

CHAPTER TWO

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

2.1.1 LOCATION

The project site consists of approximately 2,616 acres located north and east of the unincorporated community of Foresthill, Placer County, California. The major portion of the project site is located north of Foresthill Road, but a portion is located east of Foresthill Road. Blackhawk Lane forms a portion of the northeasterly boundary of the site, then crosses through the site to provide access to an existing subdivision north of the site. Yankee Jim's Road also provides access to and traverses the southwesterly portion of the site (see Figures 2-1 and 2-2).

The project site is located on the Foresthill Divide, a long northeast-trending ridge system separating the North and Middle Forks of the American River. The project site is a portion of Sections 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34 and 35, Township 14 North, Range 10 East; a portion of Section 30, Township 14 North, Range 11 East; and a portion of Sections 2 and 3, Township 13 North, Range 10 East, Mount Diablo Base & Meridian. The site encompasses a total of 31 Assessor's parcels (see Figures 2-3 and 2-4).

2.1.2 SITE CHARACTERISTICS AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The "Forest Ranch" project site, as it is now known, has had several names over the years. The property was known as the "Pomfret Estate" from the late 1940s until the property was acquired by the project applicants in 1991, when it began to be referred to (in official correspondence and various permit applications with Placer County) as the "Foresthill Associates" property. The "Forest Ranch" name was assigned to the property by the owners in 2001.

The project site is characterized by forest vegetation, relatively level to steep topography (including two canyons), and seasonal drainages. Site elevation ranges from approximately 2,200 to 3,400 feet above mean sea level, and encompasses several major life zones that gradually change with increasing altitude. Natural habitat types in this region of Placer County include mixed chaparral, mixed coniferous forest, and montane hardwood. Additional habitat types found throughout Placer County include annual grassland, blue oak woodland, open water, and river/stream.

Although the site is undeveloped, it is not undisturbed. Several dirt roads traverse the property, as well as three County roads (Foresthill Road, Yankee Jim's Road and Blackhawk Lane). The property has been logged in the past and most tree cover is second growth. Portions of the property have been reforested, including some trees planted for Christmas tree production. There is evidence of past mining (closed mineshafts, altered landforms caused by hydraulic mining) on the site. The property encompasses two landlocked parcels with residences owned by other parties (see Figure 2-4). Existing land uses adjacent to and on the project site include

timber lands, rural residential, low density residential, and undeveloped land. Uses in the project vicinity include commercial development, timber lands, low density residential, and recreational.

2.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project consists of a General Plan Amendment to the 1981 Foresthill General Plan and rezoning to accommodate the proposed Forest Ranch project. No site-specific entitlements (e.g., tentative subdivision maps, conditional use permits) are requested as part of this project application. The California Board of Forestry and the Placer County Board of Supervisors approved a rezoning application in 1993 that changed the zoning on the majority of the site (2,025± acres) from TPZ to Forestry (160-acre minimum lot size) effective June 2, 2003. The remainder of the site (590.69 acres) is zoned Residential-Forestry, Combining a Minimum Building Site size of 1 acre, Combining a Planned Development designation of 1.0 dwelling units per acre (RF-B-43, PD-1.0) (see Figure 2-5).

The current Foresthill General Plan (1981) land use designations on the project site are as follows (see Figure 2-6):

Forestry (20 to 160-acre minimum) (2,025± acres)
 Rural Residential (1.0 to 2.3 acre minimum) (591± acres)

The proposed land use designations and zoning districts that are included in the application are as shown in Table 2-1 (see Figures 2-7 and 2-8).

**Table 2-1
 Proposed Land Use Designations and Zoning Districts**

Land Use Designations	Proposed Zoning	Acree e	# Units	Units Per Acre	Percentage
RR-5 – Rural Residential	RF-B-X 5 ac min. PD 0.2	189	37	1/5 acres	7%
RR-2.3 – Rural Residential	RF-B-X 2.3 ac min. PD 0.44	71	29	1/2.3 acres	3%
RR-1 – Rural Residential	RF-B-43 PD 1.0	309	271	1/1 acre	12%
LD-2 – Low Density Residential	RS-PD 2.0	190	334	2/1 acre	7%
LD-3 – Low Density Residential	RS-PD 3.0	291	698	3/1 acre	11%
MD-4 – Medium Density Residential	RS-PD 4.0	140	448	4/1 acre	5%
MD-6 – Medium Density Attached Residential	RS-PD 6.0	83	396	6/1 acre	3%
RES – Resort (14 acres)	RESORT	14			Less than 1%
GC – General Commercial	OFFICE & PROFESSIONAL	5			Less than 1%
OS – Greenbelt & Open Space	OPEN SPACE	1,323			50%

The proposed application to amend the Foresthill General Plan and rezoning is a residential and recreation development, consisting of the following components:

Residential Uses: 2,213 residential units, of which approximately 1,700 would be age-restricted (55 years of age and older). The remaining 513 housing units will consist of 216 townhomes and 297 single-family detached residential dwellings. A mixture of housing options is proposed to be provided, from townhomes to rural residential parcels (one dwelling unit/5 acres). Affordable housing units are proposed to be included in accordance with County policy, although the number of proposed affordable units is not identified in the application.

