

I. Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

This Oak Woodland Management Plan (OWMP) complies with the 2004 El Dorado County (County) General Plan Measure CO-P. Measure CO-P requires that the County's Planning Services develop and adopt an Oak Resources Management Plan. The OWMP is the first component (oak woodland portion) of the Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) required under Measure CO-M and Policy 7.4.2.8.

The loss of oak woodland in El Dorado County was a key issue of the 2004 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Oak woodland habitat removal and fragmentation from development, and a reported low rate of blue oak regeneration, are primary concerns. Measure CO-P and Policies 7.4.4.4, 7.4.4.5, and 7.4.5.2 require mitigation for the loss of oak woodland and oak trees. This plan identifies specific oak woodland conservation areas and methods for the County to implement an oak woodland ordinance that fulfills the requirements of the 2004 General Plan and EIR.

Measure CO-P requires the OWMP to address oak mitigation standards outlined in Policy 7.4.4.4. Policy 7.4.4.4 applies to all new development projects (not including agricultural cultivation/operations and actions pursuant to a County-approved Fire Safe Plan necessary to protect existing structures, both of which are exempt) that would result in soil disturbance (see Appendix F for complete policy). Under this policy, the County shall require one of two mitigation options. Option A applies oak tree canopy retention standards and requires on-site replacement of removed oak woodland habitat at a 1:1 ratio. Option B allows a project applicant to pay a fee at a 2:1 mitigation ratio to the INRMP conservation fund described in Policy 7.4.2.8. The County can apply only Option A of Policy 7.4.4.4 until this OWMP is adopted (Superior Court Ruling, 2005; Settlement Agreement, 2006). Once the OWMP is adopted, applicants will have the opportunity to mitigate oak woodland impacts using Option A, Option B, or some combination of the two options subject to County approval.

At the state level, the Oak Woodlands Conservation Act of 2001 recognizes the importance of private land stewardship in conserving oak woodlands. The legislation established the California Oak Woodlands Conservation Program (COWCP), the mission of which is to "conserve the integrity and diversity of oak woodlands across California's working landscapes through incentives and education." The COWCP provides technical and financial incentives to private landowners to protect and promote biologically functional oak woodlands (COWCP legislative goal, WCB website).

From the above, the OWMP has three purposes. First, it complies with Measure CO-P. Second, once the OWMP is adopted, the County will have a conservation fee option for mitigating impacts to oak woodlands (Policy 7.4.4.4, Option B). And third, the OWMP will establish a plan that landowners, the County, and others can use to seek grants and cost-sharing from State/Federal programs (e.g., COWCP) for oak woodland conservation in El Dorado County.

A. Plan Organization

Following this section, this plan is organized to first introduce the reader to the natural resource and economic values of oak woodlands (Sections II and III). The geographic distribution of oak woodland types in El Dorado County is described next (Section IV). County-specified methods for mitigating the removal of oak woodlands are discussed next (Section V), followed by a discussion of thresholds for measuring the impact significance of oak woodland removal (Section VI). The specifics of Option A replanting and replacement mitigation, and Option B “fee” mitigation follow (Sections VII and VIII).

Most of the remaining sections of the OWMP discuss administrative aspects of Policy 7.4.4.4 Option A and Option B mitigation methods, including monitoring/reporting (Section IX), program administration (Section X), public outreach (Section XI), and opportunities to jointly achieve objectives of this OWMP with other public or private programs (Section XII). Lastly, the contents of this OWMP are cross-referenced to the INRMP (Policy 7.4.2.8) requirements (Section XIII). In Section XIII, other General Plan policies and measures closely related to oak woodlands are also summarized.

B. OWMP Goals

The OWMP goals are guided by General Plan Objective 7.4.4: Forest and Oak Woodland Resources, “Protect and conserve forest and woodland resources for their wildlife habitat, recreation, water production, domestic livestock grazing, production of a sustainable flow of wood products, and aesthetic values.” Goals address issues, such as fragmentation, that were discussed in the General Plan EIR.

As this plan’s goals and objectives are finalized, the plan’s consistency with the General Plan will be evaluated. The potential for environmental effects of the plan’s implementation will also be assessed through a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process.

General Plan Objective 7.4.4: “Protect and conserve forest and woodland resources for their wildlife habitat, recreation, water production, domestic livestock grazing, production of a sustainable flow of wood products, and aesthetic values.”

