

6 STUDY AREA 6: UPPER STILSON CANYON

Study Area 6, Upper Stilson Canyon, consists of approximately 4,245 acres located adjacent to and east of Bidwell Park along Highway 32. A small portion of the study area is currently developed with low density residential, while the majority of the study area remains open.

- ◆ Alternative 1 follows the existing General Plan, designating the majority of the study area as Agriculture and the remaining area as Rural Residential, allowing approximately 100 new homes.
- ◆ Under Alternative 2, the entire study area is preserved in Resource Conservation, which would not allow any new homes.
- ◆ Alternative 3 designates a portion of the study area for Very Low and Low Density Residential, allowing approximately 600 new homes, as well as about 30 acres of Retail. The remainder of the study area is designated as Resource Conservation.

As described below, there are significant environmental constraints in Study Area 6, including an unnamed fault in the southwestern part of the study area, severe erosion and very high fire severity in the north and west of the study area, and critical steelhead habitat in the west of the study area. In addition, the entire study area is within the Critical Winter Range for deer herds and is officially recognized as Grazing Land by the California Farmland Mapping and Mitigation Program. Therefore, it is unlikely that the amount of development under Alternative 3 could be accommodated without placing some development on constrained land.

A. *Economics*

1. **Market Viability**

a. **Alternative 1**

Because Alternative 1 calls for no new commercial development and only 100 units of residential development, which are likely to be absorbed during the General Plan horizon, Alternative 1 receives an A.

b. Alternative 2

Alternative 2 calls for the entire study area to be designated as resource conservation, so market viability is not a concern for this alternative.

c. Alternative 3

While this study area would likely support the development of approximately 600 new low-density residential homes over time, there is unlikely to be market support for more than a small portion of the 392,000 square feet of retail space planned under this alternative. Equivalent to a large-sized community shopping center, this size of retail development would typically require a market area population of 20,000-plus people within a convenient drive. Given the isolation and limited accessibility of this study area, along with a relatively small potential buildout population, market viability for the retail component of Alternative 3 is low, and Alternative 3 receives a C.

2. Fiscal Impacts

a. Alternatives 1 and 2

With a minimal amount of new residential development allowed under Alternative 1, and no new residential or commercial development under Alternative 2, fiscal issues are not a significant concern for Study Area 6. Since both of these alternatives would be unlikely to generate significant fiscal surpluses or deficits, both receive a C.

b. Alternative 3

Within Study Area 6, Butte County receives between 17.2 and 18.4 percent of the property tax revenues. Residential development under this alternative is likely to be relatively high-valued single-family homes, based on the existing character of the study area. Retail development has potential to generate healthy revenues, to the extent that it can be successfully developed. The greatest concern regarding fiscal impacts of developing this study area should be service efficiency and costs. Because the study area is located in a canyon, access is limited, so effective services must be more or less self-contained in the study area. The study area is located outside of the eight-minute travel range of the closest full-time staffed fire station, the City of Chico's Fire

Station #4. Thus, unless this rural level of fire/EMS protection is considered adequate, development under Alternative 3 might trigger a need for an expensive upgrade in service levels, which, combined with the relatively small amount of new development to generate new revenues, could likely create fiscal deficits. Therefore, Alternative 3 receives a D.

3. Jobs/Housing Balance

With only 100 new residential units allowed under Alternative 1, there would be a negligible effect on jobs/housing balance.

a. Alternative 2

With no new residential or commercial development planned, Alternative 2 would have no effect on the current balance of jobs to housing balance in the Chico area.

b. Alternative 3

The estimated jobs/housing balance for new development planned under Alternative 3 is 1 job for every one employed resident. However, given the low expectations of absorption of the job-generating retail uses in Alternative 3, this alternative would likely result in more houses than jobs. This would result in a slight increase in houses in the Chico area, which currently has a good jobs/housing balance, so Alternative 3 receives a B.

B. Public Services

1. Fire and Emergency Services

The Butte County Fire Department and CAL FIRE provide fire protection and emergency services to Study Area 6. 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 will impact the level of fire protection and emergency services.

There are no fire stations within the boundaries of Study Area 6. Fire Station 27, the closest station, is located less than a mile away from the eastern boundary of the study area and 4 miles from the western boundary. This fire station is volunteer-staffed.

