

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Sutter County has initiated a comprehensive update of its General Plan to evaluate current conditions in the community, reaffirm a vision for the County's future, and outline a systematic set of actions by which to achieve that vision. The first major step in the General Plan Update process is the establishment of baseline conditions and trends in the County. This Technical Background Report (TBR) provides a descriptive profile of Sutter County's existing conditions and serves as the "environmental setting" for the General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

■ REGIONAL CONTEXT

Sutter County is situated in the Sacramento Valley, with the southern boundary located approximately 10 miles north of the City of Sacramento. The County is comprised of 607 square miles of land. The County is generally bordered on the west by the Sacramento River, on the east by the Feather and Bear Rivers and Placer County, on the north by Butte County, and on the south by Sacramento County. State Route 99 extends in a north-south direction through the County and is the primary corridor connecting Sutter County to the region. State Route 20 is the primary east-west connection through the County. Sutter County's regional location is reflected on Figure 1.1-1.

Sutter County can generally be divided into two geographic areas, the Sutter Buttes and the valley area. The Sutter Buttes are often referred to as the world's smallest mountain range and are a symbolic focal point of the County. The valley area is primarily flat and dominated by farming related operations. Overall, Sutter County's character is reflective of its rural tradition with a landscape dominated by extensive agricultural areas, significant natural and recreational resources, and relatively low population density.

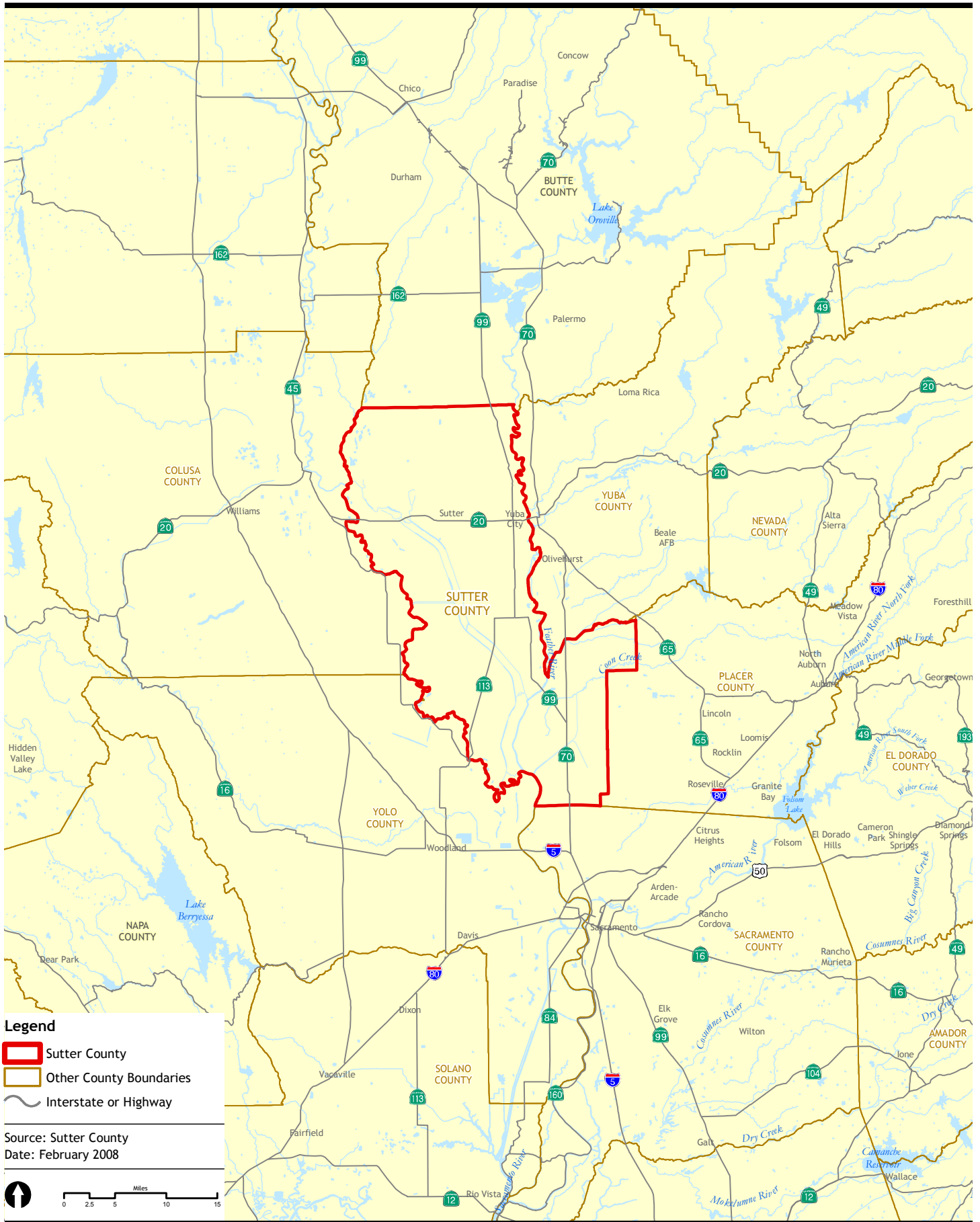
Sutter County has experienced moderate growth over the last several decades, with its two incorporated cities, Yuba City and Live Oak, receiving the largest percentage of that growth. Similar to other areas in the region, however Sutter County is encountering considerable new growth pressures. These pressures are reflective of the County's positive quality of life and relative affordability, attractive to people and businesses relocating from the Bay Area and Sacramento.

