

## 21 STUDY AREA 21: THERMALITO

The Thermalito study area consists of approximately 1,810 acres located near the City of Oroville. The unincorporated community of Thermalito is included within this study area, and it is bounded to the west and east by the City of Oroville. This study area is currently developed with some residential and public uses, as well as commercial along Highway 162. There are also many large undeveloped parcels, and there is some limited agriculture, including livestock and olive orchards.

- ◆ Alternative 1 follows the existing General Plan, designating the majority of the study area for Medium Density Residential, as well as some Medium-High Density Residential, Retail and Public. The existing General Plan allows approximately 7,000 new homes and about 90 acres of retail uses.
- ◆ Under Alternative 2, the retail uses along highway 162 would increase to about 110 acres. The remaining areas would maintain the land use designations from the existing General Plan, including the residential and public designations. As under the existing General Plan, this alternative would allow approximately 7,000 new homes.
- ◆ Under Alternative 3, most of the residential area would decrease in density to Rural and Very Low Density Residential, while smaller portions would maintain the Medium Density Residential designation, allowing approximately 1,500 new homes. The Retail and Public designations from Alternative 2 would remain.

### A. *Economics*

#### 1. Market Viability

##### a. Alternatives 1 and 2

Alternatives 1 and 2 both call for approximately 7,000 new residential homes, which is about three times the number of existing housing units in the study area. This is a very large amount of new development in what is arguably a fairly weak market area within the county. Successful buildout of Alternatives 1 or 2 would require capture of approximately 72 percent of the

projected new housing demand for the unincorporated areas by 2030. Capturing such a large share of demand is not likely. At the same time, new development of this magnitude could have the effect of helping to increase the vitality of the area through new investment.

For the retail component, Thermalito's location at the intersection of Highway 162 and Highway 70 means the study area is well located to capture demand from residents of the greater Oroville area, as well as residents to the southwest, in the Biggs and Gridley areas, who may have more limited shopping options in their own communities. Under both Alternatives 1 and 2, the number of new homes that would be allowed, in combination with existing development, would likely support a neighborhood shopping center with grocery store, drug store, casual restaurants, and personal services. However, the amount of retail space included under Alternative 1 is equivalent to approximately one regional shopping mall, which typically would require a population of about 300,000 people in its trade area to provide adequate market support. Since Chico is well-served with retail facilities and will tend to attract most Paradise residents for regional shopping trips, the effective trade area for retail in this study area is likely limited to the greater Oroville area, plus Biggs/Gridley. This trade area is unlikely to grow large enough to support the scale of retail development anticipated under this alternative within the General Plan time horizon.

Since both the residential and the retail components of Alternatives 1 and 2 are questionable, both alternatives receive a D.

b. Alternative 3

This alternative calls for a less aggressive amount of residential growth than the other two alternatives; thus its market risk for residential development is reduced. However, the retail component of Alternative 3 is even larger than the retail considered under Alternative 1, meaning its market viability is doubtful. The new retail that would be supported by Alternative 3 would more likely be small, local-serving convenience store, gas station, or small grocer. Since the residential component of Alternative 3 has solid market

viability, and only the retail component is questionable, Alternative 3 receives a C.

## **2. Fiscal Impacts**

### **a. Alternatives 1 and 2**

The Thermalito study area spans TRAs in which the county's share of property taxes ranges from 15.7 to 16.0 percent of the total, which is somewhat below average. In addition, property values tend to be relatively low in this part of the county, compared to the county as a whole, meaning that the residential component of Alternative 1 may struggle to provide adequate revenues to cover service costs. The 1.1 million square feet of retail space included in Alternative 1, and the 1.4 million square feet of retail space in Alternative 3, would tend to create positive fiscal results if built out successfully, but it is unlikely that this would occur. Since Thermalito has a certain amount of development and services already in place, service cost increases should be incremental. On balance, if successfully built out, this area has potential to generate fiscal benefits for the County, so both alternatives receive a B.

### **b. Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 would have the increased amount of retail development, but a greatly reduced amount of residential homes compared both Alternative 2 and Alternative 1. Among the three alternatives, Alternative 3 has the best potential for fiscal benefits. However, since the market viability of the retail development is low, the fiscal benefits may be correspondingly low. Alternative 3 receives a B.