The majority of Study Area 6 does not have adequate fire and emergency service levels for any type of development; however, its road frontage along Highway 32 does have adequate service levels for rural and very low density residential development, as it is within eight to 14 minutes of one to two fire stations. None of the study area has adequate service levels for suburban residential, retail or industrial development.

a. Alternatives 1 and 3

Alternatives 1 and 3 call for call for approximately 100 and 600 new homes, respectively, at very low and suburban densities. In addition, Alternative 3 calls for retail development, 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. The majority of the development under Alternatives 1 and 3 would not have adequate fire and emergency service levels due to high travel times and a low station concentration in the immediate area. Moreover, the level of development under these alternatives would not support a new fire station, so there would be little opportunity to improve fire protection. Because the majority of the development under Alternatives 1 and 3 would not have adequate service levels, these alternatives receive a D.

b. Alternative 2

There would be no new development in this study area under Alternative 2, so fire and emergency services are not an issue.

2. Sheriff Services

Study Area 6 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 Study Area 6 is located near the Chico area, response times to this location are relatively quick.

There is no police station located within the boundaries of the Upper Stilson area; however, the Butte County Sheriff's Department in Chico is located within 5 miles of the southwestern boundary of the study area and 11 miles of the northeastern boundary.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would allow approximately 100 new homes in an area with quick response times. Because this development would not generate the need to hire a new officer, this alternative receives an A.

b. Alternative 2

There would be no new development in this study area under Alternative 2, so sheriff services are not an issue.

c. Alternative 3

Alternative 3 would allow approximately 600 new homes, generating the need for approximately two new officers in an area with quick response times. Therefore, this alternative receives a B.

3. Capacity of School Districts

Study Area 6 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.

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a. Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, Study Area 6 could generate approximately 30 new K-8 students and 20 new 9-12 students, which can be accommodated by the existing capacity. 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 existing capacity, this alternative receives an A.

b. Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, Study Area 6 would not generate any new students, so schools are not an issue.

c. Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, Study Area 6 could generate approximately 200 new K-8 students and 100 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 3 in all of the study areas within the CUSD could generate approximately 1,290 new K-8 students, about 1,180 students beyond current capacity, as well as approximately 630 new 9-12 students, about 540 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.

C. *Water*

1. **Water Supply**

Study Area 6 is located within the Foothill Inventory Unit. As discussed in more detail under the Forest Ranch study area, the foothills primarily rely on surface water. However, there is some groundwater supply from the Tuscan and Modesto Formations.

Study Area 6 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 Study Area 6. 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 approximately 100 new homes. Because there is no identified water supply for this minor development, this alternative receives a C.

b. *Alternative 2*

There would be no new development under Alternative 2, so water supply is not an issue.

c. *Alternative 3*

Alternative 3 calls for approximately 600 new homes and 30 acres of retail development. Because there is no identified water supply for this development, this alternative receives a D.

2. **Groundwater Recharge Potential**

Study Area 6 is located within the Foothill Inventory Unit. It may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 calls for approximately 100 new homes in a region that may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area. Therefore, this alternative receives a C.

b. Alternative 2

There would be no new development under Alternative 2. Therefore, this alternative receives an A.

c. Alternative 3

Alternative 3 allows significant residential development in a region that may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area. Therefore, this alternative receives a D.

D. Wastewater

There is currently no publicly managed sewer service in Study Area 6. The current wastewater treatment method is individual septic systems.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 calls for approximately 100 new homes at a very low density. This development cannot effectively be served by septic because it is too dense, nor can it effectively be served by a sewer system because there would be too few new homes to support the cost of a new sewer system. Therefore, this alternative receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

There would be no new development in this study area under Alternative 2, so wastewater is not an issue.

c. **Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 calls for approximately 600 new homes at very low and low densities, as well as about 30 acres of retail uses. This development can effectively be served by sewers due to the density and amount of development. Furthermore, it appears likely that this development would create the ability to form a new sewer system because it is all part of one development proposal. Therefore, this alternative receives a B.

E. Circulation

Study Area 6 is served by Highway 32.

