

## Mendocino County: History

The first permanent non-native settlers came to Mendocino County in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, exploring and establishing small outposts. It was almost 300 years before the first permanent non-Spanish settlements in the county were established on the Mendocino coast north of Big River in April of 1852.

One resource stands out in its impact on the County's early history: the vast stands of Coastal redwood, Douglas fir, and pine trees, which were logged and milled to meet the needs of a growing state. San Francisco was rebuilt after the Great Quake of 1906 in part with Mendocino County lumber, and its residents were fed with food produced in Mendocino County. Timber and agriculture were the mainstays of the County's economy from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century into the 20<sup>th</sup>, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century remain important to both the economy and culture of Mendocino County, although the character of agriculture is changing.



As the County enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, tourism is growing in importance and the county's traditional economic base—timber and agriculture—are now serving the county's economy by drawing visitors to the extensive forests and vineyards. According to a study commissioned by the County,<sup>1</sup> visitors to Mendocino County spent more than \$300-million in 2005 and generated some \$7-million in taxes. Almost 5,500 jobs were generated by tourism in the county in 2005. (By comparison, the total value of timber produced in the county in 2006 was about \$86-million.)

Mendocino County's land ownership patterns have also changed over time. The first land ownership was in the form of Spanish land grants. Later, smaller homesteads granted by the federal government in the County's early days were consolidated into massive ranches, which were later subdivided into smaller ownerships. Today, the fragmentation is continuing, fed in part by declines in ranching and timber and demand for smaller parcels by individuals seeking the County's ambiance and quality of life.

### Mendocino County: Today's Issues

Mendocino County in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century continues to value its oldest industries—timber and agriculture—as important aspects of the lifestyle and economy of the County. However, like all of California's counties, Mendocino County also faces new and difficult issues: development pressures from its more urban neighboring counties; changes in the timber and agricultural industries; and global climate change, which has the potential to directly and indirectly affect the future of the County. The long term availability of energy and water resources—both crucial to the continued health of the county's economy—also continue to be carefully considered as the County enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Key issues which have shaped this General Plan are summarized below:

#### **Timber and Agriculture**

Mendocino County's livelihood has been linked since its most distant beginnings to the richness of the land and its ability to provide food and fiber.

Timber remains a vital part of the County's economy to this day. Similarly, agriculture remains strong. Both timber and agriculture have been protected by longstanding County policies which seek to concentrate development into existing cities, towns and villages, and to retain vast areas of the County in timber and farmland.

Today, both timber and agriculture face challenges. The county's timber industry faces increasing competition from worldwide sources of lumber that have made it difficult for local mills to remain competitive. Mendocino County, which once boasted more than 200 lumber mills, now has only a handful; the last mill on the Mendocino Coast (in Fort Bragg) closed in 2003. The cost of local timber—itself affected by the need to comply with increasingly strict environmental regulations—has been blamed as a major factor in the mill closings, but it is only one of a number of factors impacting the county's timber industry. Other factors

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<sup>1</sup> "Mendocino County's Travel Industry: An Overview of Economic Benefits," 2005



include fragmentation of forest ownership (reducing economies of scale), resource/residential conflicts which discourage timber harvest and broader economic trends (a poor economy demands less lumber).

The value of timber produced in the county dropped by half between 1995 and 2006. Reductions in timber harvesting had spillover effects into the county's timber-related industrial economy. With fewer logs to process, mills closed, and many industrial jobs were lost.

Agriculture, unlike timber, is not in decline. Rather, it is changing, as the burgeoning California wine industry—and in particular the production of high-end wines—has taken off in Mendocino County with the production of premium quality “fruit” (as grapes are called by winemakers). As of the writing of this General Plan, several areas of the County, including the Ukiah Valley, Anderson Valley, Potter Valley, Redwood Valley, and the Hopland area, are now home to vineyards and wineries. As has occurred in other grape growing and premium wine producing regions in the state, the growth of wineries is being followed by a rise in tourism.