## **3. Jobs/Housing Balance**

### **a. Alternatives 1 and 2**

The heavy residential emphasis of Alternatives 1 and 2 generates a jobs/housing ratio of less than one job for every one employed resident, meaning the planned development would cause a further deterioration of the jobs/housing balance in the Oroville area, which already has a surplus of housing and a deficit of jobs. Therefore, Alternatives 1 and 2 receive a D.

b. Alternative 3

The surplus of jobs that would be generated by the full buildout of the retail component of Alternative 3 is unlikely to occur during the General Plan horizon. Nevertheless, because of the significantly reduced amount of housing planned under Alternative 3, the projected jobs/housing ratio for two jobs for every one employed resident means that Alternative 3 would tend to help improve the jobs/housing ratio in the Oroville area. 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 the Thermalito 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 will impact the level of fire protection and emergency services.

There are no fire stations within the boundaries of the Thermalito study area. The closest fire station is the Butte County/CALFIRE Fire Station 63, a career-staffed station located less than a mile away.

The Thermalito study area has adequate service levels for rural and very low density residential development, as it is located within an eight-minute travel area for a first-due unit. In addition, the northeastern portion of this study area has adequate service levels for suburban residential, retail and industrial uses, as it is located within four minutes of a first-due unit and is within eight minutes of three or more fire stations.

a. Alternatives 1 and 2

Alternatives 1 and 2 call for approximately 7,000 new homes at suburban densities, as well as some retail development. These alternatives have enough

development that it could support a new fire station in the Thermalito study area. Therefore, these alternatives receive a B.

b. Alternative 3

Alternative 3 calls for approximately 1,500 new homes at rural, very low and suburban densities, as well as retail uses. The majority of the suburban residential and retail development would not have adequate fire and emergency service levels due to high travel times and a low concentration of fire stations in the immediate area. The rural and very low density residential development would have adequate service levels. The level of development under this alternative would not support a new fire station, so there would be little opportunity to improve fire protection. Because Alternative 2 allows more than minimal development, portions of which would have adequate service levels, this alternative receives a C.

**2. Sheriff Service**

The Thermalito study area is served by the Southern Division of the Butte County Sheriff's Office (BCSO). The BCSO is currently understaffed and has limited capacity for expansion of its services. The Southern Division typically has about three to four deputies on duty in the Oroville area. Because the Thermalito study area is located within the Oroville area, response times to this location are quick.

There is no police station located within the boundaries of the Thermalito study area; however, the Butte County Sheriff station in Oroville is located less than 1 mile away from the study area.

Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 call for significant growth, including 7,000 new homes under Alternatives 1 and 2, and 1,500 new homes under Alternative 3, as well as significant retail development. These alternatives would generate the need for more than five new officers in an area with quick response times. Therefore, these alternatives receive a C.

### 3. Capacity of School Districts

The Thermalito study area is served by the Thermalito Union School District (TUSD) (K-8) and the Oroville Union High School District (OUHSD) (9-12).

The TUSD has maintained a stable enrollment for the past five years, although a decline is expected next year. Its current enrollment is approximately 1,450 students, while it has the capacity for 1,570 students, meaning the District has the capacity for approximately 120 more students. The TUSD has completed all of its recent expansion plans, and is beginning a facilities master planning process to identify future school sites.

The OUHSD has been experiencing declining enrollment. The District's current enrollment is approximately 2,950 students, while it has the capacity for 3,390 students, meaning the District has the capacity for approximately 440 more students. There are numerous improvement projects underway, including one that will expand the capacity of the Oroville High School by about 100 students. In addition, some of the existing campuses could accommodate additional classrooms to expand capacity, and there are discussions about potential new high school sites throughout the District, although there are no specific plans underway.

#### a. Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, the Thermalito study area could generate approximately 2,310 new students within the TUSD, which would exceed its current capacity by about 2,190 students. The new students generated from this study area by this alternative could support about six new K-8 schools. This would significantly increase the size of the TUSD and require additional administration and other services.

The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 1 in all of the study areas within the TUSD could generate approximately 2,330 new students, about 2,210 students beyond current capacity.

**BUTTE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2030  
ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION  
STUDY AREA 21: THERMALITO**

Under Alternative 1, the Thermalito study area could generate approximately 1,130 new students within the OUHSD, which would exceed its planned capacity by about 590 students. The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 1 in all of the study areas within the OUHSD could generate approximately 7,250 new students, more than double the current enrollment and about 6,810 students beyond current capacity.

