

4 STUDY AREA 4: FOREST RANCH

The Forest Ranch study area consists of approximately 525 acres located along Highway 32 in northern Butte County. The community of Forest Ranch is included in this study area, which is developed with low density housing, as well as some public and retail uses in the center of the town. The remainder of the study area is open with significant forested areas and steep slopes.

- ◆ Alternative 1 follows the existing General Plan, designating the majority of the study area Medium Density Residential, as well as approximately 20 acres of Retail. This alternative would allow 1,500 new homes.
- ◆ Alternatives 2 and 3 designate the majority of the study area for agricultural uses, and maintains the 20 acres of Retail.

A. *Economics*

1. **Market Viability**

a. **Alternative 1**

With an attractive setting and relatively easy access to the Chico area via Highway 32, this should be a fairly desirable location for the residential development planned under this alternative. One drawback is a lack of nearby employment opportunities or effective transit options, meaning that the study area would primarily be attractive to retirees or upper income workers who can afford to commute via private auto to jobs in the Chico area or beyond.

With a relatively small existing population and an estimated new population of just under 4,000 people, the population of this study area at buildout would be well under the typical size threshold necessary to support almost 300,000 square feet of additional retail space. A 300,000 square foot commercial development would be similar to a community shopping center, which typically requires a minimum trade area population of around 20,000 people. Particularly with the presence of a major concentration of competitive retail facilities just west of Forest Ranch off of Highway 32 in Chico, absorption potential for the retail component of this alternative is

poor. Instead, the amount of new homes that would be allowed under Alternative 1 would likely support a limited amount of small convenience stores or fast-food restaurants to serve new residents. Therefore, Alternative 1 receives a C

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 include the same amount of retail development as Alternative 1. As discussed under Alternative 1, above, absorption potential for the retail component of Alternatives 2 and 3 is poor. With no new residential development included in these alternatives to add customers for the planned retail space, these alternatives are marginally even less viable than the retail component of Alternative 1. Neither Alternative 2 nor Alternative 3 allows enough new homes to support even a limited amount of new retail. Therefore, Alternatives 2 and 3 both receive a D.

2. Fiscal Impacts

a. Alternative 1

The Forest Ranch study area lies in a TRA where the county receives and above-average 18.4 percent of the property tax revenues. Furthermore, with a focus on higher-value single-family residential units, planned residential development in this study area should generate fairly strong revenues for the county. From a service provision standpoint, the Forest Ranch study area is a reasonably efficient location for new development, as it is easily accessible from Highway 32 and also already has full-time fire protection service through Butte County Fire Station #23. These observations regarding revenue generating potential and service efficiency also hold true for Alternatives 2 and 3.

The Forest Ranch study area also includes a significant amount of new retail space – approximately equivalent to a modest-sized community shopping center including two to three “anchor” stores such as supermarkets, drug stores, or discount general merchandise stores, along with a variety of smaller medium-box and/or smaller “inline” shops. Because retail space typically generates retail sales taxes and other revenues in excess of the service costs

that it generates, this may be fiscally attractive to the county. However, the lack of absorption potential negates the potential fiscal benefits associated with the retail component of Alternative 1. From a service provision standpoint, the Forest Ranch study area is a reasonably efficient location for new development, as it is easily accessible from Highway 32 and also already has full-time fire protection service through Butte County Fire Station #23. These observations regarding revenue generating potential and service efficiency also hold true under Alternatives 2 and 3.

Since the residential development under Alternative 1 would likely generate some fiscal surpluses, Alternative 1 receives a B.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 are identical and would have similar beneficial fiscal impacts if they were fully built out.

With only retail development planned under these alternatives, along with an above-average property tax share for the county and good potential for service efficiency, Alternatives 2 and 3 would both be likely to generate fiscal benefits for the county under existing service standards if they were fully built out. Unfortunately, the lack of absorption potential negates the potential fiscal benefits associated with the retail component of Alternatives 2 and 3. Since the only other land use included in Alternatives 2 and 3 is agriculture, the fiscal impacts would likely be neutral. Therefore, Alternatives 2 and 3 receive a C.

