation Draft proposed Plan were received at nine public hearings, on the following dates:

- June 11, 2013
- June 26, 2013
- July 16, 2013
- July 30, 2013
- August 7, 2013
- August 19, 2013
- August 28, 2013
- September 4, 2013
- September 18, 2013

On December 3, 2013, the Board of Supervisors initiated the proposed Plan for purposes of environmental review. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15082, the County began the Notice of Preparation (NOP) process in January 2014. As part of this process, the County prepared an environmental scoping document (scoping document), which provided an overview of the proposed Plan and a preliminary review of the potential environmental impacts. The scoping document, along with the NOP, was circulated to public agencies, special districts, and members of the public requesting input on the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR. Appendix A contains the NOP, scoping document, and responses to the NOP.

From January 10 to February 24, 2014, the NOP was circulated for a public comment period by the County, and the County conducted a scoping of the EIR for the Plan. During the scoping period, the County solicited comments from the public and agencies on issues that should be addressed in the EIR. The County also held an environmental scoping meeting at the County

Planning Commission Hearing Room in Santa Barbara on February 10, 2014. The County received letters and emails from 56 commenters during the scoping period. The NOP process and subsequent response from agencies and the public identified concerns regarding the following issues:

- Conversion and/or development of agricultural land for more intensive uses
- Redesignation and rezoning of existing rural designated/zoned agricultural land to Mountainous Area – Gaviota zone (MT-GAV)
- Location, affordability, and intensity of future residential development to be allowed
- Resource conservation and inclusion of chaparral habitat to existing environmentally sensitive habitat overlays
- Support for local businesses, services, farms, parks, recreational uses, and trails
- Increased coastal access
- Potential land use conflicts

This EIR addresses all potentially significant environmental impacts associated with the Plan as determined in the County's Scoping Study, responses to the NOP, and input at the EIR scoping meeting. Potentially significant impacts on environmental resources are addressed in Chapter 4, Environmental Impact Analysis, and in the following EIR sections:

- 4.1 Land Use and Development
- 4.2 Transportation and Circulation
- 4.3 Aesthetics/Visual Resources
- 4.4 Agricultural Resources
- 4.5 Air Quality
- 4.6 Biological Resources
- 4.7 Flooding and Water Resources
- 4.8 Cultural Resources and Historical Resources
- 4.9 Public Services and Facilities
- 4.10 Noise
- 4.11 Geologic Hazards/Soils/Mineral Resources
- 4.12 Hazardous Materials/Risk of Upset
- 4.13 Parks, Recreation, and Trails

Chapter 3, Environmental Setting, provides general environmental conditions throughout the Plan Area. More detailed descriptions of the setting for individual issue areas can be found in the discussions contained within individual sections of Chapter 4, Environmental Impact Analysis. These setting descriptions provide the context for assessing potential environmental impacts resulting from implementation (buildout) of the proposed Plan.

The proposed recreational elements in the Plan, including the Parks, Recreation, and Trails (PRT) chapter policies and related map amendments, represent the most significant change that would occur as a result from Plan implementation. As a result, the EIR analysis of potential impacts for each environmental subject area related to the Plan PRT chapter and related map amendments have been consolidated in Chapter 4 into a larger cohesive 4.13 Parks, Recreation, and Trails analysis section. Section 4.13 addresses the following topics related to the proposed PRT chapter and related map amendments: Land Use and Development, Transportation and Circulation, Aesthetics/Visual Resources, Agricultural Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Flooding and Water Resources, Cultural and Historical Resources, Public Services, Noise, Geologic Hazards/Soils/Mineral Resources, and Hazardous Materials and Risk of Upset. This approach keeps all PRT related information and impact analyses in one place for ease of access and avoids repeating analysis in each EIR section.