■ THE GENERAL PLAN

Purpose of the General Plan

State law requires every county and city in California to prepare and maintain a planning document called a general plan. The general plan serves as the jurisdiction's "constitution" for decisions concerning land use and resource conservation. The general plan provides guidance to decision-makers regarding the allocation of resources and is the official statement of the jurisdiction regarding the extent and types of development needed to achieve the community's physical, economic, social, and environmental goals. All specific plans, subdivisions, public works projects, and zoning decisions must be consistent with the local jurisdiction's general plan.

SUTTER COUNTY
General Plan Update



Under State law, each county and city general plan must contain the following seven elements:

- Land Use
- Circulation
- Housing
- Conservation
- Open Space
- Noise
- Safety

California Government Code Section 65303 permits local jurisdictions to formulate other elements, which, in the “judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county or city.” These “optional” elements are as legally binding as the mandatory elements. Sutter County intends to include the following optional elements in its updated General Plan:

- Economic Development
- Infrastructure
- Community Services

Although the general plan consists of individual elements that address specific areas of concern, it also embodies a comprehensive and integrated planning approach for Sutter County.

Sutter County General Plan Update Process

The current General Plan for Sutter County was adopted in 1996. Various elements of the General Plan have been amended over time, but the plan has not been comprehensively updated since its adoption. Much of the data, analyses, and policies in the 1996 plan do not reflect the current conditions in the County. As a result, an update of the General Plan is necessary to reflect the current vision for accommodating future growth and conservation within Sutter County through 2030.

Sutter County initiated its General Plan Update process in late 2007. This process will lead to a vision and series of findings that form a framework for updating the plan and directing future County planning efforts.

The General Plan Update process includes the following four major steps:

Discovery: Establishment of the baseline conditions and trends from which the General Plan goals, policies, and implementation programs will be developed. This step includes preparation of (a) the Technical Background Report; and (b) a Planning Issues Report, synthesizing opportunities and constraints for which general plan policy will subsequently be formulated.

Visioning: Defining a commonly shared vision that articulates the fundamental values and aspirations for the future of the County. This step includes the preparation of a focused number of “Issue Papers” to explore in greater detail the key issues and options to be addressed in the update of the general plan; establishment of a framework of workshops, study sessions, and public involvement to create the County General Plan vision; and preparation of a “vision

statement” and corresponding “guiding principles” that provide the underlying influence and set of “rules” by which land use alternatives will be developed and updated plan policies will be written.

Policymaking: Development of a preferred physical plan for the future of the County and the establishment of policy to guide that future. This step consists of two primary components: (a) the formulation and evaluation of alternative land use/conservation scenarios for the County with the selection of a preferred land use scenario; and (b) the formulation of goals, policies, and implementation measures to reflect the defined issues, guiding principles, and selected land use scenario.

Documentation and Community Ownership: Preparation, review, and approval of planning and environmental documents for the updated general plan. This step includes preparation and approval of the County General Plan as well as certification of the program EIR.

Sutter County intends to promote a highly interactive process that engages the public throughout the General Plan Update process.

■ **TECHNICAL BACKGROUND REPORT**

Purpose of the Technical Background Report

The updated Sutter County General Plan will be divided into two documents: this Technical Background Report and a future Policy Document.

The purpose of this TBR is to provide a profile and analysis of existing conditions and trends focusing primarily on the unincorporated portion of Sutter County and those areas that influence the unincorporated County area. The TBR presents the physical, social, and economic information required to support the preparation of the general plan. It serves as the foundation document from which subsequent planning policies and programs will be formulated, and it will also be used as the “Environmental Setting” section of the General Plan EIR.

This TBR is based on data and information available as of December 2007. Supplementary information and comments received throughout the General Plan Update process will also be collected and used to support the County’s General Plan and EIR.

Organization of the Technical Background Report

The TBR consists of eight chapters. The contents of each are described below.

Chapter 1 – Introduction: This chapter provides background information on the purpose of the Sutter County’s General Plan Update and outlines the purpose and content of the TBR.

Chapter 2 – Community Development: Includes sections that address land use, demographic trends and conditions, economic development trends and conditions, and the agricultural economy.

Chapter 3 – Infrastructure and Community Services: Includes three major sections that discuss Infrastructure, Mobility, and Community Services and Facilities. Infrastructure addresses potable water systems and supply, agricultural water systems and supply, wastewater systems, stormwater and drainage, flood control and levees, solid waste management, energy resources, and telecommunications. Mobility addresses streets and highways, transit and rail, bikeways, and air travel and airports. Community Services and

Facilities addresses law enforcement; fire protection and emergency services; schools; parks and recreation; and general government, civic, and cultural facilities.

Chapter 4 – Environmental Resources: Includes sections that address biological resources; agricultural, soils, and mineral resources; hydrology and water quality; air quality; visual resources; and prehistoric and historic resources.

Chapter 5 – Community and Safety Hazards: Includes sections that address geologic and seismic hazards, fire hazards, hazardous materials management, and noise.

Format of the Technical Background Report Sections

Each section of the TBR includes the following:

Introduction: Provides a brief description of the issues covered in the section.

Summary of Key Findings: Presents key facts and preliminary issues from the section. These findings will serve as the basis for the identification of technical issues in the next phase of the General Plan Update.

Existing Conditions: Describes the existing conditions of each resource or issue area. The focus of the discussion is upon the unincorporated County area, with reference to the incorporated cities and surrounding region where appropriate.

Regulatory Context: Presents federal, State, and local regulations that are applicable to each resource or issue area.

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