3. Jobs/Housing Balance

a. Alternative 1

The estimated jobs housing balance in this study area is 0 jobs for every one employed resident. Development of a large amount of housing in this study area and a relatively small amount of employment generating land uses means that this alternative would decrease the current balance between jobs and housing ratio in the Chico area. Alternative 1 therefore receives a C.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Under Alternatives 2 and 3, only jobs would be added to the area. This would result in a surplus of jobs in the Chico area, which currently enjoys a good balance between jobs and employed residents. However, since it is extremely unlikely that the amount of retail development included in Alternatives 2 or 3 would be absorbed by the market, it is unlikely that the potential jobs associated with the retail component of Alternatives 2 and 3 would be available. Because it is unlikely that these alternatives would create a significant amount of new jobs, they would actually maintain Chico's existing balance between jobs and housing, resulting in an A.

B. Public Services

1. Fire and Emergency Services

The Butte County Fire Department and CAL FIRE provide fire protection and emergency services to the Forest Ranch study area. In general, there is not adequate staffing to handle more than two serious fire events or several less-serious emergencies at once in Butte County. Any new development in the county would impact the level of fire protection and emergency services.

There is one fire station located within the boundaries of the Forest Ranch study area, Fire Station 24. This station is staffed by volunteers.

The majority of the Forest Ranch study area has adequate service levels for rural residential density development, and portions have adequate service levels for very low density residential development. Specifically, portions of the Forest Ranch study area are located within eight-, ten- and 14-minute travel areas for one first due unit. None of the study area has adequate service levels for suburban residential, retail or industrial development.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 allows approximately 1,500 new homes at a suburban density, as well as retail development. This development would not have adequate

levels of fire and emergency services due to high travel times and a low concentration of fire stations in the immediate area. Moreover, this level of development would not support a new fire station, so there would be little opportunity to improve fire protection. Therefore, this alternative receives a D.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 would not allow any new homes. There would be some retail development under both alternatives, which typically requires high fire and emergency service levels because it includes assets of high economic value and generates customers that depend on those services. This minimal development would not have adequate levels of fire and emergency services due to high travel times and a low concentration of fire stations in the immediate area. Therefore, these alternatives receive a C.

2. Sheriff Services

The Forest Ranch study area is served by the Northern Division of the Butte County Sheriff's Office (BCSO). The BCSO is currently understaffed and has limited capacity for expansion of its services. The Northern Division typically has about two deputies on duty in the Chico area. Because of the distance from Chico to Forest Ranch, response times to this location can be slow.

There is no police station located within the boundaries of the Forest Ranch study area. The Butte County Sheriff station in Chico, the closest station to the study area, is located approximately 15 miles away.

Alternative 1 allows approximately 1,500 new homes, generating the need for approximately five new officers. Alternatives 2 and 3 allow some retail development, which would not likely generate the need for new officers. Because Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 allow development that would generate the need for less than six new officers in an area with slow response times, they receive a C.

3. Capacity of School Districts

The Forest Ranch study area is served by the Chico Unified School District (CUSD). As discussed in more detail under the NCSP study area, taking into account the recently-approved Meriam Park and Mountain Vista-Sycamore Glen projects, the CUSD has the capacity for 110 more K-8 students and 90 more 9-12 students. The District also has long-term plans to build a new high school that would likely accommodate approximately 2,000 new students and an elementary school that would likely accommodate approximately 550 new students.

a. Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, the Forest Ranch study area could generate approximately 500 new K-8 students and 240 new 9-12 students, which would exceed the current capacity. However, these additional students could be accommodated by the expected capacities of the planned new high school and elementary school. The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 1 in all of the study areas within the CUSD could generate approximately 1,820 new K-8 students, about 1,710 students beyond current capacity, as well as approximately 890 new 9-12 students, about 800 students beyond current capacity. These additional students would create a need for the planned new elementary and high schools described above.