Recreational Uses: An 18-hole golf course, including a clubhouse and other recreational facilities generally associated with a golf course/retirement community (e.g., restaurants, meeting rooms, swimming pool, driving range), is proposed on 195 acres. The proposed project also includes an equestrian center to provide for the boarding of horses and a staging area for the project's equestrian trail system. A 100-unit recreational vehicle park is also included in the project. According to the project application, the golf course (and related facilities) and RV park will be open for public use; the equestrian center is intended to serve project residents. The proposed equestrian center and RV park total approximately 14 acres. The proposed project includes 17 miles of "community trails" and 0.8 mile of "wilderness trail."

Office and Professional Uses: Approximately 5 acres are proposed to be designated for office and professional uses. For the purpose of this analysis, it was estimated that there would be 19,000 square feet of office and professional uses.

Open Space: Approximately 1,128 acres, or 43% of the project site, is proposed to be maintained as open space to protect sensitive habitats and slopes and to provide project buffering.

Infrastructure Improvements: Improvements needed to serve the development include those related to streets, water system, storm drainage, dry utilities, sewer transmission and treatment facilities, the golf course, recreational vehicle park and equestrian center, and trails. Major infrastructure improvements include a wastewater treatment facility (proposed to be constructed and operated to State Water Resources Control Board standards), a water system and roads. The applicant has also indicated that the project's proposed General Development Plan (Figure 2-7) shows the conceptual location of the project's major collector road system. A more detailed circulation plan will be a part of future subdivision map applications. Improvements for proposed streets and accesses to the project site will be consistent with the appropriate County standard. Any existing wells and septic systems are proposed to be abandoned with development of the site. No need for improvements to off-site private facilities has been identified by project applicants.

Access, Easements and Rights-of-Way: No construction will occur directly as a result of this application; however, when future development occurs, it is anticipated that construction equipment and materials will access the project site via Foresthill Road. Subsequent entitlements will be required to provide specific information regarding on-site construction staging areas.

Onsite easements and rights-of-way will be dedicated, as necessary through future map approvals and/or use permit approvals, to accommodate the proposed development improvements and public utilities. Off-site dedications for access and utilities will be provided as necessary and required by the County (e.g., additional right-of-way on Foresthill Road.)

Phasing: It is anticipated by the applicants that the phasing of the project and related improvements will occur in increments containing up to 150 units per year. Construction of the golf course is anticipated to commence with the first phase of development. Buildout will be dependent on market conditions, but current estimates are for a buildout of approximately 15 years.

2.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The applicant's project objectives, as submitted to the Placer County Planning Department, are as follows:

Forest Ranch Associates proposes an amendment to the 1981 Foresthill General Plan and a rezoning in order to accommodate development of the Forest Ranch property. The project will include development of 2,213 residential units, of which approximately 1,700 will be age restricted to individuals 55 years and older. Of the total 2,213 residential units, approximately 524 units are currently accommodated within the existing Foresthill Community Plan. These permitted units will be redistributed under the Forest Ranch Development Plan.

A mixture of housing options will be provided, ranging from townhomes to rural residential parcels. Also included as part of the Forest Ranch development will be an 18-hole golf course on approximately 195 acres; a recreational vehicle park and equestrian center on 14 acres; a five (5) acre office-professional area; and 1,128 acres of common open space.

The Forest Ranch project is proposed to accommodate a demand for residential housing, with associated recreational and services uses, particularly directed towards buyers 55 years and older.

The County's objectives for the project site are not specifically stated in the 1981 Foresthill General Plan or the 1994 Placer County General Plan. The existing General Plan land use designations express the County's intent with regard to the property. The proposed Foresthill Divide Community Plan (not yet adopted) includes development standards for the "Forest Ranch Specific Plan Area" (Appendix B of the FDCP). The relevant portions of the Development Standards (those provisions related to land use) state the following:

Under the provisions of the proposed Foresthill Divide Community Plan (FDCP), the subject area would be required to be developed as a specific plan pursuant to the requirements of Sections 17.58.200 [Specific Plans] and 17.52.080 [Development Reserve (-DR)] of the Zoning Ordinance [Chapter 17, Placer County Code] and §66450 *et seq.* of the California Government Code. The

project may also be developed as a Planned Residential Development (PD), subject to the provisions of Sections 17.52.120, 17.54.080, 17.54.090, 17.54.100 and 17.54-110; however, the provisions of the specific plan will take precedence over the development standards and requirements of these sections unless otherwise stated in the specific plan. Because the FDCP is not yet adopted, processing of the project application is not subject to these provisions.

