



9 – Recreation and Cultural Resources

9.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how the recreational, archeological, and historical resources within Merced County contribute to both the quality of life and economic well being of its residents. Current conditions regarding active and passive recreation, as well as archeological and historical resources, are addressed. This chapter is divided into the following sections:

- Introduction (Section 9.1)
- Recreation and Open Space (Section 9.2)
- Archeological and Historical Resources (Section 9.3)
- Major Findings (Section 9.4)

9.2 Recreation and Open Space

Introduction

Merced County contains several County, State, and Federal parks and recreation areas. Aside from parks in the county, there are many public open space areas as well. This section highlights these various parks and open space areas and identifies recreational opportunities within them. The information contained in this section was compiled from a variety of sources including the California State Department of Parks and Recreation website, and consultation with the Merced County Department of Public Works and Division of Parks and Recreation.

Key Terms

Open Space Land. Open space land is any parcel, area, or waterway that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use. Under Section 65560 of the California State Government Code, open space land is broadly defined as land designated for the preservation of natural resources (i.e., lakeshore and watershed lands); managed production of resources (i.e., lands for agriculture, forestry, recharge of groundwater); outdoor recreation (i.e., parks, scenic highway corridors, and areas with outstanding scenic, historic and cultural values); and public health and safety (i.e., flood plains, unstable soil areas).

Recreational Area. Any public or private space set aside or primarily oriented to recreational use. This includes both parks and community centers.

Regulatory Setting

- **Sections 65910, State Government Code: Open Space Lands.** This portion of California planning law defines open space and requires every city and county to prepare open space plans as a required element of their General Plan. Building permits, subdivision approvals, and zoning ordinance approvals must be consistent with the local open space plan.

- **Section 5076, State Public Resources Code: Open-Space Elements and Trail Considerations.** This law requires that during development of the General Plan, counties shall consider trail-oriented recreational use and shall consider such demands in developing specific open-space programs. Further, cities shall consider the feasibility of integrating their trail routes with appropriate segments of the state system.
- **Section 66477, State Government Code, Subdivision Map Act.** Referred to as the Quimby Act, permits local jurisdictions to require the dedication of land and/or the payment of in-lieu fees solely for park and recreation purposes. The required dedication and/or fee are based upon the residential density, parkland cost, and other factors. Land dedicated and fees collected pursuant to the Quimby Act may only be used for developing new, or rehabilitating existing, park or recreational facilities. The maximum dedication and/or fee allowed under current State law is equivalent to providing three acres of park land per 1,000 persons, unless the park acreage of a municipality exceeds that standard, in which case the maximum dedication is 5 acres per 1,000 residents.
- **Merced County General Plan.** The unincorporated lands of Merced County fall under the jurisdiction of the county. The Open Space/Conservation Element of the Merced County Year 2000 General Plan contains goals, objectives, and policies pertaining to recreation resources of Merced County (Merced County 1990). Those goals, objectives and policies that are relevant to recreation resources are presented below:

Goal 3: Open space for recreation, aesthetics and protection from hazards.

Objective 3.A.: Recreation lands are available for local and regional needs.

Policies:

1. Encourage the continuation and expansion of existing public recreation land uses, including but not limited to, public beaches, parks, recreation areas, wild areas and trails.
2. Ensure that adequate local and regional park facilities are available to serve the growing County population.
3. Establish and continue to develop a system of local and regional parks, and other recreation areas throughout the County which balance the relative importance of direct site access with management of sensitive wildlife resources.
4. Nonrecreational land uses should be buffered from sensitive public recreation lands through site design and other techniques.
5. Promote the use of energy, communication, transmission and distribution easements as equestrian, bicycle and pedestrian or hiking trails.
6. Areas identified as proposed for the California Recreational Trails System should be reviewed during project proposals of consideration of easements and integration into County recreational facilities.

Objective 3. B.: Lands with high aesthetic value are properly managed.

Policies:

7. Stream corridors should be maintained in a natural condition and retain the general character of natural slopes and formations.
8. Regional parks should be used to preserve areas of natural scenic beauty.
9. The location and construction of highways should occur in consideration of the surrounding landscape and topography.
10. Power transmission and distribution facilities should be underground whenever possible.
11. Structures and activities located adjacent to state designated scenic highways should receive special review to ensure that scenic vistas and local scenic values are not significantly degraded.

Objective 3. C.: Open space lands are used for public protection purpose.

Policies:

12. Open space recreational uses should be considered appropriate for areas identified as noise impacted.
 13. Agriculture shall be considered a compatible land use in public and private recreation areas which must be protected and buffered.
 14. Open space buffers and larger minimum parcel sizes should be required around existing and abandoned (un-reclaimed) solid waste dump sites.
 15. Landfills should be located to avoid health and safety risks and to ensure that future adjacent land uses do not restrict landfill operations.
 16. Sites identified by the State Department of Health Services and the local Health Department as spill sites or hazardous waste sites shall not be considered for development approvals, unless clean-up occurs prior to or is part of said development.
- **Merced County Ordinance 1090.1730.** Under the Quimby Act provisions, Merced County Ordinance 1730 was passed in 2004 (codified as Section 17.44 of the County Code) and requires dedication of parkland or payment of in-lieu fees from new residential development based upon a minimum standard of 3.0 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The Ordinance applies to residential subdivisions with more than five parcels. Under Section 17.44.060 of the Ordinance, residential subdivisions consisting of 50 or fewer lots are considered as qualified for the payment of fees in lieu of land dedication. Those subdivisions with 51 lots or more are considered qualified for the provision of land or payment of fees or a combination of both. Park fees can vary by subdivision as they are based upon appraised land value, and assume 3.2 persons per single family or duplex residence or 2.0 persons per multi-family dwelling unit. The County has no standard for provision of regional parkland.

- **Merced County Open Space Action Plan (OSAP).** Adopted as part of the County's 1990 General Plan, the Open Space Action Plan provides County decision-makers with a procedure for determining the true development potential of a piece of land at a given time, based upon an assessment of its open space sensitivity value. Areas that have been delineated by the Planning Department's inventory maps as sensitive, or significant resource or hazard areas are to be protected, managed, or preserved in a manner that is compatible with the resources or hazards that exist on the site or in the area. See Section 8.6, Scenic Resources, of this document for a detailed discussion of the County's Open Space Action Plan.

Existing Conditions

Park and recreation facilities generally rank high on the list of community needs for the citizens of Merced County. These facilities provide economic, health, and open space benefits to county residents. These lands represent a unique assortment of facilities that provide both residents and visitors with an amenity. The 1990 Merced County General Plan addresses these recreational areas as both a vital component of healthy communities and a regional resource.

For the purposes of this section, the existing facilities and programs will be broken down into County, State, and Federal parks and other recreational resources. Table 9-1 describes those Federal, State, and local public recreation facilities available to residents of Merced County. The parks listed in Tables 9-1 and 9-3 provide both active and passive recreation opportunities. There are approximately 114,000 acres of recreational lands in the county that offer a variety of amenities such as picnicking, swimming, boating, hunting, bird watching, playgrounds, sports fields, and hiking.

Federal Recreation and Wildlife Areas

As shown in Table 9-1, there are three National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) located in Merced County: the Merced National Wildlife Refuge, the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, and the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (not currently open to the public).

With the exception of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge, these facilities are open to the public and provide information kiosks, restrooms, marked automobile tour and trail routes and an overlook tower, bird watching, and a hunting tower. The refuges are on the Great Pacific Flyway and offer bird watching and hunting. The San Luis NWR is home to one of the last remaining herds of Tule elk within the state.

| TABLE 9-1 Federal Park and Recreational Facilities in the Merced Region | | | |
|--|---|---|------------------------|
| Park or Recreational Facility | Location | Activities Available | Acres (approx.) |
| Merced National Wildlife Refuge | 16 miles southwest of Merced on Sandy Mush Rd. | Auto/trail routes, bird watching, hunting | 8,234 |
| San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (not currently open to the public) | Confluences of the San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne Rivers | bird watching | 12,800 |
| San Luis National Wildlife Refuge | Approximately 10 miles north of Los Banos | Auto/trail routes, bird watching, hunting, Tule Elk viewing | 26,340 |
| Total | | | 47,374 acres |

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006.

