

INTRODUCTION

1. THE GENERAL PLAN’S PURPOSE

The State of California requires every city and county to adopt a legally adequate General Plan containing mandatory elements on issues important to the people of California. The law permits General Plans to incorporate optional elements to address issues important to the people in the jurisdiction adopting the Plan.

The California Supreme Court calls the General Plan the “constitution” of a County, and it serves as more than a document regulating land use. Although zoning is the more commonly known land use regulation tool, the General Plan is distinct and more fundamental in its role. The General Plan provides the long-range vision and policy direction defining what the County is and wants to become.

The General Plan comprises the written adopted policies of the Board of Supervisors with input from County residents. It represents a commitment to the County’s future. The General Plan creates a business plan for the County of Mariposa. For Mariposa County, the General Plan’s implementation is the foundation for the future, guiding the County’s growth and development for the next 20 years.

2. GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

No matter how many elements a General Plan contains, the law dictates equal weight and value to all. This means components of the General Plan—goals, policies, and implementation measures—must work together.

3. RELATION TO OTHER LAND USE LAWS

The Board of Supervisors implements the General Plan through development and adoption of ordinances and standards. The General Plan focuses on policies to manage land development and capital infrastructure.

In addition to updating Title 17, the County will need to consider revision of both Title 16 of the Mariposa County Code, Subdivisions, Title 18, Miscellaneous Land Use codes, certain components of the Title 15, Building Code, and will need to consider road standards, design review guidelines, and historic review guidelines.

4. THE GENERAL PLAN AND THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF HOLDING PROPERTY

The County of Mariposa General Plan recognizes the constitutional right to hold and use property. An important purpose of the General Plan is to entrust the right to use property in a manner beneficial to - the County's constituencies. The General Plan establishes goals, policies, and implementation programs to define the highest and best use of lands within its jurisdiction.

When policies are implemented, the structure of the General Plan creates a due process whereby a property owner is able to hold and use property in balance with the rights of all other property owners.

The General Plan is a catalog of choices. Almost all actions of the County involve competing issues and values. The General Plan consolidates some of the choices as County policy. Through the public review of this document as it is being developed, through the public hearing process as its policies are implemented, and through the power granted by the State, the County of Mariposa General Plan grants those property rights and establishes equitable property responsibility.

5. ELEMENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN

An "element" is a component or chapter of the General Plan. State law requires that some elements be contained in the General Plan. Planning issues of special significance for a particular city or county can be placed in a series of optional elements.

5.01 FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

The first three chapters of the General Plan, together based on the philosophy of the 1981 General Plan, input from Mariposa County citizens, and guidance from the County Board of Supervisors, form the foundation of this General Plan. The goals, policies, and implementation measures of the Plan all rest on and must be consistent with the foundation in these three chapters.

1. Mariposa County Setting and Governance
2. Planning Issues Raised by County Residents
3. Guiding Principles of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

5.02 REQUIRED ELEMENTS

California law requires every General Plan to address a minimum of seven elements.¹

- Circulation (including infrastructure and services)
- Conservation
- Housing

¹ Section 65300 et. seq. of the California Government Code defines the minimum content requirements for each of these elements.

- Land Use
- Noise
- Open Space
- Safety

The State allows maximum flexibility in preparing the General Plan. For example, cities and counties are permitted to combine elements. In the Mariposa County General Plan, Open Space and Conservation are combined into one element.

5.03 OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

In order to address important issues specific to Mariposa County, the General Plan includes the following six optional elements.

- Agriculture
- Arts and Culture
- Economic Development
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Local Recreation
- Regional Tourism

In addition, the County expanded the Circulation Element to become the Circulation, Infrastructure, and Services Element.

5.04 AREA PLANNING

Mariposa’s diverse communities create unique planning areas, each with their own distinct character. Therefore, the County incorporates area plans into the General Plan. Each area plan acts as a mini-General Plan and falls into one of three categories: town plans, community plans, or special plans.

6. HISTORY OF GENERAL PLANNING IN MARIPOSA

Planning in Mariposa began in the late 1940s when the County contracted with an engineering firm to prepare a master plan. Zoning regulations started evolving in the mid-1950s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mariposa started seeing the creation of extremely large subdivisions, such as Lake Don Pedro, Lushmeadows Mountain Estates, Mariposa Pines, Ponderosa Basin, and Yosemite West. Since the 1960s, there have been few major subdivisions of this magnitude. In the mid-1970s, the County adopted Ordinance 180, which was the first organized zoning regulation, but left most of the County zoned “Unclassified.”