1. Proximity to Freeways and Major Roadways

Highway 32 runs along a portion of the western boundary of the study area. Highway 32 provides a connection to Highway 99. This study area receives an A for access proximity to major roadways. Since Alternatives 1 and 2 do not include any new development, proximity to roadways is not an issue.

2. Bicycle Circulation

Within Study Area 6, bicycle facilities are planned on Highway 32. The study area is more than 1 mile from the City of Chico urban area. Due to the study area's high level of access to planned bicycle facilities and location more than 1 mile from an existing urban area, the study area receives a C. Since Alternatives 1 and 2 do not include any new development, bicycle circulation is not an issue.

3. Transit Service

Transit service is currently provided along Bruce Road, which is more than 1 mile from the study area. This receives a D. Since Alternatives 1 and 2 do not include any new development, transit service is not an issue.

F. Airport Compatibility Zone Conflicts

The Upper Stilson 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

The majority of the approximately 4,245 acres in Study Area 6 are identified as Grazing Land. Grazing Land is located throughout the study area, with the exception of the southeastern portion.

a. Alternatives 1 and 3

Under Alternative 1, 1,710 acres in Study Area 6 would be designated for non-agricultural uses, which would convert 1,590 acres of Grazing Land to non-agricultural uses. Alternative 3 would convert 1,150 acres of Grazing Land to non-agricultural uses. Therefore, Alternatives 1 and 3 receive a D.

b. Alternative 2

There would be no loss of Grazing Land to non-agricultural uses under Alternative 2, as the entire study area is designated for Resource Conservation. Therefore, Alternative 2 receives an A.

H. Biological Resources

The study area is located in the lower foothills. Most of the study area is outside of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area; however, the lower portion of the study area along Little Chico Creek is inside the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area. The predominant land cover types are chaparral and hardwood woodland dominated by blue oak. Small areas of grassland occur in the central portions of the study area. Little Chico Creek and associated riparian habitats bisect the lower portion of the study area.

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One special-status plant occurrence is known in the study area: California beaked rush is recorded on Little Chico Creek. No special-status animals have been recorded.

Outside the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area, the upper elevation mixed hardwood forests provide potential habitat for Butte County checkerbloom, white-stemmed clarkia, and Butte County fritillary, and special-status bat species.

Within the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area in the lower portion of this study area there is modeled habitat for the following 14 species:

- ◆ Bald eagle
- ◆ Butte County checkerbloom
- ◆ Butte County golden clover (small area along Little Chico Creek)
- ◆ Central Valley steelhead (Little Chico Creek)
- ◆ Fall-run Chinook (Little Chico Creek)
- ◆ Foothill yellow-legged frog (Little Chico Creek and lower tributaries)
- ◆ Northwestern pond turtle (Little Chico Creek lower reach)
- ◆ Swainson's hawk
- ◆ Tricolored blackbird
- ◆ Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (lower Little Chico Creek and lower tributaries)
- ◆ Western spadefoot (Little Chico Creek lower reach)
- ◆ Western burrowing owl
- ◆ White-tailed kite
- ◆ Yellow-breasted chat (lower Little Chico Creek area)

Little Chico Creek has been designated Critical Habitat for Central Valley steelhead. The study area is adjacent to the City of Chico's Bidwell Park along the northwest edge.

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Valley oak riparian woodland occurs along the lower reach of Little Chico Creek and mixed hardwood dominated by blue oak woodland occurs throughout the study area.

Almost the entire area is within Critical Winter Range habitat for deer herd, with a small portion within Winter Range habitat.

a. Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would allow residential development on approximately 40 percent of the study area and would designate the remainder as Agriculture, resulting in potential impacts on a large area of oak woodland and Critical Winter Range for deer herd. Therefore, this alternative receives a D for Special-Status Animal and Plant Species, an A for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, a D for Sensitive Habitats, and a D for Deer Herd Habitat.

b. Alternative 2

Under alternative 2 the entire area would be designated Resource Conservation. There would be impacts on biological resources, including Winter Range deer habitat, from recreational use (e.g. off-road vehicles, disturbance from increased visitation). These impacts could be minimized to some extent by configuring the recreational areas to avoid sensitive biological resources. Therefore, this alternative receives a C for Special-Status Animal and Plant Species, an A for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, a C for Sensitive Habitats, and a D for Deer Herd Habitat.

c. Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3 the area designated for residential development would be much greater than under Alternative 1 and would allow 600 new homes. In addition, the Resource Conservation designation may also accommodate a vineyard and agricultural tourism. Vineyards are one of the few agricultural crops that do not provide wildlife habitat, and agricultural tourism would increase visitation and associated disturbance. Combined, these developments could result in potential impacts on a large area of oak woodland and Critical Winter Range for deer. Therefore, this alternative receives D for Special-

Status Animal and Plant Species, an A for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, a D for Sensitive Habitats, and a D for Deer Herd Habitat.