The allowable uses related to any of the following categories are limited as discussed within the subsection following each of the category headings.

Any development proposed within this specific plan area is subject to the specific plan provisions of the Zoning Ordinance (Section 17.58.200, Placer County Code) and the following standards:

A. Residential Uses: A maximum of 533 dwelling units may be considered for the subject property, although this number may not be realized upon project approval due to site constraints, inclusion of buffers and other factors that may limit available developable land. Residential units/lots shall generally be concentrated closer to the community core and densities shall be reduced as development occurs further from the core. In addition, residential units/lots shall be sited so as to:

- Preserve specific environmental, cultural or historical features;
- Provide or protect natural migration/circulation corridors and other important wildlife habitat;
- Create the opportunities for the public to make use of trails and other recreational facilities;
- Minimize visual impacts on surrounding properties as well as public roadways and trails;
- Preserve quality of life characteristics; and,
- Afford more efficiency in building arrangement and the provision of public infrastructure and services.

B. Open Space: Any development proposal for the specific plan area shall provide for the important wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, drainageways, floodplains, forested buffer areas, >30% slopes, etc. [see Figure B-1 in Appendix B of the Draft Foresthill Divide Community Plan] as well as for recreational opportunities for the residents of the project and the public. A minimum of 25% of the project area must be designated and protected as natural open space where disturbance of the vegetation and landforms is limited to only that which is required to provide non-motorized trail access. This natural open space shall be contiguous throughout the project wherever possible in order to provide protected wildlife migration routes, habitat connectivity, and consistent visual buffers. The natural open space shall be held in common ownership by the residents of the project or by an appropriate public entity (land trust, park district, local government, etc.) approved by the County; easements or other non-ownership provisions shall not be considered adequate to satisfy this requirement. Other forms of open space, including open space for active recreational uses, timber management, etc., may be provided in addition to this basic 25% requirement.

- C. Recreational Uses:** Non-motorized trails shall be provided throughout the project for the recreational use of the residents and the public. Wherever these trails are built, the construction shall comply with the appropriate Placer County Trail Standards [see Figure B-2 of the Draft Foresthill Divide Community Plan and the description of trail construction standards added to the end of this Appendix] and shall include erosion control measures (Best Management Practices [BMPs]), adequate directional signage and minimal grading or disturbance to the natural terrain. Trails (non-motorized and multi-use) shall be constructed to serve as links to surrounding public and private lands and to provide access to existing trail systems and networks, as appropriate. Other recreational development may include golf course improvements, equestrian boarding stables and staging areas, mountain bike courses, fitness circuits and related facilities; however, such facilities shall not be provided within natural open space areas (except for the non-motorized trails discussed above). The project shall be provided with active recreational uses and facilities sufficient to comply with Section 17.54.100(D) of the Placer County Zoning Ordinance [Planned Residential Developments – Recreational Facilities]. These facilities shall be constructed such that the recreational amenities are available concurrent with the occupancy of the equivalent number of residences that produce the demand for the facilities, as determined by the County (or a recreation and parks district serving the area).
- D. Environmentally-sensitive Lands:** Development impacts on environmentally-sensitive lands, including wetlands, riparian corridors, important wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, erosive soils, >30% slopes, etc., shall be minimized through the use of development setbacks, open-space zoning, open-space easements and other similar measures.
- E. Commercial Uses:** No commercial uses are permitted within the specific plan area, except in conjunction with and as an accessory to an approved typical golf course clubhouse (such as pro shop, restaurant and bar).

2.4 COMPATIBILITY WITH GENERAL PLAN AND OTHER PLANS AND POLICIES

Placer County General Plan

The existing (1994) Placer County General Plan includes numerous goals and policies relevant to the proposed project. These are presented in Chapter Three of this EIR, with relevant goals and policies listed under each major subject heading.

Foresthill General Plan

The existing (1981) Foresthill General Plan also includes numerous goals and policies relevant to the proposed project. These are presented in Chapter Three of this EIR, with relevant goals and policies listed under each major subject heading.