Between 1978 and 1981, the General Plan elements required by State law were adopted separately, then consolidated into a single document; the 1981 General Plan. With several minor amendments over the years, and a major Housing Element Update in 1995, the 1981 General Plan has served the County for the past 20 years. At the outset, the General Plan was the County’s zoning regulations as well as its policy document. Rather than serving as a road

map for the future, the 1981 General Plan was used as a zoning tool; however, in 1988, the County adopted Title 17, Zoning.

Recognizing the need to address planning issues that are unique to individual communities, the County prepared “town planning area” plans for Coulterville (1980), Fish Camp (1983), Mariposa (1981), and Wawona (1987). The “Wawona Town Specific Plan” is unique in that its implementation is carried out jointly with the National Park Service.

With guiding policies in the 1981 General Plan calling for its replacement in 2000, the Board of Supervisors initiated this General Plan Update process.

7. STRUCTURE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The subject matter and complex approval process of the General Plan creates a voluminous document. For convenience, the General Plan is published in four volumes.

- Volume I — Countywide General Plan
- Volume II — Area Plans and Interim Land Use Plans
- Volume III — Technical Background Report
- Volume IV — Environmental Impact Report

Only two volumes—the countywide General Plan and the Area Plans—constitute the actual General Plan. The other two are reference documents that provide information to support the General Plan goals, policies, and implementation measures contained in the first two volumes.

VOLUME I: COUNTYWIDE GENERAL PLAN

Volume I contains the countywide General Plan, consisting of seven mandatory General Plan elements and six optional elements added by the County. This Volume applies to all portions of the County, unless otherwise addressed in the Area Plans.

VOLUME II: AREA PLANS

The General Plan identifies “planning areas” for communities and towns. “Area plans” are the adopted documents defining land use and planning policy for planning areas. The Land Use Diagram identifies “Planning Study Areas” to define those lands that do not have adopted Area Plans but are to be considered for inclusion in the Area Plan during the area planning process.

When adopted, area plans are separate documents. Area plans are one of four types: town plans, community plans, special plans, or the Yosemite National Park General Management Plan—which incorporates a number of subsidiary plans, including among them the Yosemite Valley Plan. The Yosemite General Management Plan is not a General Plan document, and the County has no authority over the Yosemite National Park plans but its planning process is recognized as a component of overall planning in Mariposa County.

Each of the area plans addresses specific issues and opportunities for its planning area. The area plans may include any number of elements to address General Plan programs. The

Wawona Town Specific Plan and the Fish Camp Town Specific Plan are considered Area Plans for purposes of the General Plan. The term “specific plan” is reserved for precise development plans of private or major mixed-use County projects. While specific plans are not incorporated into the General Plan as an element, the documents must be consistent with the General Plan.

Volume II contains interim land use maps for the Planning Study Areas.

VOLUME III: TECHNICAL BACKGROUND REPORT

The General Plan has supporting technical data. The Technical Background Report contains a summary of this data. The Report is updated, as new technical information related to the General Plan is made available to the County.

VOLUME IV: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND DOCUMENTATION

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires environmental analysis of all discretionary projects to be approved by the County. The Mariposa County General Plan Update is analyzed with a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) because the impacts of a General Plan cannot be as precisely defined and proposed mitigation cannot be as specific as for a Project-level EIR.

This General Plan, consists of Volumes I and II, together with the description of the environmental setting in Volume III and analysis of impacts in Volume IV, Environmental Impact Report. These volumes, when read together, incorporate the required topics needed for a complete Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Proposed projects that are at or below thresholds are generally approvable without a project-specific environmental impact report. Projects that have impacts above the assessed thresholds will need more detailed environmental analysis demonstrating that project impacts can be mitigated to less-than-significant levels. This can be done as part of the development of the proposed project prior to application submittal by the preparation of a project-specific environmental impact report for the project.

8. GENERAL PLAN TERMINOLOGY

To the extent possible, the General Plan is written in plain language. However, as in any technical planning document, there are “terms of art,” (i.e., statutorily assigned definitions and document-specific terms). The General Plan provides a glossary (Appendix A) to aid in the understanding of the document. The glossary establishes specific rules on the meaning of words in the General Plan and provides a hierarchy explaining how the definitions are established.

9. ORGANIZATION

The General Plan is divided into Chapters that correspond to the Elements of the Plan. Each of the chapters is subdivided into sections. The terms “Chapter” and “Element” have the same meaning related to the General Plan’s organization.

