

# I. INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) addresses the 1993 proposed Imperial County General Plan Update (Plan Update). Elements of the Plan Update contain goals, objectives and policies by which future development within the County will occur. The Plan Update was developed from and will eventually replace the existing General Plan. The primary aspects of the proposed General Plan analyzed in this Program EIR are the proposed General Plan's effects on the environment.

## A. Purpose

This EIR is intended to provide an extensive data base with a level of analysis that can serve as a program-level environmental assessment for the design and review of future development proposals within Imperial County. The analysis contained in this report identifies sensitive environmental resources and issues that may be affected by implementation of the various Elements of the proposed Plan Update. Particular attention is given to land use compatibility, agricultural production, traffic/circulation, public services, biological and cultural resources, and safety impacts that may result from ultimate development according to the proposed Plan Update.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 requires the preparation of an EIR or other environmental analysis for any project that may have a significant effect on the environment. The purposes of an EIR are to identify environmental effects and their significance, identify alternatives to the project, and indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be mitigated or avoided. EIRs must be organized and written in such a manner they will be meaningful and useful to both decision-makers and the public.

EIRs must contain discussion of specific topics as outlined by the lead agency, as well as specific topics outlined in guidelines for the implementation of CEQA prepared by the State Secretary of Resources. Such guidelines are periodically updated to comply with changes in CEQA or new court interpretations. This report follows the most recent guidelines and amendments to CEQA. The report is also consistent with Imperial County's Rules and Regulations for implementing CEQA.

It is anticipated that this EIR will serve as an environmental resource document for land use proposals and regulating ordinances. Major developments, including large residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, and public facility projects, will probably require more focused and site specific individual EIRs. In all cases, an initial study or project evaluation will be performed and a decision made, pursuant to CEQA and Imperial County's CEQA implementing procedures, as to the proper environmental documentation needed for each project permitted.

In addition to providing primary documentation at the County-wide level, this document is intended to serve as a reference guide for the preparation of environmental documentation for future projects. It is intended for use primarily by Imperial County staff, decision-makers, and project proponents in the county.

## B. Process

This EIR addresses the proposed adoption of a comprehensive General Plan Update prepared for Imperial County in 1993, and which was authorized for environmental analysis by the Imperial County Board of Supervisors. The analysis contained in this document is based on potential environmental impacts which may result from ultimate buildout of the proposed General Plan. Information presented herein is intended to provide general land use and environmental constraints analyses that should be considered when reviewing individual properties proposed for development; and to indicate when and/or where additional site-specific studies should be required to determine the level of impacts. Potentially significant impacts associated with a particular constraint can often be mitigated through regulatory processes, sensitive site plan design, and implementation of certain conditions which must be met prior to, or concurrent with, project development.

This report will be made available for a 45-day review period during which time citizen and public agency comments are solicited. Comments received during the period will be reviewed and responded to in the Final Environmental Impact Report. The Final Environmental Impact Report will then be reviewed by the Imperial County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors as part of the procedures to adopt the Plan Update. Additional information on this process may be obtained by contacting the County Planning Department at (619) 339-4236.

## C. Organization

This Environmental Impact Report represents the synthesis of all research conducted in an acceptable format as required by the State of California EIR Guidelines. The document is organized into several sections to facilitate coherent and orderly analysis of the Plan Update.

A Summary is presented first to provide an overview of the analysis that follows. This section, the Introduction, explains the use and scope of the EIR. Section II, the Project Description, provides a brief description of all aspects of the proposed Plan Update. Section III consists of the Environmental Analysis, which examines the issues identified by Imperial County as having potentially significant environmental effects. These issues are land use, agriculture, traffic/circulation, noise, biological resources, cultural resources, public services/safety, air quality, visual resources, water quality and availability, geology/soils, and flood control/hydrology. Each issue is addressed in the following manner.

**Existing Conditions.** This section describes the existing resources and setting germane to the subject addressed. The information presented here allows the reader to evaluate the significance of any changes the proposed General Plan might have on the environment.

**Environmental Impacts.** All immediate and potential direct and indirect impacts that may result from General Plan implementation are discussed in this section. Both positive and negative impacts are analyzed with discussion focused on each impact's level of significance as it relates to each specific Element of the General Plan.

**Mitigation Measures.** Those aspects of the General Plan that have been incorporated to avoid or minimize environmental impacts are discussed. Special attention is directed toward feasible mitigation measures to be required during subsequent project-specific environmental and planning review.

Sections IV through IX address specific topics required by CEQA. These topics include Growth Inducement, Cumulative Impacts, Effects Found Not To Be Significant, The Relationship between Local Short-Term Uses of Man's Environment and Enhancement of Long-Term Productivity, Any Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes Which Would Be Involved in the Proposed Action Should It Be Implemented, and Alternatives to the Proposed Project. The Alternatives to the Proposed Project section includes discussion of the Increased Agricultural Alternative, Increased Development Alternative, Modified Staff Alternative, Environmental/Open Space Alternative, and the No Project Alternative.

## **D. Limitations**

The data, analysis, and recommendations documented in this report reflect an independent interpretation of existing information available at the time of the study. It should be recognized that the findings contained here may not present a full disclosure of the County's ultimate development due to the lack of more precise land use information on specific development proposals.