

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION  
RIVERSIDE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The County of Riverside (County), in cooperation with participating local governments and landowners, will prepare an EIR for the proposed General Plan of Riverside County. Because CEQA requires that “all phases of project planning, implementation, and operation must be considered,” and because it is clear that future development that will be facilitated by the proposed Riverside County General Plan could have a significant effect on the environment, an EIR is required. The EIR will be prepared in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended (Public Resources Code, Section 21000, *et seq.*), and State CEQA Guidelines. The EIR will also comply with the procedures of the County of Riverside for implementing CEQA.

The challenge of balancing the housing, transportation, and economic needs of existing and future populations with limited natural resources and the sensitivity of the natural environment required Riverside County to develop the Riverside County Integrated Planning Project (RCIP) process, which consists of three coordinated plans to determine future planning, transportation, and conservation needs for the County. The goals of the effort are threefold:

- Adopt the County’s 2002 General Plan.
- Create a Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) for western Riverside County and integrate the ongoing Coachella Valley MSHCP into the fabric of comprehensive planning for the County.
- Identify transportation corridors to meet the County’s future transportation needs through the Community Environmental and Transportation Acceptability Program (CETAP).

Pursuant to the provisions of CEQA and the State and local guidelines, the County is the Lead Agency and is charged with the responsibility of deciding whether or not to approve the proposed General Plan. The discretionary action anticipated to be taken by the County is the adoption of the *2002 Riverside County General Plan*, which incorporates 19 Area Plans as part of the Riverside County General Plan, and the adoption of proposed boundary changes to zoning districts to coincide with the 19 Area Plan boundaries.

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) is a brief notice sent by a Lead Agency to notify responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and involved Federal agencies that the lead agency plans to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The purpose of the NOP is to solicit guidance from those agencies as to the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR. While the RCIP process is a threefold effort, the environmental documentation for each component effort will be prepared and certified independently. Therefore, the notification action of this NOP applies only to the Riverside County General Plan EIR.

**2. PROJECT LOCATION**

Riverside County, California, encompasses approximately 7,295 square miles, stretching 200 miles from the eastern portion of the Los Angeles metropolitan area to the Colorado River. It is bounded by Orange County on the west, San Bernardino County to the north, the State of Arizona to the east, and San Diego and Imperial Counties to the south (Figure 1). Riverside County, the fourth largest county in California, is one of the most diverse counties in the State, including well-established urban, suburban, and rural

communities; an extensive array of agricultural lands, lands devoted to mineral extraction, and recreational areas; rugged mountains, flat valley areas, and open desert; and expansive natural open space areas.

While 24 incorporated cities lie within the County, the majority (6,564 square miles or 4,201,120 acres) of the land within the County is unincorporated. Of this unincorporated area, 1,324,415 acres (32 percent of *unincorporated* lands) are held by private landowners. Approximately 2,876,705 acres (62 percent of the *unincorporated* land within the County) is either held or managed by County, State, Federal, or Native American entities.

Western Riverside County, represented by the Western Riverside County Council of Governments (WRCOG), is approximately the portion of the County west of the crest of the San Jacinto Mountains. Even though it constitutes less than one third of the County, Western Riverside County contains most of the County's non-desert areas, as well as most of its urbanized areas. Eastern Riverside County, represented by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG), is defined as that portion of the County which lies east of the crest of the San Jacinto Mountains. Nearly all of the County's desert regions are located in eastern Riverside County.

### **3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Riverside County's General Plan will be a blueprint for the County's future. It describes the projected growth and development within the County over the long-term. It acts as a constitution for public and private development, the foundation on which County authorities will make growth and land use-related decisions. The General Plan is meant to express the County's goals with respect to both human-made and natural environments, and sets forth the policies and implementation measures to achieve them for the welfare of those who live, work, and do business in the County.

State law requires each City and County to adopt a General Plan that contains, at a minimum, seven elements. State law permits cities and counties to organize the information, goals, policies, and programs included in their General Plans in the manner best suited to the needs of the city or county. Thus, the seven mandatory elements of a jurisdiction's General Plan need not be specific chapters or sections, provided that all the subjects required by State law, are in fact, addressed. The seven mandatory elements include:

The **LAND USE ELEMENT** designates the general distribution and intensity of uses of the land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, public buildings and grounds, waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private uses.

The **CIRCULATION ELEMENT** is correlated with the land use element, and identifies the general locations and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities.

The **HOUSING ELEMENT** is a comprehensive assessment of current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community, as well as groups having special housing needs (e.g., homeless, farm workers, elderly, handicapped). In addition, it embodies policy for providing adequate housing and includes action programs for this purpose. (*The Riverside County Board of Supervisors adopted the Housing Element as an amendment to the existing General Plan on December 4, 2001.*)

The **CONSERVATION ELEMENT** addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, including water, forests, soils, rivers, and mineral deposits.