
1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is a Final Program Environmental Impact Report (Final Program EIR) regarding the proposed General Plan Update for the Town of Mammoth Lakes. The proposed project involves the update of the Town's General Plan, which provides the Town's long-range comprehensive direction to guide future development and identifies the community's environmental, social, and economic goals. The project's background, as well as the reasons for preparing a Final Program EIR are described below.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM EIR

The purpose of an EIR is to identify the significant adverse impacts of a proposed project, identify feasible mitigation measures for those impacts and identify alternatives to the proposed project that might lessen or avoid adverse environmental impacts. This Final Program EIR serves as an information document for the public, the decision makers and all other interested agencies and parties.

The proposed project being considered by the Town of Mammoth Lakes and addressed in this Final Program EIR is the 2005 Comprehensive Update of the Town's General Plan (referred to as the General Plan Update, the updated Plan or the project). This document has been prepared as a Program EIR, which is intended to facilitate consideration of broad policy directions, program-level alternatives and mitigation measures consistent with the level of detail available for the Plan.

1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

A Draft Program EIR was previously prepared and circulated regarding an earlier version of the General Plan Update. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Draft Program EIR was distributed by certified mail to the State Clearinghouse, responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and others on April 25, 2003. The Town of Mammoth Lakes distributed a Notice of Availability (NOA) in accordance with CEQA Section 150879(a) and circulated the Draft Program EIR from February 2005 to May 17, 2005 for public comments.

Over 400 individual comments were received on the previously circulated Draft Program EIR from regulatory agencies, jurisdictions, and individuals. Comments were provided on all sections of the document. Based on the extent and range of comments the Town determined that the project should be revised or redefined and that additional and clarifying technical information was necessary. Based on Section 15088.5, which provides guidance on recirculation of an EIR

prior to certification, the Town determined that the proposed revisions to the General Plan and to the Draft Program EIR required the preparation of a Revised Draft Program EIR.

In accordance with CEQA Section 15088.5 and in order to avoid confusion over which comments are relevant and to avoid duplication, the Town determined that new letters specifically addressing the Revised Draft Program EIR should be submitted. The new letters have been responded to in the Final Program EIR. However, the comments received on the February 2005 Draft Program EIR are a part of the administrative record.

An NOP for the Revised Draft Program EIR was distributed by overnight delivery to the State Clearinghouse, as well as to responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and others on August 16, 2005. The NOP provided responsible and trustee agencies an opportunity to comment on the Plan and the issues to be evaluated in the Revised Draft Program EIR, thereby contributing to the ultimate scope and focus of environmental issues that are analyzed. The full text of the NOP for the Revised Draft Program EIR and a distribution list of agencies that received the NOP are located in Appendix A to the Revised Draft Program EIR. Written comments of those agencies and members of the public that responded to the NOP for the Revised Draft Program EIR are included in Appendix B.

Based on the Initial Study process, NOP comments, public input, comments to the previously circulated Draft Program EIR, and the NOP for the Revised Draft Program EIR, the Revised Draft Program EIR focused on the following 14 potentially significant environmental issues:

- Aesthetics, Light and Glare
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Public Safety/Hazards
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population, Housing, and Employment
- Public Services
- Public Utilities
- Recreation
- Transportation and Circulation
- Cultural Resources

The Revised Draft Program EIR was circulated to local, regional, state, and federal agencies and to interested organizations and individuals for a 45-day review period. The Revised Draft Program EIR was available for review at the Town offices, County offices, the Public Library in the Town, and was also posted on the Town's website to facilitate public access. The public comment period on the Revised Draft Program EIR began on October 31, 2005 and ended on December 14, 2005.

The Final Program EIR is presented in three volumes. Volume I is the Final Program EIR, itself, and consists of this Introduction and Sections 1.0 through 10.0 as well as the

Appendices which were included in the Revised Draft EIR, all but this Introduction of which have been modified via redline/~~strikeout~~ to reflect corrections and additions attributable to comments received during the public review period. A total of 55 agencies, private organizations, and individuals submitted letters or made oral comments at public hearings containing some 935 separate comments. Volume II contains a matrix identifying the agencies, private organizations, and individuals who have commented on the Revised Draft Program EIR and the topics upon which they commented. The matrix is followed by responses to each of the comments submitted by the agencies, organizations, and individuals. Volume III contains reproduced copies of each of the comment letters submitted.