State Parks

The State of California Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department of Fish and Game operate a variety of public recreation sites located in whole or in part in Merced County, as indicated in Table 9-2. Regional State parks include:

George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area. Located east of Newman in the San Joaquin Valley, and surrounded by the Merced River, the park has many trees and is home to wildlife, especially birds. Swimming, fishing, and picnicking are popular activities.

Great Valley Grasslands State Park. Operated in conjunction with McConnell State Recreation Area, the park has 2,700 acres of grasslands and provides opportunities for fishing along the San Joaquin River as well as field trips for students and field research. The acreage was formerly part of the Freitas Ranch and incorporated parts of Fremont Ford Park. The park does not contain improved facilities.

Los Banos Creek Reservoir. Los Banos Creek Reservoir is known in the area for its excellent fishing. The Department of Fish and Game stocks the reservoir with trout. Bass fishing competitions are often held here, and crappie and bluegill are also caught. The reservoir is located just west of State Route 99, south of Volta. The park has 20 undeveloped camping/picnicking sites located along the shore.

McConnell State Recreation Area. The park is located on the banks of the Merced River. Fishing for catfish, black bass, and perch is popular. The park contains 70 acres of picnicking, camping, and playing areas. It is located southeast of Delhi on State Route 99, south of Turlock.

Pacheco State Park. Located west of the San Luis Reservoir, the park is a former ranch, donated to the State Parks system. The Park has 28 miles of designated hiking, mountain biking and riding trails on 2,600 acres currently open to public use. The park is home to Tule elk, deer, bobcat, coyote, fox, and several varieties of raptors.

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area. Located in the hills of western Merced County near Pacheco Pass, San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area offers opportunities for boating, board sailing, camping, fishing, and picnicking. The reservoir is open year round for all activities.

California State Fish and Game Wildlife Areas

Cottonwood Creek Upper and Lower (DFG). Located 36 miles east of Gilroy and northeast of State Route 152, the 6,315 acres of steep oak-grassland (Upper unit) and steep hilly grassland (Lower unit) provides visitors with the opportunity to view wild pigs, black-tailed deer, gray fox, and 100 species of birds.

O'Neill Forebay Wildlife Area. Located 10 miles west of Los Banos and two miles south of Santa Nella, west of State Route 33, the 700-acre area consists of eight miles of artificial waterway. The riparian habitat also includes 4 small shallow ponds. Access is only by foot. Visitors can see gray fox, cottontail rabbits, and 127 species of birds.

Los Banos Wildlife Area (DFG). Purchased in 1929, Los Banos Wildlife Area was the first of a series of waterfowl refuges established throughout the state to manage habitat for wintering waterfowl. Located four miles northeast of Los Banos, the area has expanded from its original 3,000 acres to 6,217 acres of wetland habitat, including lakes, sloughs, and managed marsh. Motor vehicles are restricted to designated roads, with few exceptions. Visitors can walk or bicycle over the whole area. Western pond turtles, raccoons, striped skunks, beaver, and muskrats, as well as over 200 species of birds are among the many animals found in the area. A special access blind site is available for mobility impaired hunters.

North Grasslands Wildlife Area (DFG). The Wildlife Area is comprised of several management units totaling 7,069 acres of wetlands, riparian habitat, and uplands located north and northeast of Los Banos. The restored and created wetlands are now habitat for the Swainson's hawk and Sandhill crane. Camping is allowed only at the hunter check station.

San Luis Reservoir Wildlife Area. Located adjacent to the San Luis Recreation Area, this 902-acre wilderness area contains the oak-grassland habitat typical of the inner coastal range. Access is by foot only. Over 100 species of birds have been recorded in the area. This is also a good area for observing spring wildflowers.

**TABLE 9-2
California State Parks and Recreation/Fish and Game Sites in the Merced Region**

| Park or Recreational Facility | Location | Activities Available | Acres (approx.) |
|--|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| Cottonwood Creek Upper and Lower (DFG) | 36 miles east of Gilroy and NE of SR 152 | Hunting, camping, bird watching | 6,700 |
| George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area (DPR) | East of Newman on County Road J-18 | Bird watching, swimming, fishing, picnicking | 46 |
| Great Valley Grasslands State Park (DPR) | Southeast of Delhi on SR 99 | Fishing, field trips, research | 700 |
| Los Banos Creek Reservoir (DPR) | West of SR 99, south of Volta | Fishing, boating, hiking, camping, equestrian trails | 620 |
| Los Banos Wildlife Area (DFG) | 4 miles northeast of Los Banos | Auto/trail routes, bird watching | 6,217 |
| McConnell State Recreation Area (DPR) | Southeast of Delhi on SR 99 | Fishing, picnicking, camping, play areas | 78 |
| North Grasslands Wildlife Area (DFG) | 6 miles north of Los Banos. The China Island Unit is located between Newman and Gustine. The Galdwall Unit is approximately 2 miles east of Los Banos at Santa Fe Grade. The Salt Slough Unit is approximately 7 miles north of Los Banos. | Camping, bird watching, hunting | 7,069 |
| O'Neill Forebay Wildlife Area (DFG) | 10 miles west of Los Banos and 2 miles south of Santa Nella, west of SR 33 | Bird watching, hiking | 33,700 |
| Pacheco State Park (DPR) | 5 miles west of the San Luis Reservoir on the south side of SR 152 | Hiking, mountain biking and equestrian trails, bird watching, camping | 6,890 total, 2,600 open to public |
| San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area (DPR) | 30 miles east of Gilroy, on the south side of Pacheco Pass, along SR 152 | Boating, board sailing, camping, fishing, and picnicking | 17,554 |
| San Luis Reservoir Wildlife Area (DFG) | 30 miles east of Gilroy, on the north side of Pacheco Pass, along SR 152 | Bird watching, wildflower | 902 |

| TABLE 9-2 California State Parks and Recreation/Fish and Game Sites in the Merced Region | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Park or Recreational Facility | Location | Activities Available | Acres (approx.) |
| Volta Wildlife Area (DFG) | ¾ miles north of Volta on Ingomar Grade | Hunting, bird watching | 2,891 |
| West Hilmar Wildlife Area (DFG) | On the east side of the San Joaquin River, approximately 4 miles downstream from Hills Ferry | Boating, bird watching | 340 |
| Total Parkland Acres | | | 25,888 |
| Total Wildlife Acres | | | 57,819 |
| Total Park and Wildlife Acres | | | 83,707 acres |

Sources: California Departments of Parks and Recreation, and Fish and Game, 2006.

County Parks

There are a total of 21 parks owned and/or operated by Merced County. The location, acreage, and features of these parks are indicated in Table 9-3. Figure 9-1 shows the locations of parks located inside the county's boundaries.