I. Safety and Hazards

1. Fire Hazards

Study Area 6 includes moderate fire severity zones, high fire severity zones and very high fire severity zones.

a. Alternatives 1

Under Alternative 1, approximately 1,380 acres of land that would be developed are within the high fire severity zone and approximately 370 acres are within the very high fire severity zone. Therefore, this alternative receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, there would be no new development. Therefore, this alternative receives an A.

c. Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, approximately 2,400 acres of land that would be developed are within the high fire severity zone and approximately 1,100 acres are within the very high fire severity zone. Therefore, this alternative receives a D.

2. Flood Hazards

The southwest portion of Study Area 6 is included in the 100-year FEMA flood zone of the Little Chico Creek.

a. Alternatives 1 and 2

In Alternatives 1 and 2, approximately 15 acres of land that would be developed is within the 100-year FEMA flood zone. Therefore, these alternatives receive a C.

b. Alternative 3

In Alternative 3, development would not be limited by flood hazards. Although a small portion of the site is within the 100-year flood zone, it is assumed that development would be located on the portion of the site that is not constrained by flood hazards. Therefore, this alternative receives a B.

3. Geologic Hazards

Severe erosion hazards occur on approximately 2,430 acres in the west and north of the Upper Stilson Canyon study area. This study area has zero to low subsidence hazard, low to moderate and moderate landslide potential, low and moderate potential for soil expansion, and low liquefaction potential. A pre-quatarnary fault traverses the southwestern portion of Study Area 6.

a. Alternative 1

In Alternative 1, approximately 900 acres of land designated for development have severe erosion potential. Development under Alternative 1 would not be constrained by subsidence, landslide, expansive soils or liquefaction hazards. Although the pre-quatarnary fault in the southwestern portion of the study area is located in areas designated for development, pre-quatarnary faults are not considered to present a high risk of fault rupture and so would not constrain development. Because of the area of development that would be subject to severe erosion potential, Alternative 1 receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is not subject to significant geologic hazards and so receives an A.

c. Alternative 3

In Alternative 3, it is assumed that areas of severe erosion potential could be avoided by locating development in the less-constrained southern and eastern parts of the study area, so that erosion hazards would not be a constraint to development. Development under Alternative 3 would not be constrained by subsidence, landslide, expansive soils or liquefaction hazards. The pre-

quaternary fault is not considered to present a high risk of fault rupture and so would not constrain development. Because erosion hazard areas could be avoided in the precise location of development, Alternative 3 receives a B.

J. Cultural Resources

Study Area 6 lies within portions Paradise West USGS 7.5' quadrangle. Approximately 25 percent of the land in the Paradise West Quadrangle has been surveyed for cultural resources. To date, a total of three cultural resources sites have been recorded in Study Area 6. This number includes three prehistoric sites, including one lithic scatter and two multiple component sites. None of the sites have been evaluated for significance. The study area is in a foothill setting with available water. The presence of previously recorded sites indicates that this study area is of medium sensitivity for prehistoric cultural resources.

a. Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, the study area would be designated very low density residential and agriculture. Agricultural land in the study area would be devoted to grazing. This land use is not particularly destructive to most types of cultural resources. There are no designated Resource Conservation land uses under Alternative 1, resulting in the potential to impact significant cultural resources. Because of the large amount of acreage in unspecified agriculture and the lack of resource conservation, Alternative 1 receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

Alternative 2 does not include any development and so this alternative receives an A.

c. Alternative 3

Although this alternative would result in the largest number of new residential homes, there are approximately 3,350 acres of designated Resource

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Conservation land use that could be used to protect significant cultural resources. Alternative 3 receives a C.

K. Notes