
Nevada County General Plan

Volume 1: Goals, Objectives, Policies, and Implementation Measures

Section 1: Introduction

Introduction

Introduction and Setting

Nevada County's General Plan is the long term policy guide for the physical development of the County. The Plan is comprised of Central Themes, goals, policies and implementation programs. Supporting documentation and an Environmental Impact Report are attachments to the Plan.

California State Law requires each County to adopt a General Plan "*for the physical development of the County and any land outside its boundaries which ...bears relation to its planning (Government Code Section 65300)*". The role of the General Plan is the County's constitution for the physical use of the County's resources, the foundation upon which all land use decisions are made. This General Plan expresses the community's development goals and embodies public policy relative to the distribution of future public and private land use.

The County, in response to key issues affecting the County's quality of life, has established four central themes which articulate the vision for the development of the County:

- 1. Fostering a rural quality of life;**
- 2. Sustaining a quality environment;**
- 3. Development of a strong diversified, sustainable local economy;**
and
- 4. Planned land use patterns will determine the level of public services appropriate to the character, economy and environment of each region.**

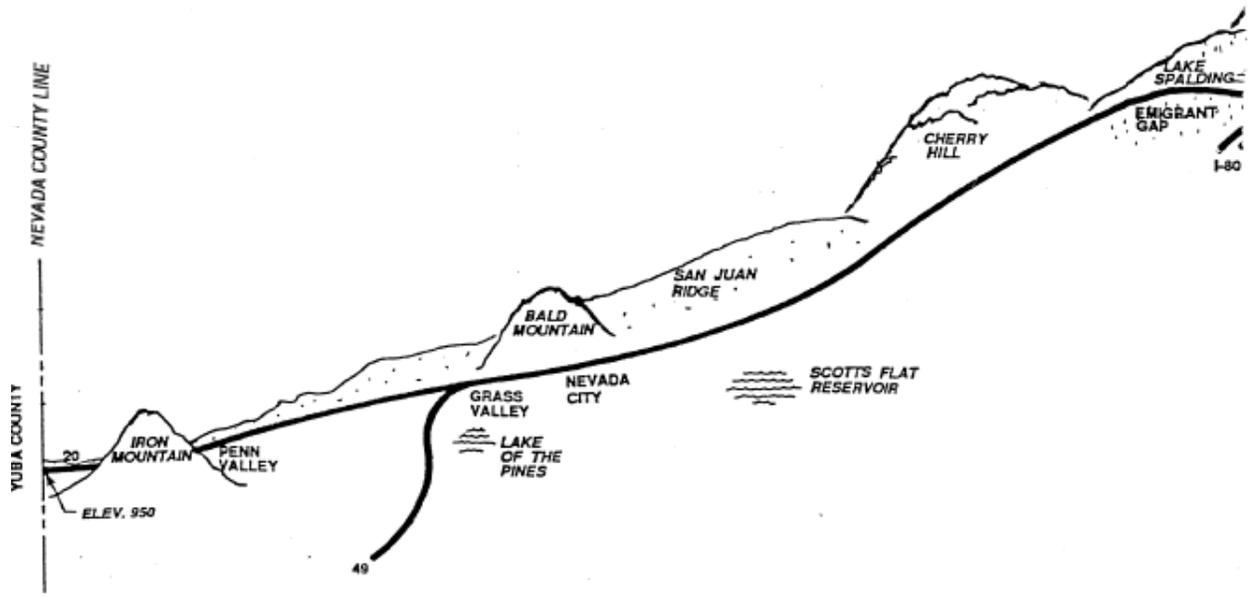
These themes are the standard by which the appropriateness of goals, objectives and policies are tested. These themes respond to the environmental, economic, and social qualities of the County which have evolved over time and constitute the setting for the Plan.