| TABLE 9-3 Merced County Regional, Community, and Dual-Use(DU) Parks, Including City Parks Maintained by Merced County | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Park or Recreational Facility | Location | Activities Available | Acres (approx.) |
| Hagaman Regional Park | 19914 W. River Road in Stevinson | Picnicking, fishing, rental facilities | 16 |
| Henderson Regional Park | 2641 E. Merced Falls Road in Snelling | Picnicking, fishing, boating, rental facilities | 74 |
| Lake Yosemite Regional Park | 5714 N. Lake Road in Merced | Picnicking, fishing, boating, waterskiing, wind surfing, swimming, rental facilities | 89 developed park 486 water |
| Ballico Park | Ballico Avenue between Park & Grove in Ballico | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, game courts, ball park | 5.3 |
| Campus Recreational Area | Irvine & Berkley (off Chestnut) Winton | Playground, picnic tables, half basketball court | 1.0 |
| County Courthouse Park | 21st & N Streets in Merced | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, County museum, library | 8.0 |
| Cressey Park | Cressey Way at Crocker Avenue in Cressey | Playground, picnic tables, bbq | 0.75 |
| El Capitan Estates Park (DU)(Dual Use) | Corner Drake Ave. & Lobo Ave Franklin in Beachwood | Playground, picnic tables | 4.0 |
| Harmony Ranch Park(big park) | Harmony Ranch Dr.(off Shanks) in Delhi | Playground, picnic tables | 2.0 |
| Harmony Ranch (small park) | Lancaster Ave. (off Shanks) in Delhi | Playground, picnic tables | 0.26 |
| Hilmar Park | Lander Avenue & Falke Street in Hilmar | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, swimming, library | 2.0 |
| Houlihan Park | Stanford & Sutter Avenues in Planada | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, game courts, rental | 4.1 |

| TABLE 9-3 Merced County Regional, Community, and Dual-Use(DU) Parks, Including City Parks Maintained by Merced County | | | |
|---|---|---|------------------------|
| Park or Recreational Facility | Location | Activities Available | Acres (approx.) |
| | | facilitiesfaciilities | |
| La Paloma Park Recreational Area | Carleen & Morgan Ct. (off Gertrude) in Winton | Picnic tables, half basketball court | 0.16 |
| Le Grand Park | Jefferson & Le Grand Rd in Le Grand | Picnic tables, bbq | 4.0 |
| Los Banos Park | Pacheco Blvd & Seventh St. Los Banos | County museum, picnic tables | 1.5 |
| O'Banion Park | Center Street between Loraine & Park Ave in Dos Palos | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, game courts, ball park, rental facilities | 20.0 |
| Shattuck Park (Dual Use) | Vincent Rd. in Delhi | Playground | 3.0 |
| Snelling Courthouse Park | SR 59 & Third Street in Snelling | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, old tennis courts, library, old courts, old Courthouse building | 0.5 |
| South Dos Palos Park | Reynolds & Shane in South Dos Palos | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, ball field | 15 |
| Taylor Park Recreational Area (Dual Use) | Mediterranean Ave. & Atlantic Way (off Shanks) in Delhi | Playground | 1.01.0 |
| Winton Park | Olive & Winton Way in Winton | Playground, picnic tables, bbq, game courts, ball park, rental facilities | 22 |
| Total Acres | | | Approximately 90 acres |

Sources: Merced County, Division of Parks and Recreation; 2006, 2007.

The County of Merced minimum standard for dedication of parkland within residential development is 3.0 acres per 1,000 people. Communities in the unincorporated area of the county currently (2006) do not have parkland available consistent with this standard.

After the 2010 Census, the unincorporated county had a population of 89,167 and 3 regional parks – Hagaman, Henderson, and Lake Yosemite – with a total of 190 acres of developed parkland (not including the 486 acres of the surface of Lake Yosemite) (U.S. Census 2010). Under existing conditions the County provides approximately 2.13 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 county residents. An additional 77 acres would be needed for the current population to meet the County’s current parkland standard. However, taking

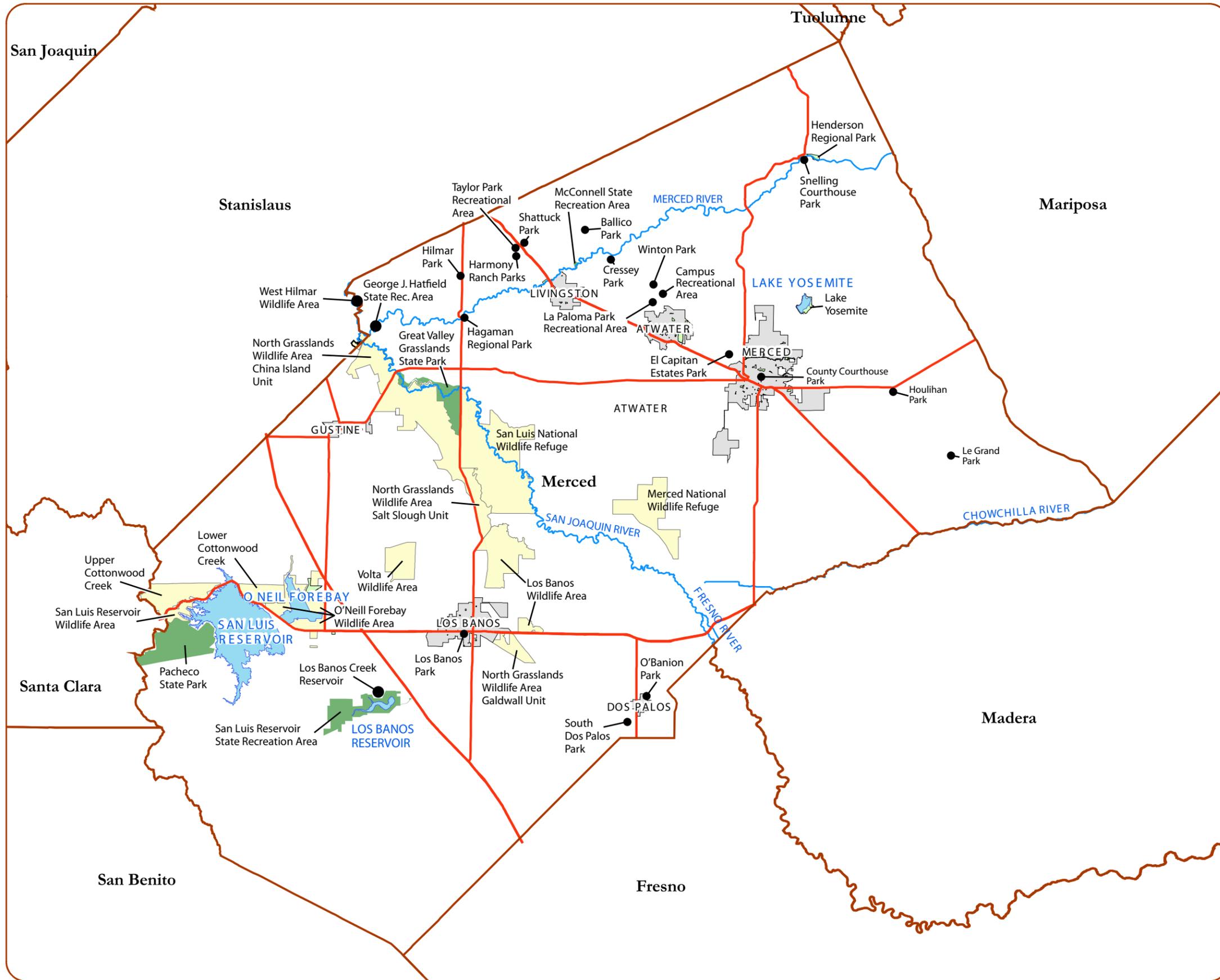
into consideration Federal and State parklands, open to the public, an additional 34,574 acres are available within Federal wildlife refuges and an additional 79,417 acres are available for hiking and wildlife viewing within State park lands and wildlife areas. As a result, County residents living closer to these recreational amenities may have better recreational experiences than residents not living near Federal and State parks and wildlife areas

The unincorporated Merced County population is anticipated to grow from 86,167 in January 2010 to approximately 152,900 in the year 2030, an increase of 66,730. In order to meet the standard, a total of approximately 200 additional acres of developed regional parkland would be required.

The Merced County Parks and Recreation Department maintains a variety of parklands throughout the county. County maintained parklands can be broken down into four basic classes: regional parks, community parks, dual-use parks, and neighborhood parks. The characteristics of these parklands are further discussed below through benefit zones within County Service Area No. 1.

Regional Parks

Regional parks are generally large in size and provide recreational facilities and amenities that, because of their specialized nature, cost, or demand, are not generally available within smaller community parks. Regional parks tend to be composed of large tracts of undeveloped land in order to protect and preserve the land's unique environmental, ecological, or scenic value. For an area to be considered a Regional Park, it must be an area or facility that has an attraction capability that is region-wide or supplements or complements community parks and recreation facilities.