In accordance with Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21092.5(a), written responses to comments received from public agencies were made available to those agencies at least 10 days prior to the first public hearing during which certification of the Final EIR may be considered. This Final Program EIR is to be provided to the Planning Commission and the Town Council, and those bodies will review and consider it and the General Plan Update, as well as alternatives to the General Plan Update evaluated in the Final Program EIR, in public hearings at which public testimony will be received.

1.3 COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA

This Final Program EIR has been prepared in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and the Guidelines for CEQA Implementation (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387, hereafter referred to as the CEQA Guidelines). The Town is the Lead Agency (defined by CEQA as the agency with the ultimate authority to approve or deny the project) responsible for preparation of this Final Program EIR.

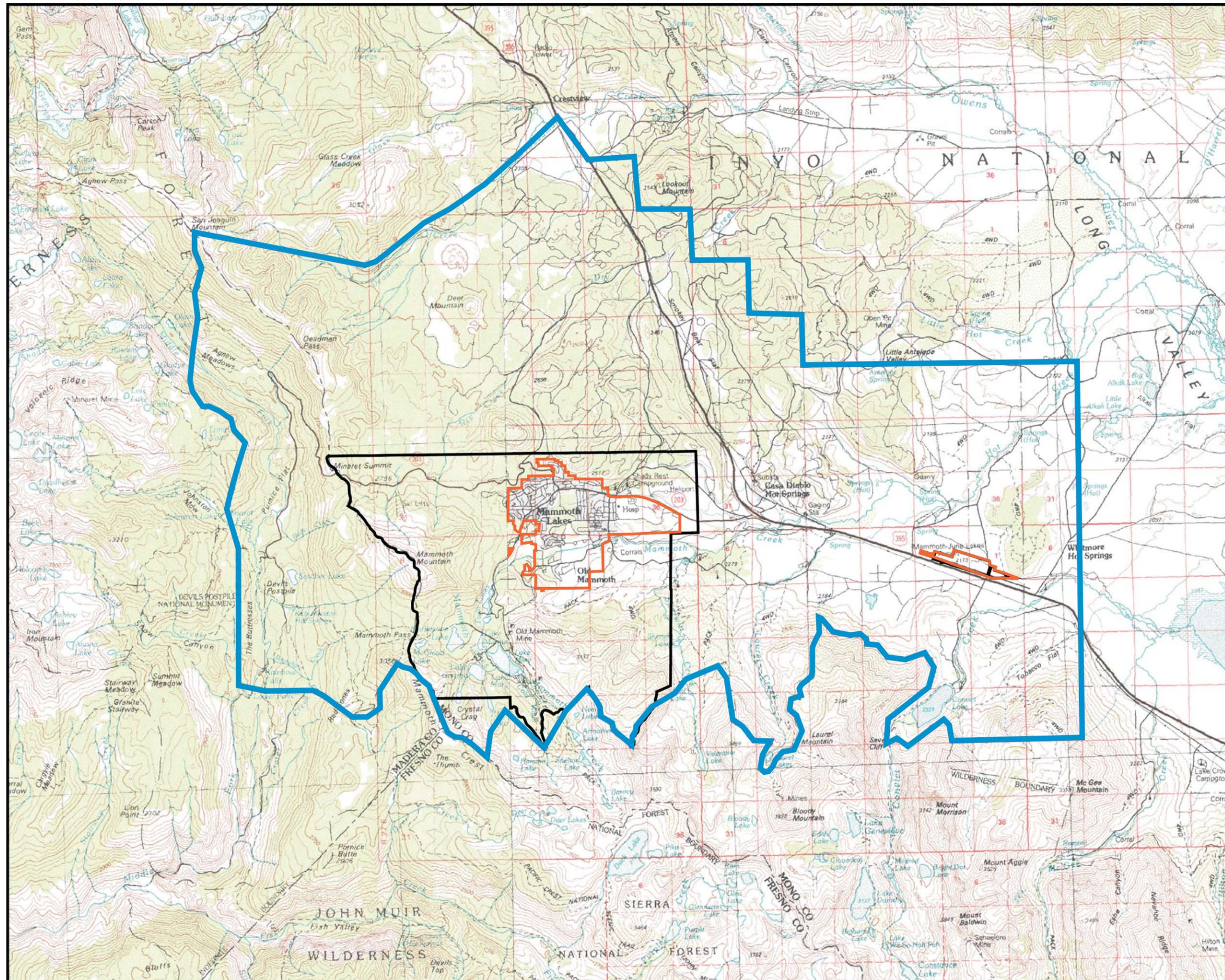
Section 15121(a) of the CEQA Guidelines defines an EIR as an “informational document which will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project.” CEQA requires that the Town require all feasible mitigation before approving a project and provides that the Town cannot approve a project that has adverse environmental impacts that have not been mitigated to a less than significant level unless it adopts a Statement of Overriding Considerations, which sets forth the Town’s findings explaining why the benefits of the project outweigh its adverse environmental consequences (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091 and 15092). Thus, if any significant impacts identified in this Final Program EIR cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level, the Town decision makers must state in writing the reasons the Plan is being adopted despite the identified significant impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15092[b]).