The Setting

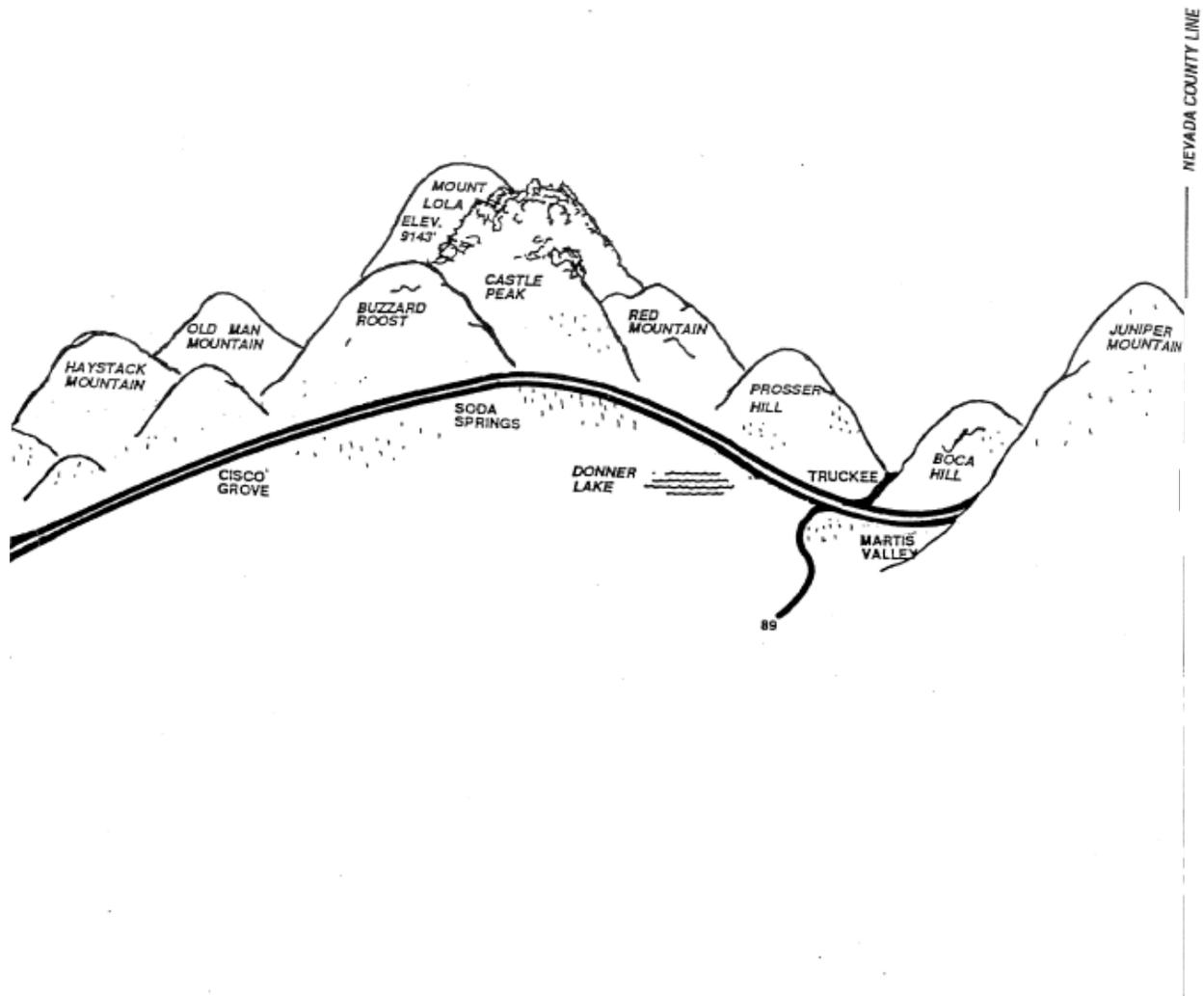
Nevada County's 978 square miles contains a variety of resources which characterize the County.

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One of the County's most notable features is its diversity in elevation. The County climbs from the Sacramento Valley at an elevation of 300 feet to the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, at an elevation of 9,143 feet, the peak of Mount Lola.



Elevation Profile



of Nevada County

Agricultural resources of timber and soils which support orchards and grazing are abundant in the County. The timber resources are primarily located on Tahoe and Toiyabe National Forest lands which account for twenty-eight percent (28%) of Nevada County's land area.

The County is rich in mineral resources including lode gold, placer gold, chromite, barite and sand and gravel. It was these resources which first attracted the Euroamerican settlers to the region in the 1800s.

A wide variety of wildlife is supported in the county by a diversity of habitats. The riparian habitats along the rivers and streams are essential in supporting sensitive wildlife including deer, wolverine, eagle, goshawk, amphibians and the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout.