As in other areas, however, the change from historic crops such as pears, apples, prunes, and livestock to grapes and wine-making has resulted in other changes as well. Some residents in the county's new grape-growing regions have bemoaned the loss of the fruit orchards, sheep ranches, forests, and other historic uses that defined their regions in the past.

Combining their recognition of the importance of their agricultural economy and trends toward more “natural” foods, Mendocino County voters in 2004 took an historic step. In March 2004, Mendocino County became the first county nationwide to pass a ban on the growth and propagation of genetically modified (GMO) plants and animals. This groundbreaking measure sparked similar efforts elsewhere in the US, although the debate over the safety of foods which use GMOs continues.

Organic foods (and wine) are also growing in popularity, and many Mendocino County farmers and wineries are capitalizing on this trend by offering organically grown products.

### **Water Supply and Quality**

Despite all of the advances of modern civilization, water in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century remains what it has always been—an irreplaceable key to building and maintaining cities, homes, and industry. In Mendocino County, a limited water supply combined with uncertainty about the availability of future supplies, has served to limit development in most of the county. As the County enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, new challenges



*Water-saving drip irrigation is commonly used in modern vineyards*



have been added to the historical water equation: changes in agriculture from low-intensity farming to more water-intensive crops (primarily wine grapes), potential reductions in rainfall and river flows resulting from global climate change, and changes in upstream use of water that could limit flows in the rivers.

Growing concerns about the impacts of development on water quality are also being voiced. The county's homes, businesses, farmers, and timber companies are likely to fall under increasing scrutiny by the various local, state, and federal agencies charged with preserving California's and the nation's water supplies.

In response, this General Plan contains a comprehensive set of policies and actions (located in the Resource Management Element), which seek to address how Mendocino County manages water supply and quality issues. Key among these recommendations is the need to gather more information to supplement what is already known about water supplies so that future decisions will be based on the best knowledge available. The reader is invited to refer to the Water section of the Resource Management Element for additional information.

### Energy Supply and Sustainability

As of the writing of this General Plan (2007-08), the future of the energy resources on which Mendocino County and California depends has become more of a concern than in past years. Economic pressure from rising prices for fossil fuels such as gasoline and diesel are being felt by businesses and residents in the county, and concern has been expressed at a local and national level about the long-term availability of fossil fuels. While it is impossible to accurately predict when energy costs or shortages of supplies will occur, most observers agree that these will affect California and the nation in the foreseeable future.<sup>2</sup>



*Solar panels near Hopland are one example of local production of energy in the county.*

The reliability of energy resources is particularly important in Mendocino County for two key reasons:

- 1) The county's widely separated cities and towns make it necessary for many residents to travel long distances to work, shop and recreate. Fuel costs are therefore a major concern to residents and

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<sup>2</sup> Opinions on the future of petroleum-based energy vary widely. An excellent overview of this issue can be found in "Crude Oil: Uncertainty about Future Oil Supply Makes It Important to Develop a Strategy for Addressing a Peak and Decline in Oil Production," published in 2007 by the United States Government Accountability Office (Publication No. GAO-07-283)





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businesses. The county's small and widely separated urban areas make it difficult or impossible to establish cost-effective public transit, which typically functions best in dense urban areas.

- 2) As of 2009 most of the county's current energy resources originate outside of the county. Mendocino County is not unlike most of California in this regard, sharing a vulnerability to events occurring far beyond its borders and influence.

Addressing these issues also touches upon a growing concern for ensuring that the County be "sustainable"—that is, that the use of energy and other resources is done in a way that can be sustained—environmentally, economically, and socially—over the long term. Ensuring that the County's homes and businesses use resources efficiently is part of an overall strategy of being sustainable.

This General Plan for Mendocino County seeks to manage these issues, and to chart a course for County government over the next 20 years. The goals, policies, and action items in this General Plan represent the County's statement of how Mendocino County should grow or change in the coming decades, (or where it should remain the same), and how today's challenges will be met.