As described in Section 15168(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, a Program EIR is one that may evaluate a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and that are related either: (1) geographically; (2) as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar effects that can be mitigated in similar ways. A program level EIR is the appropriate framework within which to address environmental impacts associated with this project because the project is the update of the Town's General Plan, which would establish policies and regulatory criteria for future growth and development in the Town.

1.4 BACKGROUND TO THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Every municipality and county is required by the California Planning and Zoning Law, Government Code Section 65000, et seq., to have a general plan that establishes the entity's goals, objective and policies that govern the physical development of the community and provide a foundation for making land use decisions based on goals and policies related to land use, transportation, population growth and distribution, development, open space, resource management, and other related physical, social and economic factors. A general plan is to describe the locations of various land uses and include a statement of community objectives and policies for realizing those objectives. The process by which a general plan is developed provides a community with an opportunity to evaluate existing public policies and to address critical issues in light of current information, trends, and technological innovation. A general plan is commonly referred to as a public entity's land use charter or constitution. If the Town adopts the proposed updated General Plan, the Town's zoning ordinance and all land use permits issued by the Town must thereafter be consistent with the adopted General Plan.

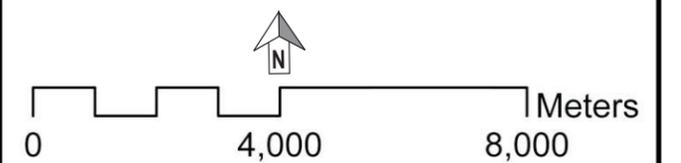
The General Plan addresses all lands within the Town's Municipal Boundary and the surrounding area (Planning Area) (See Figure 1-1 on page 1-7). Government Code Section 65300 requires that the Town include in its General Plan "any land outside of its [the Town] boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning." The Planning Area for Mammoth Lakes includes areas where existing or proposed facilities have a direct relationship to the Municipal Boundaries and services. The Planning Area includes lands in unincorporated Mono County for which the Town provides Municipal Services (extending from Whitmore Recreation area on the east to Mammoth Scenic Loop on the north) as well as Inyo National Forest (NF) lands located in Madera County that have their sole vehicular access through the Town and for which the Town provides public safety and building inspection services.



Town of Mammoth Lakes

Explanation

- Planning Area
- Municipal Boundary
- Urban Growth Boundary



Base Map: Benton Range and
Yosemite Valley 100k Quadrangles
Source: Town of Mammoth Lakes
Updated Plan, 2005

Figure 1-1 Map Showing Planning Area,
Municipal Boundary and
Urban Growth Boundary

The Municipal Boundary is the land contained within the incorporated limits of the Town. The area within the Municipal Boundary encompasses a total of approximately 25 square miles. The Mammoth Lakes Sphere of Influence is conterminous with the Municipal Boundary, indicating that no additional lands are anticipated to be annexed into the Municipal Boundary.

The Town adopted an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) policy in 1993 in order to maintain a clear delineation between the developed portions of the community and the surrounding NF lands. The UGB policy limits residential, industrial and commercial development to those areas already designated for such uses and the ultimate size and intensity of the community would be limited to those areas not designated for open space. The UGB encompasses an area of approximately 4.5 square miles that is generally coincident with the Town development and the Mammoth Yosemite Airport (see Figure 1-1). The Plan text uses these terms to refer to the areas described above.

The Town appointed a General Plan Advisory Group (GPAG) to assist in the preparation of the General Plan Update. Over a two-year period, the GPAG members generally met twice a month. Their contributions included data review, development of policy recommendations, facilitation of public workshops, review of the draft General Plan elements, providing a sounding board to staff, and serving as a key communication link between the community and elected officials. All GPAG meetings were open to the public, and public input was encouraged. In addition, committee members were asked to act as facilitators and interpreters of the General Plan materials at multiple public workshops. The GPAG made invaluable contributions in developing and reviewing General Plan materials, guiding staff efforts, and maintaining communication with diverse stakeholders. Public input has contributed to development of the scope of the Revised Draft Program EIR.