The terrain provides a significant watershed which drains into the Bear, Middle and South Yuba, and Truckee rivers. The snow and water which accumulate in the watershed provide significant recreational resources for winter and summer activities such as skiing, boating and fishing.

Visually, Nevada County provides spectacular rolling vistas of foothills, valleys, mountains, with green meadows, extensive forests, wetlands, and habitats unique to the Sierras. The natural environment predominates, with spectacular views of mountains peaks such as Castle Peak, vistas of Donner Lake, and the gorge of the South Fork of the Yuba River.



Transcontinental highways and rail routes through and along the County's southern flank have contributed to growth and development.

A significant appeal of Nevada County is its rural character and the sense that each resident lives in or near a small town. Three cities are located in the County, Grass Valley, Nevada City and its newest town, Truckee. Unincorporated communities such as Alta Sierra and Penn Valley are found in the western portion of the County.

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Lakeside residential areas such as Lake of the Pines and Lake Wildwood offer a unique living experience. A significant number of homes are located throughout the rural areas of the western portion of the County.



The County is rich in history. The Hill Nisenan (Southern Maidu) and Washoe tribes occupied what is now Nevada County until placer gold was found in Wolf Creek in 1848. The Hill Nisenan generally occupied western county and the Washoe occupied eastern county. With the onset of the Gold Rush in 1848 Euroamericans settled permanently in the County. Much of the construction from the late 1800s in Nevada City remain today making it one of California's better preserved historic towns. Historic older buildings in adjoining Grass Valley and in Truckee near Donner Pass are representative of the County's early development.

The California legislature organized Nevada County and established Nevada City as the county seat on May 18, 1851. Nevada County was named for the Spanish word meaning "snow-covered", not after the State of Nevada, as has been sometimes assumed.

The people of Nevada County are one of its greatest resources. Historically, the County has been home to a heterogeneous population composed of people from every corner of the world. Persons living in the County are known for their independence, diversity and entrepreneurial spirit. The population of Nevada County peaked at approximately 20,000 persons in 1880 and did not reach that number again until 1960. Since 1960 the attractiveness of the area and growing Sacramento Region has increased the population to 80,000 persons in 1990.

Rapid growth in the past decade has resulted in strains on the County's infrastructure, with ever increasing demands for highways, water, schools, and other public facilities. It is because of this

growth and the threat of losing the resources of the County that the 1990 general plan update was prepared.

The General Plan

The Nevada County General Plan is the long-term policy guide for the physical, economic and environmental future of the County. It is comprised of goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures, which are based upon assessments of current and future needs and available resources, and which are intended to carry out the four central themes which are critical to the future of Nevada County and its quality of life.

The General Plan is a dynamic document because it is based on community values and an understanding of existing and projected conditions and needs, all of which are subject to change over time. It is the intent of the County that this General Plan provide both for a desirable degree of flexibility to be able to accommodate change in a beneficial way, and for a sound long-term foundation for development based on good planning principles that remain timeless.

The General Plan provides a basis to guide future decisions by County officials and other governmental agencies, as well as for residents, property owners, building developers, business establishments, and industries. The role of the General Plan is to provide the **framework for the future physical growth** of the County, and serve as the **foundation for land use decisions**. It expresses long term community development goals and embodies public policy related to the distribution of future land use, both public and private (General Plan Guidelines, OPR). Because it embodies public policy, it is intended to be used by County decision makers to review new development in order to ensure that such development will contribute to achieving the vision for Nevada County which is inherent in the General Plan.

The General Plan Philosophy

To facilitate and guide the development of the General Plan's goals, objectives, policies and implementation measures the Nevada County Central Themes were established. In four short statements the County sets the framework upon which the General Plan is based. In preparing the goals, objectives and policies, the Central Themes provided the basic direction and provided a standard by which the appropriateness of goals, objectives and policies were tested.

The Central Themes are:

Fostering a rural quality of life;

Sustaining a quality environment;

Development of a strong diversified, sustainable local economy;

and

Planned land use patterns will determine the level of public services appropriate to the character, economy and environment of each region.