MERCED COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

Legend

- Highways
- Rivers
- City Limit
- Lakes
- Wildlife Areas and Refuges
- County Parks
- State Parks



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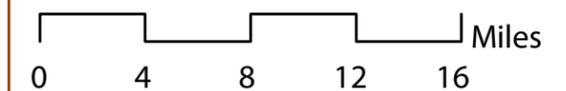


Figure 9- 1
Locations of Parks Located Inside
the County's Boundaries

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Community Parks

Community parks are larger in size than neighborhood parks, ranging in size from several acres to as many as 25 acres in size, and serve to fulfill the active and passive recreational needs of multiple neighborhoods. A community park serves the needs of local neighborhoods by providing a close-to-home site for more active and sports-focused recreation that is typically unsuitable or physically impossible in a neighborhood park (e.g., sports fields and courts). Community parks and sports parks are where most organized activities and league sports tend to occur.

Dual Use Parks

Dual use parks consists of areas that serve both passive park and open space purposes and often other functions, such as, but not limited to stormwater detention basins, schools, developed recreational facilities, like pools and ice arenas, and other facilities that can benefit multiple users and user groups. Stormwater detention basins offer an excellent opportunity for both passive and active recreation applications in addition to their intended use of storm drainage diversion. During inclement weather, the detention basin fills with stormwater runoff for what are typically only a few weeks out of the year. This creates the opportunity to use a significant open turf area for recreational purposes that would otherwise remain as underused open space for the majority of the year. Another class of dual use park is the shared use of school recreation facilities as parks.

Neighborhood Parks

Many unincorporated communities also include developed neighborhood parks. Neighborhood parks tend to be the smallest of public parks and range in size from less than one-quarter acre to several acres in size. For the most part, these parks are associated with residential subdivisions, developed as a condition of project approval for new housing developments, and are maintained by the County via County Service Area No. 1.

Other Recreational Facilities

Bikeways

Merced County currently has 75 miles of bikeways, more than any other county in the San Joaquin Valley except Kern. In June 2003, Merced County and its cities adopted the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) Regional Bicycle Plan, which proposes 400 additional miles of bikeways. In 2008, the Merced County Regional Bicycle Transportation Plan was updated (MCAG 2008) Figure 9-2 shows the location of designated bicycle routes throughout the County.

Bikeway projects have been proposed for the following unincorporated communities: Ballico, Cressey, Le Grand, Planada, Delhi, Winton, Hilmar, and Stevinson. Local Municipal Advisory Councils (MAC) identify local bikeway needs and recommendations to the Merced County Department of Public Works. The Department of Public Works provides the staff resources to submit bikeway projects for possible funding.

Bicycle riding is on the rise. Although there is not an established way to measure non-motorized transportation, best estimates show that bicycle commuting has increased 22.6 percent in Merced County since the 1990 census. For a more detailed discussion of county bikeway facilities, please refer to Section 6.6, Bikeways.

Public and Private Golf Courses

There are five courses available to the public that are in, or near, Merced County. These courses include:

- Rancho Del Rey, Atwater, public course, 18 holes;
- Fore Bay, Santa Nella, 9 holes;
- Stevinson Ranch (near Hilmar) public course, 18 holes;
- Madera Municipal public course, 18 holes; and
- Pheasant Run, Chowchilla, public course, 18 holes.

In addition to the public courses listed above, there are three private golf clubs in the region, including the Merced Golf and Country Club, the 9-hole executive course in Hilmar, and the Turlock Golf and Country Club. In addition, Merced County approved the proposed Dry Creek Golf Course (now called Fox Hills) in association with 400 housing units as part of a General Plan Amendment. The Dry Creek Golf Course is planned for an area southwest of Los Banos, but has not been built to date (October 2006).

Merced County Fairgrounds

The Merced County Fairgrounds are located in Merced. The Merced County Fair is, a State Fair that serves the local agricultural community plus area residents with a fair each July featuring entertainment, rodeo, auto and motorcycle racing, tractor pull, and a midway. In addition to the fair, facilities are available for rent to host a variety of events year-round. There are both indoor and outdoor rental facilities for shows and exhibition, music productions, receptions, parties, club-sponsored events, conventions, conferences, seminars, flea markets, farmers market, home and garden shows, and auto and motorcycle racing.

The Los Banos Spring Fair is a Merced County fair and is held in early May in Los Banos. The Spring Fair, a Merced County fair, has similar amenities to the Merced County Fair. The facility has four buildings available for rent during the year. The Los Banos Spring Fair has roughly the same amenities and activities as the Merced County Fair. Recreation vehicle (RV) spaces are also available for rent during most of the year.

University of California, Merced, Facilities

On-campus open spaces and recreational fields and facilities are available to the public to some degree. Upon buildout, the campus will provide approximately 250 acres of open space and recreational facilities, including most of the standard athletic and recreation facilities of a university campus. There will be at least 116 acres of recreational facilities, which is the minimum required to meet Division I NCAA requirements; the remaining 134 acres will be open space.

Riverside Motorsports Park

When constructed Riverside Motorsports Park would be located in unincorporated Merced County, northeast of Castle Airport. The Riverside Motorsports Park Master Plan includes the construction of a regional motorsports recreation, entertainment, and commercial business facility. The proposed project would include eight motorsports venues and other motorsports-themed entertainment and recreation-based guest amenities, such as restaurants, retail shops, and amusement arcades. The project would also provide a supporting infrastructure of mixed-use light industrial, commercial and retail businesses supplying material, products, and services to the motorsports community, attending motorsports competitors, and attending guests of the facility. Camping and RV facilities would be provided for the use of event attendees.

Private Recreational Facilities

The county also has private recreation facilities throughout the county that offer a range of recreational opportunities including camping, horseback riding, and hunting. Private hunting clubs can be found extensively throughout the major grasslands, wetlands, and water resource areas in the county. Such areas provide valuable wildlife habitat and provides for both passive recreational use in the non-hunting season and cattle grazing. Additionally, other uses such as churches provide recreational facilities including gymnasiums and performance halls.

Museums

The county has art collections exhibited in public and private facilities that offer a range of cultural and recreational opportunities. The four major museums in Merced County include: Merced Multicultural Center, 645 West Main Street, Merced; Merced County Courthouse Museum, 21 st and N Streets, Merced; Merced College Art Gallery, 3600 M Street, Merced; Livingston Historical Museum, 604 Main Street, Livingston.

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9.3 Archeological, Historical, and Paleontological Resources

The following section provides information concerning archeological, historical, and paleontological resources.

Introduction

Merced County occupies an archeologically and historically rich part of the San Joaquin Valley. To assist in the preservation of the county's unique cultural heritage, this section provides the archeological and historical cultural resources context for the County's General Plan. Archeological, historical, architectural, paleontological, and Native American cultural resources and values must be considered in all phases of planning and subsequent development projects, including design, permitting, construction, and long-term maintenance. It is essential that the public and project proponents be aware of cultural resources, as well as all the County, State, and Federal environmental laws and regulations that address them.

Methods

Merced County's known and recorded cultural resources were identified through historical records, such as those included in the National Register of Historic Places, the Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), the California Register of Historical Resources, California Historical Landmarks, the Merced County Historical Society list of historic resources, and the files of the Central California Information Center, California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock. Due to the sensitivity of many prehistoric, ethnohistoric, and historical sites, Table 9-4 lists only information available to the general public.

Key Terms

Area of Potential Effect (APE). All projects have an area of potential effect, within which cultural resources might be found and potentially impacted by the proposed undertaking.

Central California Information Center (CCIC). The CCIC is located at California State University Stanislaus, 801 W. Monte Vista Avenue, Turlock CA 95382 (209-667-3307). The CCIC collects and administers all cultural resource site forms and reports for a seven-county region, including Merced County. The CCIC houses site records and cultural resource survey reports, including confidential archeological records.

Cultural Resources. Cultural resources consist of tangible or observable evidence of past human activities, as well as intangible traditional cultural values. Cultural resources may include buildings, structures, objects, sites, districts, places, or records of historical or archaeological significance, or any physical evidence of human activities over 45 years old.