To receive a wide range of public opinion on community issues and priorities, the Town held four public workshops. Approximately 100 people attended each session.

First Workshop: The first workshop was designed to review and solicit comments on the original Vision Statement to ensure that it accurately reflected current community objectives. During this workshop, residents were asked to provide a broad shopping list of their objectives for the town of Mammoth Lakes; this was the first major comprehensive brainstorming session. In total almost 200 objectives were recorded. The following is a sample of the ideas generated during this workshop:

- Mammoth Lakes provides high-quality accommodations with amenities,
- The economy is recreation and visitor based,
- Mammoth Lakes is a unique high-quality recreation-oriented destination resort community,

- Mammoth Lakes' character reflects its alpine setting and its history,
- There is unique, authentic, diverse architecture,
- Fish and wildlife share the resources with the community,
- Community is environmentally sensitive at a local and global level,
- Water resources are protected,
- Mixed commercial and residential projects are encouraged,
- No housing in North Village,
- Expand the urban limit for housing,
- Open space is preserved,
- The forest is preserved within the community,
- Limit building height to five stories,
- Cultural activities and events are unique and give Mammoth an identifiable and unmistakable character,
- Outdoor recreation is appropriate,
- Access to recreation and services is quick and economical, and
- The airport is marketed to improve international awareness of Mammoth Lakes as a destination resort.

Second Workshop: The second workshop was designed to obtain additional comments on community values and policy preferences and allow the community to rank and prioritize the objectives provided during the first workshop. This workshop included a series of questions on story boards that provided more detailed information on community preferences. At this workshop the community provided clear direction on the following items:

- No or minimal increase in congestion,
- Support for off-site parking,
- Support for increased trails and sidewalks,
- Year-round transit,
- Small-town image,
- Old Mammoth should stay as it is,
- Increase density for resident/workforce housing,
- Promote housing located above commercial,
- Maintain the urban limit,
- Support alternate ways of controlling ice and snow,
- Prohibit new wood burning stoves in any condominium in Mammoth Lakes,
- Support irrigation controls,
- Support more intensive recycling,
- Town center along Old Mammoth Road,
- Development of a second supermarket in the middle of town,

- Do not allow big-box retailers, and
- Weekend rental of single-family homes within the RMF-2 and Resort zones only.

No clear direction was provided on the following items, which indicated that these areas required further dialogue.

- Second dwellings on single-family lots,
- Buy condominiums for use as apartments,
- Prohibit new wood-burning stoves in any home in Mammoth Lakes,
- Economic diversification,
- More density for resort development, and
- Building heights.

Third Workshop: The third workshop focused on a review of the impacts of some of the major choices and policies that resulted from the first two workshops and presented the results of the “value survey” that was distributed during the second workshop.

Fourth Workshop: The fourth workshop was designed to inform the public and decision makers on the major directions of the project. To increase dialogue and public interest and prepare the community for participation in pending public hearings, visual aids were used to outline the overall process, key results from the values survey, the revised Vision Statement, a summary of projected population density and intensity for build-out of the proposed updated Plan. Additional visual aids provided overview information on the proposed Plan’s policies on workforce housing, sustainability, community character, resident and visitor services and amenities, and the Town’s destination resort economy and overview information on the Draft Program EIR. The proposed updated Plan presented at this workshop is the project that is addressed in this Revised Draft Program EIR.

In addition to the workshops, surveys were distributed and made available on the Town website. Presentations were given to service clubs, schools, and other community groups to solicit community feedback. All of this information was utilized by GPAG and Town staff as they drafted the General Plan.

The community raised five key emphasis areas during the General Plan Update process, which included the following: housing, services and amenities, destination resort economy, community character, and density. These interest areas, combined with the direction given in the Vision Statement, create the underlying intent of the General Plan. The project is described in detail in Chapter 3.0, Project Description.

1.5 MAJOR CHANGES BETWEEN THE CURRENT GENERAL PLAN UPDATE AND THE PREVIOUS VERSION

The following is an overview of the new information contained in the proposed General Plan Update:

- The project has been redefined to allow for a lesser number of dwelling units than the previously proposed project. The anticipated population at build out under the current General Plan is approximately 61,400. The anticipated population at build out from the version of the proposed updated General Plan that was analyzed in the previously circulated Draft Program EIR was 71,200. The anticipated population at build out from the project is now estimated to be approximately the same as the current General Plan (60,700).