The content and format of this EIR meets the current requirements of the CEQA statute and the CEQA Guidelines. A discussion of each resource reviewed for the potential to be affected by the Plan is provided in Chapter 4, Environmental Impact Analysis, in sections that are organized as follows:

- The impacts and mitigation subsections in each Chapter 4 section describe the potentially significant effects or consequences resulting from development of the Plan on specific resources. The methodology and criteria used to analyze and determine the significant impacts on each environmental resource are discussed in each section of Chapter 4. This section takes into account proposed Plan policies, development standards, and programs that are intended to minimize potential adverse environmental effects. To address potentially significant impacts that are not minimized to less than significant by the Plan components, additional mitigation measures are proposed that minimize, reduce, or avoid these adverse environmental effects. These measures, if adopted, would become additional Plan development standards.
- Significance criteria are used to evaluate the degree of significance of each impact. The criteria used to establish thresholds of significance are based on the CEQA statute (Public Resources Code 21000–21177); CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000–15387); Appendix G Environmental Thresholds Form; policies in the County Comprehensive Plan and the Coastal Land Use Plan; the County Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual (2008); and the development standards in the LUDC and Coastal Zoning Ordinance. The "threshold of significance" for a given environmental effect is the level at which the County, as the lead agency, finds the effect of the project to be significant.

"Threshold of significance" is discussed for each issue in the County's Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual, and can be defined as:

A quantitative or qualitative standard, or set of criteria, pursuant to which significance of a given environmental effect may be determined (CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.7 [a]).

In each issue area discussion, the thresholds are used to determine the significance of impacts. The project impacts discussion describes potential consequences to each resource that would result from implementation of the Plan. The following categories for impact significance are used in this analysis:

- **Class I:** Significant unavoidable adverse impacts that cannot be feasibly mitigated or avoided. If the project is approved, decision-makers are required to adopt a statement of overriding considerations, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15093, explaining why project benefits outweigh the damage caused by these significant environmental impacts.
- **Class II:** Significant environmental impacts that can be feasibly mitigated or avoided to a less than significant level. If the project is approved, decision-makers are required to make findings pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15091, that impacts have been mitigated to the maximum extent feasible by implementation of mitigations.
- **Class III:** Adverse impacts found not to be significant. These impacts do not require that findings be adopted by the decision-making body.
- **Class IV:** Impacts beneficial to the environment. These are listed in Chapter 4 as applicable when the Plan would result in solely beneficial effects on the environment. They may be used as considerations for balancing any potentially adverse environmental effects resulting from Plan buildout.

Mitigation measures to minimize, avoid, or reduce potentially significant impacts are presented for each potentially significant impact. Mitigation is occasionally also recommended to minimize potentially adverse but less than significant impacts (Class III) in order to maximize consistency with Comprehensive Plan policies or development standards. These measures are intended to become conditions of approval that dictate future development within the Plan Area. A Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) component, as required under CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091(d) and 15097, will be included in the Final EIR and will contain plan requirements, timing, and monitoring components.

This MMRP structure is consistent with County procedures; the MMRP component of each measure is subsequently incorporated with the measures adopted by decision-makers as development standards. The residual impacts, or level of environmental impacts remaining after implementation of a given mitigation measure, are listed after each mitigation measure. It is

important to note that the residual Class II impacts are significant but feasibly mitigated to less than significant. The difference is that the Class II impacts are reduced to a level below significance only after implementation of required mitigation. This is important in that administrative findings are required for all Class I and II impacts pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15091, as described above. Findings are not required for Class III or IV impacts, but substantiation is required to characterize them as less than significant.

The cumulative impacts discussion in each environmental issue section describes potentially significant impacts resulting from Plan buildout in combination with the impacts resulting from the development of reasonably foreseeable projects in the area. The reasonably foreseeable projects (proposed and approved, but not built) are listed in Chapter 3, Environmental Setting. The end of each issue section also discusses residual cumulative impacts, or the level of contribution from the proposed Plan to cumulative impacts remaining after consideration and implementation of mitigation measures.

The proposed Plan's consistency with applicable County plans and policies is presented for each environmental issue area. This preliminary analysis is presented in Chapter 5, and will be used to assist the County in preparing the staff report for decision-maker consideration. Individual projects developed in conformance with the proposed Plan may be found consistent with County policies and approved even if the project would result in significant and unavoidable environmental impacts. In such a case, a Statement of Overriding Consideration must be issued by the decision-making body (i.e., the Board of Supervisors) explaining why the project's benefits outweigh its significant, unavoidably adverse impacts and why it should be approved.