Ethnohistoric Resources. Ethnohistoric resources are Native American objects, sites, buildings, or structures that date from 1776 to 45 years before the present. Ethnohistoric resources may also include cultural landscapes. Ethnohistory began at different times at different places within California after the arrival of European settlers.

Historical Archaeological Resources. Historical archeological resources are sites, historic occupations, and activities that are generally more than 45 years before the present. Evidence of historic activity can include the physical remains of cemeteries, designed landscapes, battlegrounds, mines, canals, trails, and farmsteads.

Historic-era Built Environment Resources. Historic-era built environment resources include buildings, structures, objects, or districts. “Buildings” such as houses, barns, churches, hotels, or similar constructions, are created principally to accommodate various forms of human activity. “Structure” is used to distinguish buildings whose functions are intended for purposes other than providing human shelter. The term “object” is used to distinguish from buildings and structures that are primarily artistic in nature or are relatively small in scale, and simply constructed. A “district” possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development (Office of Historic Preservation 1995).

Midden/Anthropic Deposits. Deposits of earth that have been affected by prehistoric human occupation, usually dark in color, rich in organic minerals, and often containing artifacts or other items of human manufacture or use, and frequently containing human remains.

Most Likely Descendent (MLD). The Native American Heritage Commission maintains a list of Native American descendents of many California tribes. These individuals review projects and determine whether a project may impact areas or sites of significance to the Native American community. They also monitor projects and recommend deposition of Native American human remains found during project-related activities.

Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC). Project proponents or their designees are to contact the NAHC (915 Capitol Mall, Room 364, Sacramento, CA 95814, 916-653-4082) and advise them of the purpose and location of proposed projects, and request information regarding Native American concerns about the project or its potential effects. The NAHC will respond with a list of local designees, and the project proponent is to contact the individuals listed, advising them of the project’s purpose and location.

Paleontological Resources. Paleontological resources are any fossilized remains, traces, or imprints of organisms preserved in or on the earth’s crust, that provide information about the history of life on earth and its evolution, with the exception of archeological resources as defined by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (16 U.S.C. 470bb[1]), or any cultural item as defined by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001[2]).

Phase I Cultural Resource Survey. Phase I is the initial survey or inspection of the APE of a proposed project. This phase includes background research, records check with the appropriate Information Center (for Merced County the CCIC), completion of a written report, statement of contact with the NAHC and its designated local representatives, and recommendations for further investigations of the proposed project area, if required.

Prehistoric Archaeological Resources. Prehistoric archaeological resources are sites, features, artifacts or objects created or utilized by Native Americans. Prehistoric archaeological sites can retain remnants of thousands of years of human activity, dating from the early Holocene (10,000 to 7,000 years ago) to European contact in California (1776). Physical evidence of prehistoric sites often includes (but is not limited to) flaked and ground stone artifacts organic waste (shell or animal bone debris), soil discoloration (a result of decaying organic matter, referred to as midden or anthropic deposits), fire hearths, stone alignments, grinding slicks,

bedrock milling cups (bedrock mortars), or human skeletal remains. Prehistoric archaeological resources can occur in both surface and subsurface contexts.

Preservation. The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity and materials of an historic property, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property. Long-term preservation focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features, rather than extensive replacement and new construction.

Rehabilitation. The act or process of making possible an efficient compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features that convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

Restoration. The act or process of accurately replicating the form, features and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time including if necessary removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing, damaged or altered features from the restoration period.

Reconstruction. The act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.

Regulatory Setting

Federal Regulations

The majority of applicable federal regulations concerning cultural resources are established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A Federal law created to avoid or mitigate impact to potentially affected historic properties. The NHPA includes regulations that apply specifically to Federal land-holding agencies, but also includes regulations (Section 106) that pertain to all projects funded, permitted, or approved by any federal agency that have the potential to affect cultural resources. Provisions of NHPA establish a National Register of Historic Places, or NRHP (the National Register is maintained by the National Park Service), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Offices, and Federal grants-in-aid programs.

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (16 U.S.C. 4321, and 4331-4335, as amended) (NEPA). The act establishes guidelines to “preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and to maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and a variety of individual choice.” All projects that are subject to NEPA are also subject to compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA and NEPA requirements concerning cultural resources.

American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 U.S.C. 1996 and 1996a, as amended) and Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq., as amended). These acts establish as national policy that traditional religious practices and beliefs, sacred sites (including right of access), and the use of sacred objects shall be protected and preserved. Native American remains are further protected by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for establishing professional standards and providing guidance related to the preservation and protection of all cultural resources listed in, or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties apply to all grants-in-aid projects assisted through the National Historic Preservation Fund, and are intended to be applied to a wide variety of resource types, including buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts. The treatment standards, developed in 1992, are entitled "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties" codified as 36 CFR 68. The standards address four treatments:

Certified Local Government Program. The Certified Local Government (CLG) Program is a national program designed to encourage the direct participation of a local government in the identification, registration, and preservation of historic properties located within the jurisdiction of the local government. A local government may become a CLG by developing and implementing a historic preservation program and commission, based on Federal and State standards.

The CLG program encourages the preservation of cultural resources by promoting a partnership among local governments, the State of California, and the National Park Service (NPS). Becoming a CLG can provide local staff and commissions with the tools, technical training, and leadership roles required to preserve a community's cultural heritage. Local interests and concerns are integrated into the official planning and decision-making processes.

Any local government is eligible to apply for certification, with the exception of regional commissions and councils of governments. A local government is any general-purpose political subdivision of California, such as a city, county, or city/county. It is important to be aware that certification pertains to the entire local government and its agencies, not simply to the preservation commission that serves the local government.

According to information provided by the California Office of Historic Preservation, Merced County is not Certified Local Government, nor is any city or municipality within the county.

Other Federal Legislation. Historic preservation legislation was initiated by the Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 U.S.C. 431-433) to protect historic and archaeological sites. The law established the procedure for issuing permits to conduct archaeological studies on Federal land, as well as setting penalties for noncompliance. Permits are currently issued under this act and the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA) (16 U.S.C. 470aa-mm). The purpose of ARPA is to enhance preservation and protection of archaeological resources on public and Native American lands. The Historic Sites Act of 1935 (16 U.S.C. 461-467) states that it is national policy to "preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance."

State Regulations

California Register of Historical Resources. The California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) is restricted to properties that are to be protected from substantial adverse change (Public Resources Code Section 5024.1). A historical resource may be listed in the CRHR if it meets any of the following criteria:

- It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns in California's history and cultural heritage.
- It is associated with the lives of persons important in California's past.

- It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic value.
- It has yielded or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

The CRHR lists properties that have been formally determined to be eligible for listing in the NRHP, State Historical Landmarks, and listed as eligible as Points of Historical Interest. All other resources require nomination in order to be included on the Register. Examples include resources contributing to the significance of a local historic district, individual historical resources, historical resources identified in historic resource surveys conducted in accordance with State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) procedures, historic resources that have been designated by a local jurisdiction, including historical districts, and any local landmarks that meet historical significance guidelines according to a local ordinance.

California Public Resources Code Section 5097. As part of the Native American Historic Resource Protection Act, Code Section 5097 specifies the archaeological, paleontological, and historical site and sacred site procedures that must occur both prior to and during construction of any major public works project on state or public lands. Specifically, it describes the procedures in the event there is a discovery of human remains. Because most of the proposed development that may occur under the 2030 General Plan is within the jurisdiction of Merced County, and public lands means lands owned by, or under the jurisdiction of, the state, or any city, county, district, authority, or public corporation, Merced County is responsible for complying with and enforcing the proper procedures are followed in the event any historical artifacts or human remains are found.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code 21000 et seq.). (This act is commonly referred to as CEQA.) Section 15064.5 of the CEQA Guidelines requires that lead agencies determine whether projects may have a significant effect on archaeological and historical resources. This determination applies to those resources that meet significance criteria qualifying them as “unique” or “important,” listed on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR), or determined eligible for listing on the CRHR. If the agency determines that a project may have an adverse effect on a unique or important cultural resource, the project is determined to have a significant effect on the environment, and the effect must be addressed. If a cultural resource is found not to be significant or unique under the qualifying criteria, it need not be considered further in the planning process.