Supporting themes were defined to further articulate the vision of Nevada County's future. These supporting themes also became central to the preparation of goals and objectives, and have further served as guidance in the delineation of policies to set specific direction for the future physical development of the County. The supporting themes are:

Reduce dependence on the automobile by clustering future growth;

Encourage the creation and enhancement of communities by providing for diverse and viable centers for those areas;

Provide urban services only in areas with sufficient land use intensities or population densities;

Ensure that intensive growth will only be allowed concurrent with the provision of needed services, to include, participating in financing, public studies programs, phased construction projects, or phased construction projects that enhance public benefit.

Ensure the long term quality of natural resource values at the same time ensuring the sustainability of agriculture, logging and mining activities;

Minimize conflicts due to incompatible land uses.

Once the central themes and supporting themes were established, a set of statements expressing how the General Plan is to operate were developed. These statements expanded on the Themes.

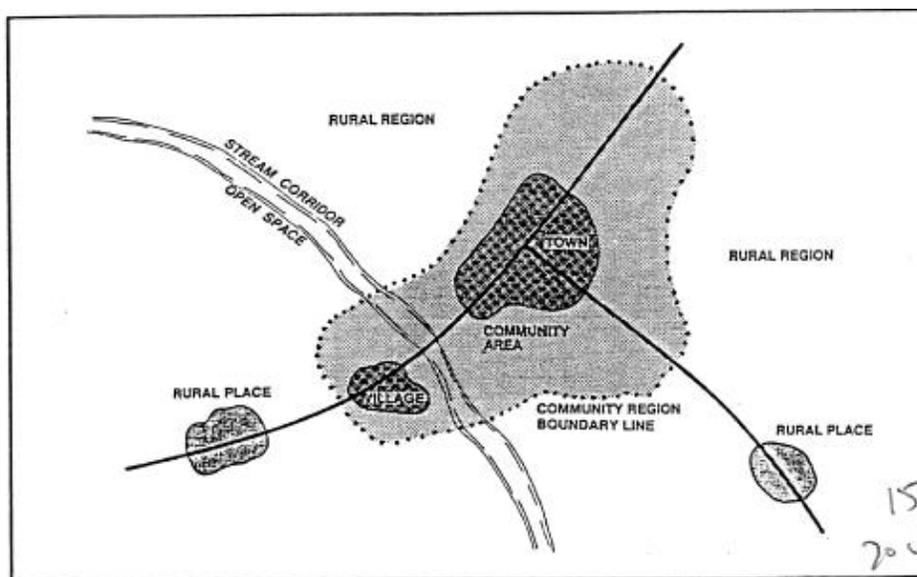
- The General Plan is to **direct urban growth into** *Community Regions* that can effectively and economically provide urban types of services. Eventually, urban and suburban residents demand such amenities as paved streets, water and sewer services, and related facilities - urban services that cannot be extended to widely scattered homes and subdivisions.
- The General Plan is to **preserve the character of** rural areas - to prevent the "partial suburbanization" of rural and natural areas. This partial suburbanization creates permanent scattered low-density arrangements that can never be adequately or feasibly served. Many areas of the Sierra foothills are experiencing development and parcelization that is neither urban or rural, a blurring of patterns that creates permanent structural problems related to public services, safety, and environmental preservation.

- The General Plan is to **allow some margin of flexibility** in the plan as to specific land use arrangements within the *Community Regions* and *Rural Regions*; and to allow for a **moderate amount of growth** in the County. A moderate annual growth rate would allow the County to establish “concurrency” - this is so that the provisions of public services keep pace with new developments.
- The General Plan is to **preserve the natural environment** of the County. This includes the preservation of natural habitats, water resources, forests, mineral resources, and scenic qualities of Nevada County.

Based upon these planning principles, the General Plan divides the County into *Community Regions* and *Rural Regions*.

All portions of the County not included within a *Community Region* shall be considered to be within the *Rural Regions* of the County. Within these *Rural Regions*, growth is provided for only those types and densities of development which are consistent with the open, rural lifestyle, pastoral character, and natural setting which exists in these areas. *Rural Places* are established within the *Rural Regions* to recognize the existence of defined places as centers of activity for the surrounding rural areas, each containing some combination of residential or commercial uses. *Rural Centers* are intended to provide various supporting commercial uses for the *Rural Regions*. Minimum parcel sizes range from five acres to 10, 20, 30, 40 and 160 acres.

The *Community Regions* contain higher residential densities and provide for a broad range of residential, commercial, cultural, public, and quasi-public uses, located for convenience, efficiency, and affordability. These *Community Regions* should be compact, self-sustaining areas of more intensive development where such development can be served most efficiently and effectively with a full range of urban services and facilities, such as public sewer and water.