Chapters are denoted with a number and title appearing in large type at the beginning of each Chapter.

Example:

3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

For each subsequent page of the Chapter, the name of the Element or Chapter is set in italics within the header.

Example:

Guiding Principles

Within each Element, the sections and subsections lead with the Chapter number. This way the reader is able to know where in the General Plan information is cited.

Example:

3.4 OVERALL GENERAL PLAN GOALS

“Section 3.4” refers to the fourth major topic in Chapter (or Element) 3. This number is also referenced as part of the numbering for goals, policies, and implementation measures as described below.

Subsections are numbered with 01, 02, and so on.

Example:

3.4.01 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The subsection divides the major issue into a series of related topics. If further division of a topic is required, the following identification sequences are used:

Example:

B. REGULATIONS IN PLANNING AREAS

Example:

B(1) INTERIM REGULATIONS FOR AREA PLANS

Example:

[A] SPECIAL POLICY PROGRAMS

Goals, policies, and implementation measures are numbered to identify the section with which they are associated.

Examples:

Goal 3-2: The “3” is the Element number, the “2” reflects the goal number. This means this is the second goal in Element 3.

Policy 3-2c: This shows that the policy is the third policy under Goal 3-2. The “3-2” is the goal number, the “c” is the policy number.

Implementation Measure 3-2c(1): This identifies the first implementation measure under Policy 3-2c. The “3-2c” is the Policy, the “(1)” is the implementation measure number.

For each implementation measure, the following are provided:

Timing:	Identifies the time frame during which an implementation measure is anticipated to be completed.
Responsibility:	Identifies which agency or department is responsible for carrying out the measure.
Fiscal Impact:	Generalizes the type of monetary impact on the County’s budget generated by the implementation measure.
Consequences:	Is a statement of the intended or sometimes unintended results of carrying out this implementation measure.

10. SUMMARIES OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Each General Plan element, except for the Foundational Elements, includes a “summary of major findings.” The summaries define the issue being addressed; discuss the problems, solutions, options, or opportunities in general terms; and reach conclusions about why policy programs are incorporated into the General Plan. The summary is the “reason why” particular issues are addressed and incorporated into the General Plan.

11. IMPLEMENTATION

In order to accomplish the objectives defined for issues by the Board of Supervisors, the Plan identifies goals and policies and incorporates specific implementation measures.

11.01 GOAL

Goals are the broad objectives or destinations of the General Plan and identify major concepts the community wishes to achieve.

11.02 POLICY

A policy refines the goal into one or more specific components. Policies may divide goal accomplishments into separate steps. The policy states the Board of Supervisors’ official intent as to how or why a goal is to be accomplished. “Policy” guides regulatory action programs, operations and maintenance costs, and capital improvement programs for the County.

11.03 IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE

An implementation measure carries out a policy. These measures ensure Board policy is carried out through the County’s administrative process. Implementation measures are either time-specific or quantifiable. Implementation measures are mandatory components that make the General Plan work.

12. GENERAL PLAN TIMELINES

To carry out the General Plan, certain implementation measures are prioritized to occur within three time frames in the future. It is expected that the Board of Supervisors will evaluate the appropriateness of the time frames during updates of the General Plan based on current issues, financial feasibility, current Federal and State law, and County priorities. Rather than assigning specific dates to time-specific implementation measures, the actions are prioritized into one of three planning horizons: short-, intermediate-, or long-term. Quantifiable implementation measures are “ongoing” actions or “ongoing review standards.”

12.01 SHORT-TERM PLANNING PERIOD

The short-term planning period covers the first five years from General Plan adoption.

12.02 INTERMEDIATE-TERM PLANNING PERIOD

The intermediate-term planning period is the second five years from General Plan adoption. Items prioritized for the midterm period are obviously speculative priorities. Each year the County will review the intermediate-term priorities and determine which will be moved into the upcoming short-term planning period, which will be retained, and which will be deferred to the long-term planning period. Some may be eliminated entirely due to changes in County policy direction.

12.03 LONG-TERM PLANNING PERIOD

The long-term planning period follows the intermediate-term planning period and covers the last ten-year period of the 20 year General Plan horizon. This projects conceptual ideas and programs well into the future. As the Plan is carried out, some of these programs will be assigned higher priorities and moved to a more predictable and accomplishable time frame. Others may be retained as long-term goals or as programs not ready for capital improvements or implementation. As time passes and the County’s needs change, some low priority long-term programs may be dropped.