CEQA emphasizes avoidance of archaeological and historical resources as the preferred strategy of reducing potential significant environmental effects resulting from projects. If avoidance is not feasible, a data recovery program or other means must be developed to mitigate impacts. In order to adequately address the level of potential impacts, and thereby design appropriate mitigation measures, the significance and importance of affected cultural resources must be determined. The three phases of cultural resource preservation actions under CEQA are:

Phase 1 – Inventory of Cultural Resources

1. A records search, requested by the project proponent, is to be conducted by the Central California Information Center (CCIC), for proposed projects undertaken in Merced County. The CCIC is located at California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock. It is part of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS), established under the authority and direction of the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). The CCIC is the repository for records produced during cultural

resource investigations conducted in Merced and adjacent counties. The records search is conducted to determine if part or all of the project area has been previously surveyed for cultural resources; if any known cultural resources have been recorded on or adjacent to the project area; if the project area is of low, moderate, or high sensitivity for cultural resources; and whether a field (reconnaissance) survey is recommended to locate, record, and evaluate cultural resources.

2. A field survey (reconnaissance), is a systematic effort to locate, identify, and summarize information about cultural resources in a given project area conducted by a professional archaeologist who visually inspects the project area for evidence of cultural resources.
3. A written report is prepared when a records search and field survey are completed. The report provides thorough documentation of objectives and expectations of the survey, the methods used to discover cultural resources, and the adequacy of such efforts. The report should include a clear statement of the purpose of the survey, definition of the survey area with a map of areas examined, a research design, definition of survey methods, a summary of results of the survey, and recommendations for management and further investigations, if needed. Copies of site record forms and a written report are to be filed with the CCIC. The State Office of Historic Preservation has developed guidelines for the format and content of archaeological records and reports. Site record forms are submitted to and reviewed by the CCIC, pursuant to Office of Historic Preservation standards.
4. Native American Consultation. It is recommended that consultation with the Native American Heritage Commission be conducted as part of the Phase I Inventory. Upon request, the Native American Heritage Commission will provide project managers with a list of the local region's Federally and non-Federally recognized tribes, identifying tribal elders, and political and spiritual leaders. Each of the persons or organizations listed by the NAHC should be contacted to determine if there are known sacred sites or tribally significant places within the project APE that are important to the heritage of Native Americans.

Phase II – Evaluation of Cultural Resources

If Phases I and II (inventory and evaluation) determine that a cultural resource is not important, according to the criteria outlined in Section 15064.5 of the California Environmental Quality Act, there will be no significant environmental effect and further work is not required. If the resource is evaluated as significant or important, project impacts must be mitigated pursuant to Phase III requirements.

Phase III – Treatment of Important (Significant) Cultural Resources

If important resources are identified there are several ways to treat and mitigate potential impacts, including avoidance, data recovery, or site capping. Capping may be undertaken when avoidance is not feasible. It may be possible to cover burials or other important discoveries with a protective layer of earth or other material, or provide protection by means of conservation easements. Data recovery may be undertaken by professional archaeologists to obtain information important to prehistory or history. Data recovery for prehistoric or historic archaeological sites usually includes archaeological excavations to obtain adequate information about the site, its occupants, age and other attributes. Data recovery for the built environment (buildings and structures) includes archival and photographic documentation and, where required or appropriate, excavation or other treatment.

Section 15064.5 of the CEQA Guidelines states: “Generally, a project that follows the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings or the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (1995), Weeks and Grimmer, shall be considered as mitigated to a level of less than a significant impact on the historical resource.”

Senate Bill 18. (Chapter 905, amends Section 815.3 California Civil Code “Traditional Tribal Cultural Places”). Section 65351 of the Government Code has been amended to read: “During the preparation or amendment of the general plan, the planning agency shall provide opportunities for the involvement of citizens, California Native American tribes, public agencies, public utility companies, and civic, education, and other community groups, through public hearings and any other means the city and county deems appropriate.”

State Laws Pertaining to Human Remains. Section 7050.5 of the California Health and Safety Code requires that construction or excavation must be stopped in the vicinity of discovery of human remains until the county coroner can determine whether the remains are those of a Native American. If the remains are determined to be Native American, the coroner must contact the California Native American Heritage Commission. CEQA Guidelines (Public Resources Code Section 5097) specify the procedures to be followed in case of the discovery of human remains on non-federal land. The disposition of Native American burials is within the jurisdiction of the Native American Heritage Commission. Upon request, the NAHC will provide project leaders with a list of MLDs, who will specify treatment and disposition of any Native American remains found within the APE of a project.

Local Regulations

Merced County General Plan. The unincorporated lands of Merced County fall under the jurisdiction of the county. The Open Space/Conservation Element of the Merced County Year 2000 General Plan contains goals, objectives, and policies pertaining to cultural resources of Merced County (Merced County 1990). Those goals, objectives and policies that are relevant to cultural resources are presented below:

Goal 2: Soil, water, mineral, energy, historical, and air resources are properly managed.

Objective 2.E.: Significant archaeological and cultural resources are recognized and managed.

Policies:

21. Projects which affect archaeological sites and artifact should be carefully managed to avoid damage.
22. The original architectural character of significant historic structures should be maintained whenever possible.
23. To discourage looting and vandalism, significant historical and archaeological resources should be subject to limited or controlled public access.

According to information compiled by the California Historical Society, there are five organizations in Merced County actively participating in historic preservation activities or projects. These are the Atwater Historical Society, Castle Air Museum, Gustine Museum, Milliken Museum in Los Banos, and the Merced County Historical Society and Merced County Courthouse Museum (California Historical Society, 2006).

Existing Conditions

This section summarizes the paleontological, archaeological, ethnographic, and historical settings within Merced County, and provides the essential background for these cultural resources.

Paleontological Setting

The following is a summary of the geological evolution of the Central Valley, taken in part from Elam (2001). During the Mesozoic Era (208-65 million years ago) the Sierra Nevada formed, but the region that would become the San Joaquin Valley lay several thousand feet below the surface of the Pacific Ocean. During the Late Cretaceous Period (75-65 million years ago) flowering plants, early dinosaurs, and the first birds and mammals appeared. The basic form of the Great Central Valley took shape during the Cenozoic period, first as islands, then as mountains. During the late Cenozoic Era (65 to 2 million years ago), the Sierra Nevada eroded to mere hills compared to their earlier appearance, the Coast Ranges rose, and the San Joaquin Valley began to form.

During the Paleocene Epoch (65-53 million years ago) dinosaurs became extinct and mammals gradually became dominant. During the Eocene Epoch (53-39 million years ago), the western edges of the San Joaquin Valley rose above sea level. Sedimentation and tectonic uplift of geological formations continued until two million years ago. In the subsequent Oligocene Epoch (39 to 23 million years ago) sedimentation continued, and during the Miocene Epoch (23 to 5 mya) the Diablo Range was uplifted. The Pliocene Epoch (5 to 2 million years ago) was a time of tremendous uplift, and great deposits of sediment eroded from the nearby mountain ranges accumulated in the valley, eventually forming a deposit thousands of feet deep. In the Pleistocene Epoch (2 million to 10,000 years ago) the Sierra Nevada range was increasingly elevated and glaciated, resulting in the formation of spectacular features such as the Yosemite region.

During the Holocene Epoch (10,000 years ago to the present) the San Joaquin Valley was above sea level and it reached its present appearance and extent—a great valley 466 miles long and from 19 to 50 miles wide, enclosed by the Siskiyou, Sierra Nevada, Tehachapi, and Coast Ranges on the north, east, south, and west, respectively. The valley contained fresh water lakes and rivers attractive to prehistoric herding and grazing animals, including the Columbian Mammoth, camel, bison, and native horse. The fossil remains of these animals have been found in Merced County and adjacent areas (Rosenthal and Meyer 2004:7). During the Holocene Epoch, at a date as yet unknown, humans entered the region.

