

2 LAND USE

2.1 LAND USE

The growth that has occurred in Mariposa County over the past decade has significant implications for land use. The population increase of nearly 21% between 1990 and 2005 resulted in the development of new housing as well as additional businesses and services to support the increased population. Moreover, the County is beginning to undergo a transition from a predominantly resource- and tourism-based economy to a more varied population and economic base; and while agricultural and tourism uses still make up a significant part of the County's land use, a greater diversity in the land use pattern has begun to occur. However, Mariposa is a rural county with no truly urban communities. The County also has large areas of public land that affect land use patterns and development potential. This chapter discusses the existing land use pattern, density of development and vacant land in the County.

2.1.01 EXISTING LAND USE PATTERN

Three broad areas of land use characterize the existing land use pattern in Mariposa County (see Figure 2-1). In the eastern part of the County, public lands that are oriented to recreation and resource uses dominate the land use pattern. In the western part of the County, agricultural uses are the primary use. The remainder of the County contains rural residential areas, as well as most of the County's town and village communities, which have most of the County's commercial and industrial uses, as well as the higher-density housing. Of the County's approximately 931,200 acres, 57% are publicly owned and occupied by Yosemite National Park, and the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, as well as Bureau of Land Management lands (see Table 2-1).

2.1.02 EASTERN COUNTY

Most of the public lands in the eastern third of the County consist of wilderness or resource-related uses, including sustained-yield timber management, harvesting, and associated activities; grazing and other agricultural uses; mining and mineral processing; non-commercial recreation; and other similar uses. Wilderness areas occupy a large part of Yosemite National Park, while the national forests and Bureau of Land Management lands are primarily resource-oriented. Within and adjacent to the National Park are commercial resort communities (such as Yosemite Village, El Portal, Fish Camp and Wawona) that are recreation and resort oriented. The uses in Yosemite Village and El Portal are more commercially oriented and may include lodging facilities such as motels and hotels, campgrounds, and recreational vehicle parks, as well as restaurants and food services, professional offices, retail stores and travel services. The communities of El Portal and Wawona also have residential uses that are oriented to the National Park.

Table 2-1: Land Ownership in Mariposa County

Type	Acres
National Park	26%
National Forest	22%
Bureau of Land Management	9%
Other Public	[less than 1 %]
Private	43%

Source: “Sierra Nevada Wealth Index: Sierra Business Council, 1999-2000.”

2.1.03 WESTERN COUNTY

The western third of the County is characterized by extensive agricultural areas, which dominate the land use pattern in this area. Much of the agricultural land is under Williamson Act contracts and is used primarily for grazing, although other types of agriculture also occur. Approximately 260,000 acres are zoned for agricultural exclusive use, while 198,000 acres are under Williamson Act contracts. Catheys Valley and Hornitos are rural oriented communities in this part of the County. Hornitos is a small historic community with a few homes and commercial uses. Catheys Valley has more extensive residential development, mostly on 5- to 10-acre parcels, and provides most of the local-serving commercial uses in the western part of the County.

2.1.04 CENTRAL COUNTY

The central portion of the County, extending from the Don Pedro and Coulterville in the north, through Midpines and the Town of Mariposa, to Bootjack and the Madera County line in the south is home to approximately 60% of the County’s population, and has most of the County’s non-resort commercial activity, as well as most of the County’s industrial uses.

While residential development in the central County is still predominantly rural, with small clusters of houses accessed from the State Highways or County roads, there are larger communities that have more concentrated development. The Don Pedro area, oriented to Don Pedro Reservoir, has 3,300 lots in the Lake Don Pedro subdivision (although only about one-third of this total is in Mariposa County.) Recreation facilities, including areas with campsites, and marinas make this area attractive for second homes and retirees. The Town of Mariposa is the County seat, and has the most diversity of commercial and service uses in the County (many of which are tourism-oriented). The Town also has most of the County’s multi-family housing, as well as local industries.

Bootjack is also a local commercial center for the eastern part of the County, and residential development in this community is rural in character, typically on five-acre or larger lots. Ponderosa Basin and Lush Meadows also have sizable residential areas, with lot sizes typically between one-half and five acres, along with a few local commercial uses. The central part of the County also has significant agricultural uses, although unlike the extensive grazing and ranching areas in the western part of the County, the uses tend to be intensive in character including vineyards and specialty crops (roses, hydroponic vegetables, apples, olive oil, pears) as well as aquaculture (primarily catfish).

Figure 2-1: Public Lands Ownership

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Figure 2-2: Land Development Potential

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2.1.05 DENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, as of 2002 there were 8,991 housing units in the County, an increase of 1,295 housing units (14 percent) since 1990. Overall, within the total land area of Mariposa County, there is an average of approximately one dwelling unit per 100 acres. However, considering the area of public land (525,000 acres) and areas of extensive agricultural zoning (261,000 acres) that allow only very limited residential development, the effective average density for the 135,000 acres that make up the remainder of the County is approximately one dwelling for every 15 acres of land. In addition, some portions of the 135,000 acres, such as land along the Chowchilla River, have severe building constraints, such as steep topography, additional housing units may not be feasible. The County has a limited inventory of subdividable land (Figure 2-2).

2.1.06 VACANT LAND

The County has a total of 162,509 acres of vacant land. Vacant land is defined as, land that has no improvement value or land with less than \$15,000 value of improvements. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the improved and unimproved acreage and parcels by size of parcel.

Table 2-2: Vacant Land by Type and Parcel Size – Mariposa County

Size	Acreage with Improvements	Parcels with Improvements	Acreages Unimproved	Parcels Unimproved
Under 1 acre	55	171	237	641
1-2.49 acres	205	126	1,623	993
2.5-4.99 acres	509	144	1,683	503
5-9.99 acres	1,416	225	4,910	785
10-19.99 acres	1,589	127	5,288	408
20-40 acres	3,031	101	11,458	376
Over 40 acres	48,497	139	82,008	506
Totals	55,302	1033	107,207	4212

Source: Mariposa County Planning Department, 2005