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The range of land uses within the *Community Regions* would be more extensive and would include a full range of residential uses including single family and multiple family, commercial, industrial, public, educational, cultural, and recreational facilities. Residential densities would range from 1.5 acre lots down to four dwelling units per acre. Multiple family residential densities would have a maximum of twenty units per acre.

In addition to the Central Themes and supporting themes, planning principles used to prepare the General Plan within the *Community Regions* and *Rural Regions* are:

- Orderly development patterns that provide single-use areas for residential, commercial, and industrial activities.
- Compact development that allows for the efficient and economic provision of public facilities and services.
- Balanced development that provides sufficient space for a full range of uses to serve the County's residents.
- Avoidance of scattered or leap frog development that may not be able to be consolidated.
- Avoidance of development in areas of extreme topography or unsuitable soil/geologic types.
- Avoidance of development in areas subject to flooding.
- Preservation of the natural and visual resources of the County.
- Provides space for parks, schools, public places at an accepted level-of-service and spaces for institutions of all types.
- Establishes spaces between buildings and uses with setbacks and buffers.
- Provides for a hierarchy of streets and highways to serve all regions of the County.
- Preserves the historic and architectural resources of the area.
- Encourages rebuilding, reuse, and infill to within established areas to maintain the viability of existing urbanized areas.
- Creates compatibility between land uses within any land use grouping, such as avoiding auto-oriented uses within retail walk-in areas.
- Prevents environmental degradation through control of noise, air pollution, disposal of wastes, grading, tree removal, and other adverse affects.
- Protects the health and welfare of the residents of the County.

Organization of the Plan

The General Plan is composed of three integrated volumes, which together constitute the General Plan document.

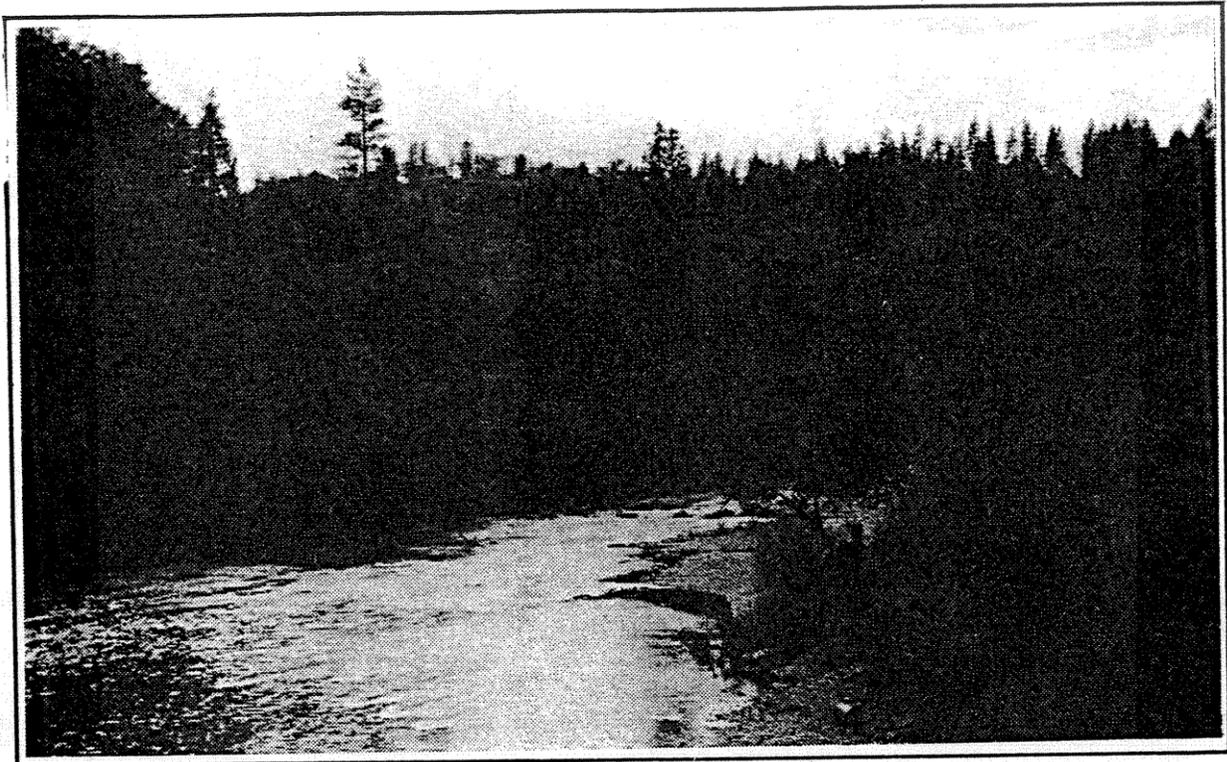
Volume 1: Goals, Objectives, Policies and Implementation Measures