Because this alternative could generate more students than could be accommodated by the existing capacities, but would not generate enough students to support the construction of a new high school, this alternative receives a D.

b. Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, the Thermalito study area could generate approximately 2,310 new students within the TUSD; there would be no new students from other study areas within this District. This student generation is about 2,190 students beyond its current capacity, which would support about six new K-8 schools. This would significantly increase the size of the TUSD and require additional administration and other services.

Under Alternative 2, the Thermalito study area could generate approximately 1,130 new students within the OUHSD, which would exceed its planned capacity by about 590 students. The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 2 in all of the study areas within the OUHSD could generate approximately 2,040 new students, more than double the current enrollment and about 1,600 students beyond current capacity.

Because this alternative could generate more students than could be accommodated by the existing capacities, but would not generate enough students to support the construction of a new high school, this alternative receives a D.

c. Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, the Thermalito study area could generate approximately 500 new students within the TUSD, which would exceed its current capacity by about 380 students. The new students generated from this study area by this alternative would support about one new K-8 school.

The total amount of development foreseen under Alternative 3 in all of the study areas within the TUSD could generate approximately 890 new students, about 770 students beyond current capacity.

Under Alternative 3, the Thermalito study area could generate approximately 240 new students within the OUHSD, which could be accommodated by the existing capacity. The total amount of development foreseen in Alternative 3 in all of the study areas within the OUHSD could generate approximately 3,220 new students, about 2,780 students beyond current capacity.

Because the number of new students generated by this study area could support the construction of a new K-8 school, this alternative receives a C.

*C. Water*

**1. Water Supply**

The Thermalito study area is located within the Sacramento Valley Inventory Unit, where groundwater is stored in the Tuscan, Laguna, Riverbank and Modesto Formations. Groundwater in these formations primarily exists within the spaces between sand and gravel deposits, which generally allow greater recharge and access to groundwater than aquifers relying on the fractures and joints of rocks. The Tuscan Formation provides water for deep irrigation and municipal wells, while the Riverbank and Modesto Formations provide water for shallower domestic wells.

The Thermalito study area is located within the Thermalito Inventory Sub-Unit. Water demands are primarily urban, although there are also agricultural water users.

The Thermalito study area is served by the Thermalito Irrigation District (TID), which supplies primarily surface water from Concow Lake to a combination of residential, industrial and governmental users. The District also has five backup groundwater wells. TID has sufficient water supply for current and expected demand, and is planning an expansion of its treatment plant to improve service during periods of maximum demand.

Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 call for residential and retail development. Since this development would be served by TID, an existing water service provider, all alternatives receive an A.

## **2. Groundwater Recharge Potential**

The Thermalito study area is located within the Valley Inventory Unit. It may serve as a moderate or high potential recharge area. Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 call for significant development in this study area, and therefore receive a D.

### *D. Wastewater*

The Thermalito study area is served by the Thermalito Irrigation District (TID), which provides wastewater collection services to portions of the City of Oroville and adjacent unincorporated areas. TID is also part of a Joint Powers Agreement with the Sewerage Commission – Oroville Region (SC-OR), which handles wastewater treatment and disposal.

TID's collection system currently has no significant capacity issues and is generally in good condition. There are no current plans to expand the capacity of TID's collection system, but significant developments may be

required to upgrade the existing collection system downstream if additional capacity is required.

Recently, SC-OR has indicated that its collection system and treatment plant may not have sufficient capacity to serve additional development in areas that would rely on the West Interceptor, which includes the areas within TID.

Alternatives 1 and 2 call for approximately 7,000 new homes at medium and medium-high densities, and Alternative 3 calls for approximately 1,500 new homes at a variety of densities. In addition, all alternatives include significant retail development. Development under all alternatives would be served by TID and SC-OR.

Although SC-OR's system is currently at capacity in this area, additional development could help fund needed improvements to SC-OR's system. However, because SC-OR's ability to serve additional development under Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 is in question, all alternatives receive a C.

### *E. Circulation*

Thermalito is served by one major regional roadway, Highway 162, as well as by an existing network of local streets.

#### **1. Proximity to Freeways and Major Roadways**

Two major regional roadways travel through or adjacent to the Thermalito study area. Highway 162 runs through the study area and Highway 70 clips its eastern boundary. Highway 162 connects to both Highway 70 and Highway 99. This study area receives an A for access proximity to major roadways.