Archaeological Setting

Little is known concerning the earliest occupants of the Merced County region, although it is likely that the San Joaquin Valley and Sierra foothills were occupied throughout most of the latter part of the Holocene Epoch (-10,000 years ago to the present). Finding evidence of early cultures in the Central Valley is a daunting task due to the great mantle of sediment that covers most of the region, deeply burying evidence of early cultures (Napton 1981). The valley trough is partly filled by alluvial deposits that are up to six miles thick, ranging from the late Mesozoic to Historic in age (Rosenthal and Meyer 2004:32).

Several of the most important archaeological sites in Merced County are located near Pacheco Pass at the extreme west side of the county (Moratto 1984:735). These sites (CA-MER-3, -14, -27, -66, -94, and -119) were tested or partially excavated prior to construction of the San Luis, Los Banos, and Little Panoche reservoirs. Site CA-MER-14 yielded evidence of cemetery features, anthropic deposits, and structural floors (Olsen and Payen 1969). Site CA-MER-3 (the “Menjoulet” site) was extensively excavated by Pritchard

(1967, 1970), disclosing remains of 12 structures, including an assembly house 75 feet in diameter, one of the largest of such features known in California. On the basis of their cumulative research in the Pacheco Pass locality, Olsen and Payen (1969) defined a series of four prehistoric complexes, named, from earliest to latest, the Positas, Pacheco, Gonzaga, and Panoche.

Located on the floor of the Central Valley at Dos Palos east of the reservoir areas, site CA-MER-66 was tested by Wildesen (1969:266-278). Excavation of this prehistoric site was important, since for nearly a decade it was virtually the only partially excavated site on the floor of the San Joaquin Valley in Merced County. This situation changed for the better when Peak and Weber (1978) conducted excavations at CA-MER-215 (“Wolfsen Mound”), on the west side of the San Joaquin River some 30 miles (48 km) downriver from CA-MER-66. At the present time it is the only comprehensively excavated prehistoric occupation site in the lower Central Valley part of Merced County. It contained 20 burials and 18 housepits, 9 of which were excavated. The archaeology of Merced County has been summarized by Napton (1981).

Ethnographic Setting

Merced County was part of the former territory of the Penutian-speaking Northern Valley Yokuts. Their territory extended from the foothills of the Coast Range east into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, north to the Calaveras River and south to the San Joaquin River. Yokuts villages, consisting of a few families to several hundred people, usually were located along principal watercourses. One of the primary sources of food for California Native Americans, the acorn, is scarce in many parts of the Yokuts territory including Merced County, but they made use of other sources of food, gathering nuts, seeds, and roots from many edible plants. Acorns and other seeds were processed in bedrock mortars or portable mortars made of stone or white oak. River cobble pestles were used to pulverize vegetal materials. Yokuts made pottery simply by smoothing or pressing out a lump of clay obtained from riverbanks. Unmodified rocks or cobbles of suitable size and shape were used as “cooking or culinary stones” to heat processed vegetal foods, such as acorn mush. When rocks were not locally available “baked clay globules” were substituted. The Yokuts used flaked stone tools (arrowheads and knives) made of chert or obsidian, the latter obtained from sources east of the Sierra Nevada by trading with neighboring Paiute or Miwuk. The Northern Valley Yokuts constructed several types of dwellings, including the mat-covered gabled *kawi*, a communal dwelling, and a wedge-shaped family dwelling (*te*) made of tule, in which each family had separate quarters. Other constructions included flat-roofed shades supported by posts. Sweathouses were built by digging a pit several feet deep and building within it a pole framework covered with brush and earth.

Information regarding the Yokuts in Merced County is based primarily on what was known prior to 1925 regarding the Southern Valley Yokuts, the “northerners” having been virtually wiped out by malaria and smallpox epidemics in the 1830s. The destruction of Native American tribal cultures in the Central Valley from 1776 to 1900 due to disease and cultural disruption is discussed by Cook (1943, 1955, 1960, 1962) and Heizer and Almquist (1971). Primary source materials concerning the Yokuts were collected by Kroeber (1925:474-543), Latta (1977) and Wallace (1978:462-470). Today, Native Americans continue to reside in Merced County. According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2010), approximately 1.4 percent of the Merced County population is composed of Native Americans (US Census 2011).

Merced County archaeological sites, features, and artifacts include house floors, bedrock mortars, portable milling implements, flaked and ground stone tools, pottery, baked clay globules, burials, and other remains. These may occur in the form of large archaeological sites or as individual, isolated finds. In any case, if such remains are observed or encountered during construction, it is essential that a professional archaeologist be

made aware of the find, and, if a human burial is found, by law the County coroner and the NAHC are to be notified immediately.

Historical Setting

Catholic missionaries and soldiers entered California in 1776 and established a chain of missions and presidios northward along the coast, but Spanish presence in the Central Valley was limited to occasional forays primarily in search of fugitive Native American mission neophytes. They explored the Central Valley in a cursory way, but did not establish missions there and did not venture into the Sierra Nevada. American exploration of the Central Valley began with the arrival of explorers and traders, including Jedediah Smith in 1827, Ewing Young in 1830, and J. R. Walker in 1834. In 1844 John Frémont and his party, heading south, crossed present-day Merced County.

Following John Marshall's epochal discovery of gold in the tailrace of Sutter's Mill in January of 1848, hordes of hopeful miners flocked to California. By June news of the find brought thousands of Argonauts to the valley en route to the Sierra Nevada "Mother Lode" region. One of the indirect, but far-reaching consequences of the Gold Rush was the presence in the Central Valley of ferry operators, storekeepers, innkeepers, and others who supplied miners with goods and services. Numerous ferries operated along the San Joaquin and its tributaries, most of them appeared overnight and disappeared just as rapidly when the flow of Sierra-bound miners and prospectors dwindled. The Spanish influence persisted in the valley, however, through the establishment of Mexican land grants, four of which were located in present-day Merced County. They are Orestimba, Panocha de San Juan y los Carrisalitos, San Luis Gonzaga, and Zanjon de Santa Rita (Cowan 1956).

During the 1850s the more productive parts of the Central Valley were settled. In 1872 the Central Pacific Railroad entered Merced County, connecting the San Joaquin Valley with markets in the north and south, and importantly, the east (Outcalt 1925:310). By 1874 much of the county was under cultivation, wheat being a major crop. The remaining grasslands were occupied by vast herds of cattle, initiating the era of the "cattle kings" typified by Miller and Lux. As controlled irrigation developed in the Central Valley, most of the former land grants were broken up into numerous small farms, and the Valley began to take on its present densely settled, highly productive aspect. The key to intensive agriculture was a means of overcoming seasonal aridity and the equally damaging seasonal floods produced when the Valley fields were inundated by melt water from the Sierra Nevada snow pack. Seasonal floods were controlled by constructing reservoirs from which water was gradually released during the growing season. Controlled irrigation in Merced County began in 1888 under the aegis of the Crocker-Huffman Land Company. In its heyday the company had over 400 miles of canals that irrigated 30,000 acres. Their canal system was extended until 1922, when the Merced Irrigation District purchased the system for \$2.25 million. Crocker-Huffman was more than a water company; it was a company of speculation and promotion. Huge tracts of land were purchased and sold off with water contracts for colonization, such as the Winn Ranch (present-day Winton). U.S. 99 was paved through the county about 1913, and other roads, such as the "Yosemite-to-the-Sea Highway," were constructed in the 1920s. The expanded network of paved roads represents the on-going trend toward increased urbanization, concentration of populations in urban centers, and reduction of agricultural land in favor of sprawling "planned communities." The history of Merced County is summarized by several writers, including Cabezut-Ortiz (1987), Hoover et al. (1958), Outcalt (1925), and Radcliffe (1940).