In particular the version of the General Plan Update previously proposed and previously analyzed in the Draft Program EIR would have:

- Increased the density permitted in the Old Mammoth area from the two (2) units per gross acre permitted by the current General Plan to four (4) units per gross acre.
- Increased the density in the Canyon Lodge area from twelve (12) units per gross acre permitted by the current General Plan to forty-eight (48) units per units per gross acre.
- Allowed for residential development in the Institutional Public Designation at four (4) units per gross acre.
- Expanded the industrial designation.
- Increased density of the Specific Plan Designation from 3,020 rooms and 135,000 square feet of commercial permitted under the current General Plan to 3,720 rooms and 185,000 square feet of commercial.

The modified updated General Plan that was addressed in the Revised Draft Program EIR and in this Final Program EIR would:

- Retain the low density residential land use for the Old Mammoth area at two (2) units per gross acre that is allowed by the current General Plan.
- Would remove the High Density Residential 3 land use designation proposed by the Plan addressed in the previously circulated draft EIR.
- Would reduce density in the High Density Residential 1 and 2 land use designation from 12 to 10 units per acre.
- Maintain the existing density in the Commercial 1 and 2 land use designations.

- Restrict housing development in the Institutional/Public land use designation to a greater degree than in the Plan addressed in the previously circulated Draft Program EIR.

In order to establish comparative relationships, the maximum population (expressed as peak people at one time) expansion need in 2003, permitted under the existing General Plan, and as would be permitted under the previous version and one currently proposed General Plan Update are summarized in Table 1-1 on page 1-13.

1.6 USE OF THE FINAL PROGRAM EIR

The Final Program EIR serves at least two major purposes. First, the document informs the Town's decision-makers (i.e., the Planning Commission and Town Council) and the public of the potential environmental consequences that may be associated with implementation of the General Plan Update. Second, it identifies ways in which environmental impacts can be avoided or significantly reduced and alternatives that might reduce impact. As a Program EIR, this document does not examine the site-specific impacts that may occur as future projects are approved under the adopted General Plan. Section 15146(b) of the CEQA Guidelines recognizes that a programmatic general plan EIR would not be as detailed as a project-level EIR for a specific project proposal. Subsequent project proposals would require independent review in light of this Final Program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared. When subsequent or supplemental documentation is required for a project or activity proposed under the General Plan, this Final Program EIR may be incorporated by reference to significantly reduce the required documentation by allowing subsequent EIRs to focus only on project-specific environmental effects that were not considered in the Revised Draft Program EIR.

1.7 LEAD, RESPONSIBLE, AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

The CEQA Guidelines define lead, responsible, and trustee agencies. The Town of Mammoth Lakes is the lead agency for the project because it holds principal responsibility for approving the project. A responsible agency refers to a public agency other than the lead agency that has discretionary approval over the project. A trustee agency refers to a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project. Table 1-2 on page 1-14 lists various agencies and their role.

Table 1-1**Population Projections**

Description	Population
Existing Population (estimated as of 2003)	34,300
Existing General Plan	61,400
Version of General Plan that was the Project and labeled as the "Project Alternative" in the Previously Circulated Program EIR	71,200
Proposed Updated General Plan (the Project)	Approx. 60,700

Source: Town of Mammoth Lakes, 2005

Table 1-2**Approval and Agency Review/Consultation**

Agency	Purpose of Review
Town of Mammoth Lakes	CEQA Lead Agency
U.S. Forest Service	Administer lands within the Planning Area
National Park Service	Administer lands within the Planning Area
Bureau of Land Management	Administer lands within the Planning Area
Mammoth Community Water District	Responsible for water supply and sewer treatment facilities
California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region	Responsible agency for water resources and related permitting
Mono County	Administers lands within the Planning Area
Mono County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)	Sphere of Influence Amendment, Annexations
Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District	Responsible Agency for air quality permitting
California Department of Fish and Game	Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and related permitting
California Department of Transportation	Responsible agency for state highways
Army Corps of Engineers	Responsible agency for permits for project within waters of the U.S.
California Department of Toxic Substance Control	Responsible agency for regulating use of toxic and hazardous substances
University of California Trustee Agency	Regarding the Valentine Reserve

Source: Town of Mammoth Lakes, 2005