Foresthill Divide Community Plan

The proposed Foresthill Divide Community Plan (FDCP) includes numerous goals and policies relevant to the proposed project, including some that are directly applicable to the project site.

The Foresthill Divide Community Plan is not yet adopted. However, it has been developed by the Foresthill Divide Community Plan Team and is currently under review for possible adoption. The Plan area is approximately twice the size (109 square miles) of the area encompassed by the 1981 Foresthill General Plan, and includes areas previously subject to the 1994 Placer County General Plan and the 1981 Weimar/Clipper Gap/Applegate General Plan. Relevant draft goals and policies are presented in Chapter Three of this EIR, listed under each major subject heading. However, it is recognized that goals and policies may not be adopted in their current form.

2.5 DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The following alternatives are identified and evaluated in Chapter Four of this EIR.

No Project Alternative

In accordance with Section 15126.6(e)(3)(B) of the CEQA Guidelines, the No Project alternative consists of an analysis of the circumstance under which the project does not proceed. The No Project alternative consists of two possibilities: first, that the project site will remain in its present condition and use (“No Project/No Build” alternative); and secondly, that the project site will be developed in accordance with the existing Foresthill General Plan land use designations, existing land divisions and available infrastructure (“No Project/Limited Development” alternative).

In the case of the proposed project, because of the existing Foresthill General Plan land use designations and zoning, failure to proceed with the project would not necessarily mean that the project site would remain in its existing condition. The existing General Plan designates the project site for Forestry and Rural Residential. In addition to the forestry, recreational and related uses permitted in the Forestry designation, the Rural Residential designation allows detached single-family dwellings and secondary dwellings; agricultural uses, equestrian facilities, and limited agricultural support businesses; resource extraction uses; various facilities and services that support residential neighborhoods, such as churches, schools, libraries, child care and medical facilities; and parks and necessary public utility and safety facilities.

The majority of the project site (2,025± acres) is currently zoned Forestry (160-acre minimum lot size). The remainder of the site (591± acres) is zoned Residential-Forestry, Combining a Minimum Building Site of 1 acre, Combining a Planned Development designation of 1.0 dwelling units per acre (RF-B-43, PD-1.0) (see Figure 2-5).

It has been determined that the above described General Plan and Zoning designations would allow development of a maximum of 591 non-age restricted dwelling units on the project site, although the actual number of dwelling units that could be developed would be determined by the type of wastewater disposal and terrain (slope).

Reduced Project, FDCP Alternative

This alternative assumes development in accordance with the proposed Foresthill Divide Community Plan. Appendix B of the proposed Community Plan contains Development

Standards for the Forest Ranch Specific Plan area. The Community Plan and Development Standards require that a specific plan be prepared and would limit the site to a maximum of 533 dwelling units on 1,380 acres. The balance of the 2,615 acre site would be placed in a Forestry, 160 Acre Minimum Parcel Size designation and zoned Timberland Production Zone (TPZ). Residential units and lots would generally be concentrated closer to the core of Foresthill, with densities reduced as development occurs further out.

Significant open space areas would be preserved, with a minimum of 25 percent of the project area designated and protected as natural open space. Trails would be emphasized and natural open space limited to non-motorized access. Open space would be continuous throughout the project area, wherever feasible. Other recreational development may include a golf course, equestrian facilities, mountain bike courses and related facilities. Recreational facilities would be available concurrent with the occupancy of an equivalent number of dwelling units. Setbacks would be used to protect sensitive lands and development would be required to minimize impacts on topography and vegetation. No commercial uses would be permitted, with the exception of a clubhouse in conjunction with a golf course. No recreational vehicle park would be developed. Utilities and public safety services would be provided by existing special districts and the County. Sewer service would be provided in accordance with the determinations of the County Environmental Health Division and might include onsite systems and/or a community treatment system. Architectural and design standards would be applied that emphasize relationship to existing terrain and natural features, views and viewsheds. A homeowners association or similar entity would be formed to ensure compliance with above architectural and design standards.

Reduced Project, Age Restricted Community Only

This Reduced Project Alternative assumes that the entire Forest Ranch development project would be age restricted and would cater only to those 55 years of age or older. The number of residential units would be limited to a maximum of 1,700. These units would be clustered near the golf course and the existing community core, with the remainder of the site remaining in natural open space. The Development Standards described in Appendix B of the proposed Foresthill Divide Community Plan would be applied to the project, including minimum open space requirements and limitations on commercial uses; however, a variety of housing types would be permitted (including attached and detached units) to encourage clustering, affordability and density closer to the core of the community. The equestrian center and 100 unit recreational vehicle park would be retained, consistent with the recreational and retirement orientation of the community.