### Global Climate Change

Climate change has become an issue of increasing concern in California, the nation, and the world. Climate change is presently thought to be both naturally occurring and induced by increases in the amounts of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the earth's atmosphere attributable to the burning of fossil fuels.

Greenhouse gases have become the subject of increasing attention worldwide in recent years. Evidence has been steadily growing—and is now widely accepted—that human activities have helped speed and magnify changes in the global climate. The burning of fossil fuels (mostly coal and oil) is the primary manmade cause of greenhouse gases, a fact that has led to calls for increased energy efficiency and use of renewable sources of energy.

Since 2005, there have been a number of legislative changes that cover greenhouse gas impacts from land use planning decisions.

- Governor Schwarzenegger issued executive order **S-3-05** in June 2005, setting GHG emission targets for the state to meet, starting with a reduction to 2000 GHG emission levels by 2010, 10% below 1990 levels by 2020 and concluding with a reduction to 80% below 1990 numbers by 2050. This order directed the California EPA, Business Transportation and Housing Agency, California Air Resources Board (CARB), the California Energy Commission and the Public Utilities Commission to work together to develop a Climate Action Plan and report back on progress on meeting the statewide targets.
- In 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger signed **AB 32**, which established the first set of limits on GHG emissions for the state of California and put into place the regulatory framework needed to reach



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those targets. AB 32 set the 10% below 1990 GHG emissions level as a target to be achieved by 2020. In order to meet this goal, CARB is required to develop greenhouse gas emissions reporting procedures and adopt rules and regulations for reducing emissions by January 1, 2011, enforceable by January 1, 2012.

- In 2008, Governor Schwarzenegger signed **SB 375**, which sets out planning concepts intended to reduce vehicle travel by promoting more compact development (ideas which are incorporated in this General Plan). A goal of SB 375 is to help curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Taken together, both S-3-05 and AB 32 set the emission targets that Mendocino County will eventually be required to attain. While explicit thresholds and requirements have yet to be developed, various state agencies have begun to examine proposed land use plans and specific projects for their potential GHG impacts.

Three important steps in helping to reduce climate change impacts are the creation of an inventory of existing greenhouse gases and a plan to reduce these emissions.

### Step 1: Greenhouse Gas Inventory

A Greenhouse Gas Inventory allows a city or community to understand the level of greenhouse gases they emit, where these emissions come from, and how they are projected to increase over time. To calculate the level of harmful pollutants a community emits within a given year, data on electricity use, natural gas consumption, waste production, and vehicle miles traveled is collected and converted into an equivalent of carbon dioxide. This provides a baseline against which a city can track its progress on lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, by taking into account population and job growth rates, an agency can predict what its GHG emissions will be in the future if nothing is done to reduce GHG production.

### Step 2: Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan (GHGRP)

A GHGRP or Climate Action Plan (CAP) identifies ways in which a city, county, or community can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and addresses adaptation to the inevitable effects of climate change. A typical target for a CAP is a 15% reduction below 2005 levels by 2020. A CAP outlines transportation, land use, energy use, and waste production measures to achieve its target and proposes a timeline for implementation. CAPs are becoming increasingly popular as a way to spread awareness of climate change, reduce an area's impact on the environment, and save money on energy bills. Additionally, when referenced in General Plans and environmental documents, CAPs signify a public agency's efforts to combat climate change.

### Step 3: Develop a Strategy for Carbon Sequestration

Beyond reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, Mendocino County's extensive forests will play a role in combating climate change by sequestering carbon—the carbon dioxide created by the burning of fossil fuels is turned into the structure of the trees themselves and removed from the atmosphere. A report by the US Department of Agriculture says of forests:



*“Sustainable forestry practices can increase the ability of forests to sequester atmospheric carbon while enhancing other ecosystem services, such as improved soil and water quality. Planting new trees and improving forest health through thinning and prescribed burning are some of the ways to increase forest carbon in the long run. Harvesting and regenerating forests can also result in net carbon sequestration in wood products and new forest growth.”<sup>3</sup>*

Directing new growth into the incorporated cities and established communities and increasing bike, pedestrian and transit systems will help lower transportation related GHG emissions. While improving building energy efficiency standards and promoting the use of renewable sources (wind, solar, hydro, and geothermal, among others) will lower emissions as well as consumption of fossil fuels in the county as a whole.