Volume 2: Background Data and Analysis

Volume 3: Supporting Studies and Analysis

The organization of the Nevada County General Plan is intended to minimize redundancy by focusing policies within the most relevant chapter. Policies are not restated in each chapter to provide a concise, comprehensive, and internally consistent document, with extensive cross references to applicable policies in other chapters. Therefore, the document should be read and considered in its entirety to clearly understand the framework it articulates for the long-range growth and development of the County.

Volume 1 represents the General Plan policy document, and is organized in four major sections. The first section, Introduction, includes an overview of the General Plan, its organization, the central themes and concepts which underlie the Plan. The second section on Community Development, includes ten chapters each dealing with a topical area: Land Use, Economic Development, Public Facilities and Services, Circulation, Recreation, Open Space, Education, Housing, Noise, and Safety. The third section on Resource Conservation and Development includes Water, Geology and Soils, Wildlife and Vegetation, Air Quality, Forest, Agriculture, Minerals Management, Aesthetics, and Cultural and Historic Resources. The fourth section provides a statement of the Implementation Measures proposed to carry out the General Plan.



Volume 2 includes statute-required background data and analyses which supports the goals, objectives and policies in five topical areas: these are the Housing Analysis; the Noise Analysis; the Open Space/Conservation Inventory; a Resource Capability Analysis; and a Land Use, Circulation, and Infrastructure Analysis. These analyses are largely extracted and reproduced from documents previously prepared as part of the General Plan Update Work Program,

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including the *Nevada County Housing Analysis*, completed in February 1992, and updated as part of the preparation of the 1992 Nevada County Housing Element; and the *Nevada County Master Environmental Inventory*, completed in January 1992 (with updating of the analyses to reflect additional data identified since that date.)

Volume 3 includes the Final Environmental Impact Report, which addresses soils, geology, hydrology, flora and fauna, air quality, noise, population, land use, housing, transportation, public facilities, and visual and cultural resources. It also includes a Public Facilities Analysis, and supporting studies of the General Plan Update. *[NOTE: Volume 3 will be completed with the Final Public Hearing Draft of the General Plan.]*

Government Code Section 65302 requires that a General Plan contain seven mandatory elements, while Government Code Section 65303 allows the General Plan to “include any other elements or address any other subjects which, in the judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county or city.” State Guidelines for the preparation of a General Plan suggest a certain format and structuring of elements and their content; however the Guidelines also recognize that an alternative organization is permissible, as long as internal consistency is achieved.

Nevada County has chosen to organize its General Plan topically in twenty chapters, and to achieve internal consistency and provide for correspondence with the mandatory elements as follows:

MANDATORY STATE ELEMENTS	NEVADA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN CHAPTERS
Land Use	Land Use
Circulation	Circulation
	Public Facilities and Services
Housing	Housing
Conservation	Water
	Geology and Soils
	Wildlife and Vegetation
	Air Quality
	Forest
	Agriculture
	Minerals Management
	Cultural and Historic Resources
Open Space	Open Space
	Recreation
Noise	Noise
Safety	Safety
ELECTIVE ELEMENTS	Economic Development
	Education
	Aesthetics
	Eastern Nevada County

Goals and objectives are statements of aims and desired future conditions relating to land use in Nevada County. The policies identify the direction and actions which the County will pursue to achieve the goals and objectives. The goals, objectives, and policies are presented topically, not by priority. Policies are identified as Action Policies or as Directive Policies. Action policies are those which require a specific action or actions to implement the policy, such as adoption of an ordinance. Directive policies provide direction or guidance for decisions relating to future growth and development within the County. References are included to specific relevant policies in each Chapter of the General Plan.