Because the number of new students generated by this study area could be accommodated by the planned capacity, this alternative receives a B.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Under Alternatives 2 and 3, the Forest Ranch study area would not generate any new students, so schools are not an issue.

C. *Water*

1. **Water Supply**

The Forest Ranch study area is located within the Foothill Inventory Unit. As in the Valley, the primary source of groundwater is the Tuscan Formation; however, aquifer yields are much lower than those in the Valley. These lower aquifer yields are due in part to a greater presence of a fractured aquifer type, in which groundwater is stored in the fractures and joints of volcanic rock. Fractured rock aquifers have less localized recharge potential.

The Forest Ranch study area is located within the Cohasset Inventory Sub-Unit. Although most water users in the foothills typically rely primarily on surface water, residents in the Cohasset Inventory Sub-Unit utilize groundwater from independent private wells. There are no water service providers operating within or near the Forest Ranch study area. Because the terrain here is not conducive to agriculture, water use is mainly domestic. Per capita water use is limited due to low yields from wells. During drought years, water needs have not been fully met.

a. *Alternative 1*

Alternative 1 calls for residential development, allowing approximately 1,500 new homes, as well as some retail uses. Because this alternative allows significant development and does not have an identified water supply, it receives a D.

b. *Alternatives 2 and 3*

Alternatives 2 and 3 call for retail development on approximately 20 acres. Because these alternatives allow minor development and do not have an identified water supply, they receive a C.

2. **Groundwater Recharge Potential**

The Forest Ranch study area is located in the Foothill Inventory Unit. It may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 calls for residential development, allowing approximately 1,500 new homes, as well as some retail uses. Because this alternative allows significant development in a region that may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area, it receives a D.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 call for retail development on approximately 20 acres. Because these alternatives allow minor development in a region that may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area, they receive a C.

D. Wastewater

There is currently no publicly managed sewer service in the Forest Ranch study area. The current wastewater treatment method is individual septic systems.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 calls for approximately 1,500 new homes at a medium density, as well as some retail development. Although this development could conceivably be served by septic or package plants, the existing parcelization and infill type of much of this development would make this difficult. Therefore, this alternative receives a C.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 call for low levels of retail development only. Because these low levels of development can be effectively served by septic, Alternatives 2 and 3 receive a B.

E. Circulation

Forest Ranch is served by one major regional roadway, Highway 32.

1. Proximity to Freeways and Major Roadways

One major regional roadway travels through or adjacent to the Forest Ranch study area. Highway 32 runs through the study area and provides a connection to Highway 99. This study area receives an A for access proximity to major roadways.

2. Bicycle Circulation

Within the Forest Ranch study area, a planned bicycle facility is located along Highway 32. The study area has good access to a planned bicycle facility on Highway 32, but is located more than 1 mile from an urban area, so all alternatives receive a C.

3. Transit Service

Transit service is currently not provided in the study area. This receives a D.

F. Airport Compatibility Zone Conflicts

The Forest Ranch study area is not located within an Airport Compatibility Zone. Therefore, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 receive an A.

G. Potential Loss of Agricultural Land

Of the approximately 525 acres located in the Forest Ranch study area, 180 acres are identified as Grazing Land. The Grazing Land is located along the western border of the study area.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 designates the entire study area for residential and commercial uses, ultimately converting 180 acres of Grazing Land to non-agricultural use. Therefore, Alternative 1 receives a D.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 designate approximately 505 acres for Agricultural uses, ultimately preserving the existing Grazing Land in agricultural use. Therefore, Alternatives 2 and 3 receive a B.

H. Biological Resources

This small study area is located along Highway 32 at an elevation of approximately 2,350 feet, and is outside of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area. The predominant land cover types are hardwood and conifer forest dominated by blue oak and ponderosa pine. Small patches of mixed chaparral occur. Urban and agricultural land covers are found along the highway.

Occurrences of two special-status plants, Butte County checkerbloom and Butte County morning glory, are recorded in the study area. The oak woodlands and pine woodlands provide potential habitat for other special-status plants, including white-stemmed clarkia, Mildred's clarkia, and Butte County fritillary.