## State Law and the General Plan

Every county and city in California is required by state law to prepare and maintain a General Plan.

State law requires that the following seven topic areas be addressed in a General Plan: **Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety**. This General Plan arranges these topics into four main sections, called “Elements,” organized into **Development, Resource Management, Housing, and Coastal**, plus sections on Community-specific policies. The table below shows where these State-mandated topics are addressed in this General Plan.

Required Topic and State Government Code Section <sup>4</sup>	Location in the General Plan
Land Use Govt. Code §65302(a)	Development Element
Circulation Govt. Code §65302(b)	Development Element
Housing Govt. Code §65302(c)	Housing Element
Conservation Govt. Code §65302(d)	Resource Management Element
Open Space Govt. Code §65302(e)	Resource Management Element
Noise Govt. Code §65302(f)	Development Element
Safety Govt. Code §65302(g)	Development Element
Coastal <sup>5</sup>	Coastal Element

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices/carbon.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> The reader is invited to consult the Government Code for additional detail on specific requirements for each topic.

<sup>5</sup> This topic is required because Mendocino County is located on the Pacific coast.

## Chapter 1: Introduction



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This General Plan consists of the following sections:

- 1 **Introduction**—An overview of key issues facing Mendocino County, the General Plan, and how the General Plan is to be used and interpreted.
- 2 **Planning Principles**—The broad principles upon which the Goals, Policies, and Action Items of this General Plan are based.
- 3 **Development Element**—Topics include:<sup>6</sup>
  - Land Use
  - Community Character (Community Areas, Noise, and Cultural Resources)
  - Infrastructure (Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Water and Sewer, Drainage and Flood Control, Solid and Hazardous Wastes, and Other Utilities)
  - Safety (Hazard Reduction, Fire Protection, Law Enforcement, Flooding, and Seismicity)
  - Education
- 4 **Resource Management Element**—Topics include:<sup>7</sup>
  - Water Resources (Watersheds, Water Supply, Water Quality)
  - Biological Resources and Ecological Systems (Overview, Terrestrial Resources, Freshwater and Marine Resources)
  - Productive Use of the Land and Resources
  - Aesthetics
- 5 **Housing Element**—The County's detailed plan to ensure that a broad range of housing is built in the unincorporated areas to meet the needs of a growing population. The 2004-2009 Housing Element will be replaced by the 2009-2014 Housing Element, September 2009.

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<sup>6</sup> Please see the Table of Contents in the Development Element for a listing of sections in which these topics are addressed.

<sup>7</sup> Please see the Table of Contents in the Resource Management Element for a listing of sections in which these topics are addressed.





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**6 Community-Specific Policies**—These sections describe key areas in the County and provide area-specific policies and actions to address local issues in:

- Anderson Valley
- Covelo
- Fort Bragg Area
- Hopland
- Laytonville
- Potter Valley
- Redwood Valley
- Willits Area

**7 Coastal Element**—Topics related to the Pacific Coast region of the County.

**8 Mendocino Town Plan**

**9 Gualala Town Plan**

**10 Ukiah Valley Area Plan<sup>8</sup>**

The General Plan also includes a **Glossary of Terms**.

## Relationship of This General Plan to Other Plans and Areas

This General Plan applies to all lands under the County's jurisdiction. The County does not have jurisdiction in the incorporated cities (Fort Bragg, Point Arena, Ukiah and Willits) or over Tribal lands (though the County General Plan prescribes intended land uses and policies for the latter); therefore, this General Plan does not affect these areas.