As required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, Chapter 6, Alternatives to the Proposed Project, examines a reasonable range of alternatives to avoid or substantially lessen significant environmental impacts while achieving most of the basic project objectives. Table 6-1 provides a detailed comparison of each alternative to the proposed Plan. The EIR fully analyzes four alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. A comparison of impacts resulting from the Plan alternatives is also presented. The Environmentally Superior Alternative is defined as a result of this comparison. Finally, this chapter also includes alternatives considered, but ultimately rejected for further detailed analysis. These include the National Park Alternative, the Visitor Serving Commercial Alternative, and the Reduced PRT Alternative. Chapter 6 details the reasons why these alternatives were not selected for further study.

Other discussions mandated to be addressed in an EIR under CEQA Guidelines Section 15126 (b), (c) and (d), including growth-inducing impacts, unavoidable significant impacts, significant irreversible environmental changes that would be caused by the project, and effects found not to be significant are presented in Chapter 7. References, persons and agencies contacted during preparation of the Draft EIR and EIR preparers are provided in Chapter 8.

## 1.5 Program EIR Review Process and Approach

This EIR draws on pertinent policies, guidelines, and existing reports and documentation to determine baseline conditions and impacts, and design mitigation measures. The County Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual and Standard Conditions of Approval and Standard Mitigation Measures (County of Santa Barbara 2008) were integrated into this analysis. Copies of pertinent documents and guidelines are available for review at County Planning and Development, 123 East Anapamu Street, Santa Barbara; and the County web site at: <http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/planareas/gaviota/gaviota.php>.

This EIR has been prepared as a Program EIR in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15168. A Program EIR is an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as (1) one large project and are related by geography; (2) as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions, in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or (3) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways. In the case of the proposed Plan, all criteria apply.

Use of a Program EIR can:

- 1) Provide an occasion for a more exhaustive consideration of effects and alternatives than would be practical in an EIR on an individual action;
- 2) Ensure consideration of cumulative impacts that might be overlooked in a case-by-case analysis;
- 3) Avoid duplicative reconsideration of basic policy considerations;
- 4) Allow the lead agency to consider broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures at an early time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts; and
- 5) Allow reduction in paperwork.

Subsequent development activities must be examined within the context of a Program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared.

- 1) If a later activity would have effects that were not examined in the Program EIR, a new Initial Study would assess the need to prepare an EIR or a Negative Declaration.
- 2) If the agency finds that pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15162, no new effects could occur or no new mitigation measures would be required, the agency can approve

the activity as being within the scope of the project covered by the Program EIR, and no new environmental document would be required.

- 3) An agency shall incorporate feasible mitigation measures in the Program EIR into the Plan.
- 4) Where the subsequent activities involve site-specific operations, the agency should use a written checklist or similar device to document the evaluation of the site and the activity to determine whether the environmental effects of the operation were covered in the Program EIR.
- 5) A Program EIR will be most helpful in dealing with subsequent activities if it deals with the effects of the Plan as specifically and comprehensively as possible. With a good and detailed analysis of the potential impacts resulting from the Plan, some subsequent project proposals could be found to be within the scope of the project described in the Program EIR, and no further environmental documents would be required.

~~CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 describes the process for Program EIRs as follows:~~

Use of the Program EIR also enables the Lead Agency to characterize the overall program as the project being approved at that time. Following this approach when individual activities within the program are proposed, the agency would be required to examine the individual activities to determine whether their effects were fully analyzed in the Program EIR. If the activities would have no effects beyond those analyzed in the Program EIR, the agency could assert that the activities are merely part of the program which had been approved earlier, and no further CEQA compliance would be required. This approach offers many possibilities for agencies to reduce their costs of CEQA compliance and still achieve high levels of environmental protection (CEQA, Article 11, Section 15168).

This Program EIR simplifies the tasks of preparing subsequent environmental documents associated with Plan buildout. The Program EIR will provide the basis in an Initial Study for determining whether the subsequent activity may have any significant effects; be incorporated by reference to deal with regional influences, secondary effects, cumulative impacts, broad alternatives, and other factors that apply to the program as a whole; and focus this EIR on a subsequent project to permit discussion solely on new effects which had not been considered previously.