**TABLE 9-4
Historic Properties of Merced County**

| Site/Building | Location | Year Constructed | Designation | National Register /CAL Register Status |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Temporary Detention Camp | Merced | 1942 | CA SHL 934 | NRHP & CRHR |
| Pacheco Pass | Los Banos | -- | CA SHL 829 | NRHP & CRHR |
| Masonic Temple | Merced | 1917 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Bank of Italy | Merced | 1928 | NRHP | NRHR & CRHR |
| Bank of Los Banos | Los Banos | 1923 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Buhach Grammar School | Merced | 1907 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Church of St. Joseph | Los Banos | 1923 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Maj. George Beecher House | Merced | 1891 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| George Bloss Mansion | Atwater | 1914 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR & POI |
| Rector Home | Merced | 1891 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Legget House | Merced | 1884 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Thomas Leggett House | Merced | 1890 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Merced Co. Courthouse | Merced | 1874 | NRHP & POI 3 | NRHP & CRHR |
| Merced Co. High School | Merced | 1897 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| Tioga Hotel | Merced | 1928 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| US Post Office Bell Station | Merced | 1891 | NRHP | NRHR & CRHR |
| Merced Theatre | Merced | 1931 | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |
| 430 W. 20 th Street | Merced | -- | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Bull Sheds Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Bunkhouse Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Hay Barn Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Main Residence Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Milk Barn Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Quonset Hut Sunshine Dairy | Merced | -- | Determined Eligible/ | CRHR |

**TABLE 9-4
Historic Properties of Merced County**

| Site/Building | Location | Year Constructed | Designation | National Register /CAL Register Status |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| | | | District | |
| Residence Sunshine Dairy | 21 Coffee, Merced | 1930 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Residence Sunshine Dairy | 46 Coffee, Merced | 1930 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Residence Sunshine Dairy | 3144 Childs Ave., Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Sunshine Dairy District | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Shop Building, Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Tank House Sunshine Dairy | Merced | 1927 | Determined Eligible/ District | CRHR |
| Bridge 39C-13 | Winton | 1912 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Bridge 39C-3 | Gustine | 1910 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Bridge 39-44 | Merced | 1931 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Bridge 39-200 | Los Banos | 1950 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Delta Mendota Canal | Los Banos | 1946 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Fagundas Barn | Los Banos | 1925 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Gustine Municipal Water Works | Gustine | 1910 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| State Route 152 | Los Banos | -- | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Station #3 Water Tower | Merced | 1934 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| Yosemite Lake | Merced | 1883 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |

| TABLE 9-4 Historic Properties of Merced County | | | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|--|
| Site/Building | Location | Year Constructed | Designation | National Register /CAL Register Status |
| W. Saunders House | Merced | 1907 | Determined Eligible | CRHR |
| G.B. Neighbors Home | Snelling | 1870 | POI 4 | -- |
| Gwin Post Office | Le Grand | 1855 | POI 5 | -- |
| Lake Yosemite Water Tower | Merced | 1888 | POI 6 | -- |
| Los Banos | Los Banos | -- | CA SHL 550 | -- |
| Los Banos Creek | Los Banos | -- | POI 2 | -- |
| Merced Co. Justice Courthouse | Gustine | 1911 | POI 8 | -- |
| Canal Farm Inn | Los Banos | 1879 | CA SHL 548 | -- |
| Snelling Courthouse | Snelling | 1857 | CA SHL 409 | -- |
| Snelling Community Recreation Hall | Snelling | 1871 | POI 1 | -- |
| Merced Main Canal | -- | | Determined Eligible | NRHP & CRHR |
| San Luis Gonzaga Archaeological District | 5 Prehistoric Sites | -- | NRHP | NRHP & CRHR |

CA SHL = California State Historic Landmark
 CRHR = California Register of Historical Resources
 NRHP = National Register of Historic Places
 POI = Point of Historical Interest

Source: Office of Historic Preservation Historic Property Data File, Merced County 2011

9.4 Major Findings

The following provides a summary of the major findings for this chapter.

Recreation and Open Space

- The County has no standard for provision of regional parkland.
- The County minimum standard for dedication of parkland within residential development is 3.0 acres per 1,000 people. Communities in the unincorporated area of the county do not have parkland available consistent with this standard.

- Lack of adequate funding for maintenance of new County parklands is a constraint to the development of new county-maintained parks.
- Residents of the county use both local and regional public recreational facilities, regardless of jurisdiction: County and city parks, state and federal recreation areas, and regional parks in adjacent cities and counties. These rural outdoor recreation facilities and areas provide a valuable amenity to county residents, and are also a regional attraction.
- As Merced County's population continues to grow, greater demands will be placed upon available recreational and open space facilities, and the need for new facilities will increase.
- Meeting county growth projections and the county's park and recreation needs will require a wide range of actions, including parkland acquisition; facility design and construction; and management of ongoing facility maintenance. Because of budget pressures, County park maintenance expenditures have been declining.
- The County participates in the Quimby Act by obtaining parkland dedication or fees from new single-family residential development. However, because these funds cannot be used for maintenance, it has been difficult to improve and expand parklands and facilities. Merced County may explore the development of additional funding sources such as shared facilities or agreements with neighboring cities for the benefit of parks or open space.
- After the 2010 Census, the unincorporated county had a population of 89,167 and three regional parks – Hagaman, Henderson, and Lake Yosemite – with a total of 190 acres of developed parkland (not including the 486 acres of the surface of Lake Yosemite). Under existing conditions, the County provides approximately 2.13 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 county residents.
- An additional 77 acres would be needed to meet the County's current parkland standard for the current population. Taking into consideration federal and state parklands open to the public, an additional 34,574 acres are available within federal wildlife refuges, and an additional 79,417 acres are available for hiking and wildlife viewing within state park lands and wildlife areas. As a result, county residents living closer to these recreational amenities may have better recreational experiences than residents not living near federal and state parks and wildlife areas.

Archaeological, Historical, and Paleontological Resources

- Merced County covers 1,234,490 land-acres, 1,006,127 acres of which are listed as "land in farms" (State of California Department of Finance 2006), which means that nearly 82 percent of the land-acres in the county are, or have been, cultivated or constitute "farmland". Data obtained from the CCIC indicates approximately 77,626 acres in Merced County have been surveyed for cultural resources, this figure representing approximately 6 percent of the total county land area. Therefore, it is evident that many sites, prehistoric and historic, found on the surface as well as in subsurface contexts, remain to be discovered.
- A recent study (Rosenthal and Meyer 2004) focused on the relative probability of finding buried archaeological deposits in the San Joaquin Valley and adjacent foothills, including Merced County. They evaluated 9,600 square miles for buried site potential. Of this total, 2,850 square miles were

considered to have moderate to very high potential for buried archaeological sites. Only landform age was considered in this study, and it is likely that other environmental characteristics, such as the distribution of economically important plants and animals and the occurrence of surface water, may be predictive of potential site locations within Merced County.

- Significant cultural remains may exist in the subsurface of farmland. Archaeological investigations, such as those conducted near the city of Dos Palos, have demonstrated that significant, unique cultural remains can exist below the plow zone in Merced County (Dougherty and Werner 1993).
- According to the Office of Historic Preservation Directory of Properties in the Historic Property Data File for Merced County 1,459 historic properties have been recorded; of these 19 are listed on the NRHP, 43 on the CRHR, five are listed as CA SHL and eight as POI, or Places of Interest.
- Paleontological specimens are found in western Merced County (Alt 2000; Hoots et al. 1954; Fancher 1950) and may be unearthed elsewhere in the county during project activities. Rosenthal and Meyer (2004:9, Table 2) state that 12 localities in Merced County have yielded Late Pleistocene-Age large mammals, including Bison, Camel, Columbian Mammoth, horse, American Mastodon, and *Elephas* spp.
- Merced County is rich in prehistoric and historic sites; therefore, it is recommended that the cultural resources programs of local governments include the education of project participants, agency representatives, and concerned citizens as to the laws, codes, and ordinances that forbid collecting of items associated with archaeological and historical sites, particularly artifacts or other objects found in association with human remains. In the event of the discovery of human remains, however fragmented or disturbed from their original context, all work is to cease in the vicinity of the find and the County Coroner and NAHC are to be notified immediately.