In addition, resource lands in Mendocino County owned by State or Federal agencies (such as National Forest lands) may also be regulated under the particular agency's land use management plans.

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<sup>8</sup> Although not an element of the General Plan, the Brooktrails Township Specific Plan is also used to guide decision-making and is incorporated into this General Plan by reference.

## Chapter 1: Introduction



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The Development Element and Resources Management Element of the General Plan apply in both inland areas and on lands located in the Coastal Zone. However, the County's Local Coastal Program (adopted separately from this General Plan) takes precedence in regulating land use within the coastal zone.

### How to Use and Interpret this General Plan

The General Plan is intended to be used by a broad range of persons, including:

- The Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission in decision-making activities;
- County staff in developing programs and projects;
- The development community in preparing development proposals; and
- Residents and citizens interested in the future of Mendocino County and the County's policies.

When using this General Plan, the following basic rules should be kept in mind:

- The Principles contained in Chapter 2 of this General Plan are statements of County policy.
- In the Elements, only those statements specifically listed as "Goal" are to be interpreted as stating the County's goals.
- In the Elements, only those statements specifically listed as "Policy" are to be interpreted as statements of County policy. Narrative descriptions and discussions not preceded by a Policy designation are provided for information and background only and may assist decision makers with the interpretation of Policies.
- "Action Items" list specific steps the County will take to implement policies. Action items may be a one-time work effort (such as amending the County's codes, or adopting a new plan or regulation) or may be ongoing efforts that are part of the County's day-to-day functions.<sup>9</sup>
- Unless otherwise defined by Policy, standard dictionary definitions of words and terms shall be used. The Glossary to this General Plan provides definitions of many commonly used planning terms; these may be used as a starting point in resolving disputes about the meanings of words in Goals or Policies.

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<sup>9</sup> Note: Some readers may be more familiar with the term "Implementation Measure." Although this General Plan uses "Action Item," the two terms are the same, and all Action Items in this Plan can be considered to be Implementation Measures.



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- Some information in this General Plan (e.g. population figures) is expected to become outdated in the normal course of events. Where this information is critical to the use of this Plan's Goals or Policies, the most up-to-date information should be used, including the Background Report and/or Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The following specific word meanings are used in this General Plan:

- Where the word "County" is capitalized, the reference is generally to the County of Mendocino as a governmental agency, as in "The County's offices are located in Ukiah."
- Where the word "county" is lowercase, the reference is generally to the geographic place, as in "There are many beautiful views in the county."
- References to current facts and figures should generally be considered to refer to the years 2007-2008, unless specifically stated otherwise.
- "Communities" generally refers to towns and other concentrations of development in the unincorporated area. Some communities are specifically addressed in Section 6 of this General Plan.

## Amendments to this General Plan

Recognizing the need for the General Plan to remain up-to-date and reflective of local issues and policies, State law allows the County to amend the General Plan to ensure that it is consistent with the conditions, values, expectations, and needs of the community. The General Plan may be amended only by action of the Board of Supervisors or by voter-approved initiative.

Periodic updates to the Housing Element are required by state law (generally every five years), but there is no required regular update for any other portion of the General Plan.

## Implementation of This General Plan

Future work, in the form of research, studies, and plans, will be needed to implement this General Plan. Some of these actions may occur in the short term; others will require more time and resources and may not be completed for some time.

The Mendocino County Zoning Ordinance is a key implementation tool for the General Plan. Many of the Goals, Policies, Objectives and Action Items in this General Plan are achieved through zoning, which regulates public and private development.

The County is responsible for ensuring that its Zoning Ordinance and this General Plan are in conformity. In most instances, this will mean that land is designated in the General Plan and zoned for similar uses with similar development standards (i.e., similar densities and minimum parcel sizes). Where zoning and General Plan land use designations are not consistent, this General Plan should be consulted carefully for guidance.