

Chapter 3. Environmental Setting and Impacts

The following is a description of the baseline assumptions used to evaluate the impacts of the GPU during the planning period 2016-2040. This introduction builds on the general growth assumptions for the planning area described in Chapter 2 – Project Description, and is supplemented by details in the individual technical sections of the RDEIR (Sections 3.1 through 3.16) regarding the specific assumptions and methodologies used in the analysis for that particular subject matter.

3.0 Baseline Environmental Conditions Assumed in the RDEIR

Section 15125(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of a project, as they exist at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The CEQA Guidelines also specify that this description of the physical environmental conditions should serve as the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether the impacts of a project are considered significant.

The environmental setting conditions of the County of Humboldt are described in detail in the individual technical sections of the RDEIR (see Sections 3.1 through 3.16). In general, these sections describe the setting conditions of Humboldt County as they existed when the NOP for the project was released on January 22, 2007. In addition, the RDEIR also includes information about the environmental setting that has been updated since release of the NOP, such as the release of the 2010 Census; updates regarding local development proposals; updated housing and population estimates from the State of California; updates from local agencies regarding their infrastructure and services; and updated information from local, state, and federal regulatory agencies.

Unfortunately, comprehensive and reliable data regarding baseline conditions related to the pervasive and unregulated development of illicit cannabis cultivation in Humboldt County is still not available. Although this RDEIR attempts to summarize some of the data that is available in Chapter 3.2 - Agriculture and Timber Resources, future regulation of cannabis cultivation, processing, manufacturing, or distribution is not within the scope of the draft GPU and potential impacts of such a regulatory program are not analyzed in this RDEIR. The County of Humboldt is in the process of developing a separate Environmental Impact Report for ordinances regulating commercial cannabis industry development in accordance with rapidly evolving state and federal law.

Growth Assumptions under the General Plan associated with the Planning Area & Period

Future growth in the General Plan Planning Area and Period is guided by the land uses identified in the General Plan Land Use Diagram (See General Plan Update Appendix F, Map Book). In the RDEIR, impact analysis of both temporary [i.e. construction-related] and operational effects is based on these proposed land use patterns. The estimated maximum feasible housing development potential of the General Plan Update land uses is far greater (38,972 housing units) than can reasonably be expected to be developed within the planning period of the General Plan (2016-2040). As explained in Chapter 2 - Project Description, the most recent population projections for Humboldt County from DOF reveal that Humboldt County's population is projected to grow fairly slowly in the coming years, and reach a peak population in 2028 of

141,441 persons, and then it is projected to start to decline to 138,307 persons in 2040, at the end of the planning period.

Appendix T of this RDEIR explains the methodology used to estimate that 1,721 new housing units will be needed to meet the demand of the increase in population to 2028 and 2040. The methodology goes on to explain how those new units were distributed across the county, reflecting historic development patterns that are most likely to continue into the future. This assumption is based on access, availability of infrastructure (water, sewer, schools, etc.), distance to work and shopping, and other factors that influence cost and market desirability. The methodology also describes how the projected increase in employment (5,980 jobs countywide) is used to estimate the commercial and industrial space constructed during the period.

Parcel-specific development potential estimates are used in this RDEIR to inform the environmental impact discussion presented later in this chapter. The estimates represent a future development pattern that most closely resembles historic development patterns. Should future development be proposed in a manner that is inconsistent with the projections and estimates in the RDEIR, additional environmental assessments pursuant to CEQA will be necessary before any such proposal could be approved.

Review of potential future development applications beyond that as set forth in this RDEIR is outside the scope of the analysis of this RDEIR, and may require supplemental or subsequent CEQA analysis.