Based on the 2004 General Plan, General Plan EIR, and COWCP, the following goals are set forth by this OWMP:

Oak Woodland Conservation and Ecological Goals

- Acquire large contiguous areas of oak woodland habitat and maintain connectivity among those areas to offset the effects of increased habitat loss and fragmentation elsewhere; minimize fragmentation; (General Plan EIR; Policy 7.4.2.8; Master Response 18 in Final EIR);

- Conserve oak woodland habitats with important biological values as identified in Policy 7.4.2.8 (INRMP) under Habitat Inventory (i.e., habitats that support special-status species; aquatic environments; wetland and riparian habitat; important habitat for migratory deer herds; and large expanses of native vegetation);
- Conserve oak woodland habitat that coincides with critical wildlife areas or natural wildlife movement corridors; prioritize habitat acquisition and management on parcels that preserve natural wildlife movement corridors such as crossings under major roadways (e.g., U.S. Highway 50) (Policy 7.4.2.8);
- Restore and manage oak woodlands to re-establish and enhance regeneration, including native understory species appropriate to the oak woodland type;
- Manage oak woodlands to protect watershed values, including water quality and riparian areas (Policy 7.3.3.4); and,
- Mitigate for removal of oak woodland with oak woodland of equal or greater biological value (Master Response 18 in Final EIR).

Land-Use Goals

- Enhance oak woodland conservation by connecting with existing open space, including publicly-owned lands that are managed for oak woodland habitat values (e.g., ecological preserves, recreation lands, rangelands, or natural resource areas) consistent with the County's open space conservation goals (Goal 7.6; Policy 7.6.1.1); and,
- Establish oak woodland greenbelts to separate urban and agricultural land uses (Policy 2.5.1.2).

Goals for OWMP Implementation

- Provide choices for oak woodland mitigation (e.g., allow landowners to mix Option A and Option B mitigation, and/or mitigate off-site by independently conserving oak woodland habitat of equal or greater biological value subject to County approval);
- Encourage the conservation of contiguous oak woodland habitats using planned developments (Policy 2.2.4.1);
- Establish private sector database inventory of interested buyers and willing landowners wishing to participate in oak woodland acquisition and management mitigation options (Policy 7.4.2.8);
- Establish conservation incentives (e.g., cost-sharing for noxious weed management) for agricultural, recreation, and other open space land uses where large-scale opportunities exist for retention of oak woodlands with high biological values;
- Provide incentives (e.g., payments for conservation banking) to protect and encourage farming and ranching operations that are operated in a manner that protect and promote healthy oak woodlands (COWCP legislative goal); and,

- Provide incentives (e.g., grants or cost-sharing for fuels/fire risk management) for the protection of oak woodlands providing superior wildlife values on private land (COWCP legislative goal).

Education and Outreach Goals

- Provide oak woodland conservation guidance to private landowners and County planners through education and outreach (COWCP goals);
- Develop a user-friendly implementation guidebook and decision flow chart for applicant selection of Option A, Option B, or some combination of the two options; and,
- Facilitate County, conservation organization, and landowner eligibility to participate in the COWCP, including funding for oak woodland conservation consistent with General Plan Objective 7.4.4 described above (WCB website).

C. OWMP Conservation Objectives

Conservation objectives of the OWMP are directed by the conservation and mitigation components of General Plan Policies and Measures. OWMP objectives differ from OWMP goals by having measurable targets. The following are conservation objectives of this OWMP:

- Objective 1 – Delineate priority conservation areas for acquiring, from willing land owners, easements or fee title within large expanses of diverse oak woodland habitats that are greater than or equal to 500 acres
- Objective 2 – To ensure viability of species dependent on the large expanses of oak woodland, interconnect each large expanse with a minimum of two oak woodland habitat corridors.
- Objective 3 – Oak woodland corridors shall have a minimum width of 500 feet of oak woodland habitat to help ensure use by most species; width of corridor shall increase with increasing distance between large expanses, and also with decreases in habitat quality. Areas delineated for oak woodland habitat connectivity between large expanses shall focus on perennial streams that become important habitat to species in the dry season.
- Objective 4 – Where large expanses of oak woodlands cannot be interconnected by oak woodland corridors at distances less than or equal to 1 mile, then intermediate smaller blocks (at least 40 and preferably over 160 acres) of oak woodland habitat shall be included in the oak woodland corridors.
- Objective 5 – Through acquisition, restoration, management, or other method, generally maintain the relative acreages of all five oak woodland California Wildlife Habitat Relationship (CWHR) types (VOW, BOW, BOP, MHW, and MHC), but place an emphasis on conservation and enhancement of the highest priority woodland types (i.e., Valley Oak and Blue Oak woodland types).
- Objective 6 – Establish an Option B fee that is sufficient to fully fund the oak woodland habitat mitigation program and implement the OWMP for County oak woodland conservation, including oak woodland acquisition, restoration, management, and monitoring and reporting.