No occurrences of special-status animals have been recorded. The conifer and hardwood forests provide potential habitat for northern goshawk and bald eagle.

There is no Critical Habitat or other protected lands in the study area.

No sensitive habitats have been mapped in the study area.

The entire area is within Winter Range habitat for deer herd.

a. Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1 the General Plan would designate the entire area Rural Residential, allowing approximately 1,500 homes distributed over the study area. This could impact two known populations of special-status plants and potential habitat for several more special-status plants; however, these habitats are common in the region. Under this alternative much of the forested lands and open space would be developed at a low density, and it is assumed that development could be placed to avoid known locations of special-status plants. Therefore, this alternative receives a B for Special-Status Animal and Plant Species, an A for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, an A for Sensitive Habitats, and a C for Deer Herd Habitat.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

These alternatives are the same and would designate most of the study area as Agriculture (Timber), with approximately 20 acres of retail. Timber harvest could result in impacts on Winter Range deer herd habitat. Therefore, these alternatives receive B for Special-Status Animal and Plant Species, an A for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, an A for Sensitive Habitats, and a C for Deer Herd Habitat.

I. Safety and Hazards

1. Fire Hazards

The entire Forest Ranch study area is located within a high fire severity zone.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 calls for the development of all 525 acres within a high fire severity zone. Therefore, this alternative receives a D.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

Alternatives 2 and 3 would include a maximum of approximately 20 acres of land designated for development within the high fire severity zone. Therefore these alternatives receive a C.

2. Flood Hazards

The Forest Ranch study area is not within the 100-year or 500-year FEMA flood zones. Therefore, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 receive an A.

3. Geologic Hazards

Slightly more than half of the Forest Ranch study area has moderate erosion potential and the remaining portion has severe erosion potential. The Forest Ranch study area has no significant subsidence hazards, low to moderate and moderate landslide potential, and low potential for liquefaction. The majority of the Forest Ranch study area has moderate potential for soil expansion, though a small portion in the south of the study area has low potential for soil expansion. There are no faults located within the Forest Ranch study area or within a 50-foot radius.

a. Alternative 1

In Alternative 1 approximately 250 acres of land designated for development have severe erosion potential, which could affect development under this alternative. Development under Alternative 1 would not be affected by subsidence, landslide, expansive soils, earthquake fault or liquefaction hazards. Due to the larger amount of development under Alternative 1 subject to the severe erosion potential in the Forest Ranch study area, Alternative 1 receives a D.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

In Alternatives 2 and 3, approximately 1 acre of the 20 acres of land designated for development is constrained by severe erosion potential. Subsidence, landslide, expansive soils, earthquake fault or liquefaction hazards would not affect development under Alternatives 2 and 3. Given that 1 acre

would be constrained by severe erosion potential under Alternatives 2 and 3, these alternatives receives a C.

J. Cultural Resources

The Forest Ranch study area lies within portions of the Cohasset and the Paradise West USGS 7.5' quadrangles. Approximately 25 percent of the land in the Cohasset and 35 percent of the land in the Paradise West quadrangle has been surveyed for cultural resources. To date, no cultural resources sites have been recorded in the Forest Ranch study area. Although this study area lies primarily in foothill regions and has some apparent water, the lack of previously recorded sites in the area indicates that this study area be considered of low sensitivity for cultural resources.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 consists of medium density residential and retail development, with no Resource Conservation land use areas that could be used to protect significant cultural resources. Because of the density of residential development and the absence of designated Resource Conservation land use areas, Alternative 1 receives a D.

b. Alternatives 2 and 3

These alternatives are identical. Most of the study area would be designated for Agricultural land use, specifically for timber harvest. Though timber harvesting can be very destructive, it is possible to avoid significant cultural resources by not harvesting timber in the study area, therefore Alternatives 2 and 3 receive a B.

K. Notes

BUTTE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2030
ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION
STUDY AREA 4: FOREST RANCH