#### **2. Bicycle Circulation**

Adjacent to Thermalito, bicycle facilities are planned along Highway 162, Nelson Avenue, and 20<sup>th</sup> Street. The location of the study area adjacent to

the City of Oroville allows for bicycle access to jobs, schools, and services in Oroville. Due to the study area's high level of access to planned bicycle facilities and location adjacent to the Oroville urban area, the study area receives a B.

### **3. Transit Service**

Transit service is currently provided along Nelson Avenue, Grand Avenue, 10<sup>th</sup> Street, and 14<sup>th</sup> Street in the study area. This receives an A.

#### *F. Airport Compatibility Zone Conflicts*

Portions of the Thermalito study area are located within Airport Compatibility Zones C and D.

The land uses assigned under all alternatives are compatible with the 2000 Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. Therefore, airport compatibility issues would not affect development under Alternatives 1, 2 or 3.

#### *G. Potential Loss of Agricultural Land*

Of the approximately 1,810 acres in the Thermalito study area, about 30 acres are identified as Farmland of Statewide Importance and 355 acres are identified as Grazing Land. The Farmland of Statewide Importance is located in two pockets, one in the central portion and the other in the southern portion of the study area. The Grazing Land is located in the northwest portion.

Under Alternatives 1, 2 and 3, the entire Thermalito study area would be designated for non-agricultural uses, which would convert 30 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance and 355 acres of Grazing Land to non-agricultural uses. Therefore, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 receive a D.

### *H. Biological Resources*

The Thermalito study area is located on the valley floor and is within the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) area. The predominant land cover type is open ranchettes, with smaller areas of grassland and urban land. Grassland with vernal swale complex occurs in the northwest portion.

There are no special-status plant or animal CNDDDB occurrences in the Thermalito study area.

There is Butte Regional Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP)-modeled habitat in this study area for the following 17 species:

- ◆ Ahart's dwarf rush
- ◆ Bald eagle
- ◆ Conservancy fairy shrimp
- ◆ Greene's tuctoria
- ◆ Hairy Orcutt grass
- ◆ Hoover's spurge
- ◆ Northwestern pond turtle breeding habitat in pond
- ◆ Peregrine falcon
- ◆ Swainson's hawk
- ◆ Tricolored blackbird
- ◆ Valley elderberry longhorn beetle
- ◆ Vernal pool fairy shrimp
- ◆ Vernal pool tadpole shrimp
- ◆ Western burrowing owl
- ◆ Western spadefoot
- ◆ White-tailed kite
- ◆ Yellow-breasted chat

There is no Critical Habitat or other protected lands in the study area. The Feather River, which forms the southwestern boundary of the study area, has been designated Critical Habitat for Central Valley steelhead and Central

Valley spring and fall-run Chinook. The study area is adjacent to Department of Water Resources lands around Thermalito Forebay on the west and north edge, and is also adjacent to the Oroville State Wildlife Area along the southeast edge.

Grassland with vernal swale complex is present in the northwest corner of the study area. Small areas of valley oak riparian woodland have been mapped scattered throughout the study area, and valley oak riparian and emergent wetlands are associated with the Feather River in the east of the study area.

There is no deer herd habitat in the study area.

Because of the sensitive habitats and the potential habitat for special-status species, which would be difficult to avoid, these alternatives receive a C for Special-Status Animal and Plant Species, an A for Critical Habitat and other protected lands, a C for Sensitive Habitats, and an A for Deer Herd Habitat.

## *I. Safety and Hazards*

### **1. Fire Hazards**

The Thermalito study area is located in a moderate fire severity zone. Fire hazards would not affect development under Alternatives 1, 2 or 3; therefore, these alternatives receive an A.

### **2. Flood Hazards**

Approximately 130 acres of the Thermalito study area are included in the 100-year FEMA flood zone of the Feather River, and approximately 5 acres are within the 500-year FEMA flood zone of the Feather River. Therefore, the alternatives receive a D.

### **3. Geologic Hazards**

The majority of the Thermalito study area has slight erosion potential, although there is a small area of moderate erosion potential in the southern

part of the study area. This study area has zero to low subsidence potential, zero to low landslide potential, low to moderate potential for soil expansion, and low to moderate liquefaction potential. There are no faults within the Thermalito study area or within a 50-foot radius.

Geologic hazards would not be a significant constraint to development in any of the Thermalito study area alternatives. All three alternatives in this study area receive an A.

#### *J. Cultural Resources*

The Thermalito study area lies within the Oroville and Palermo USGS 7.5' quadrangles. Approximately 25 percent of the land in the Oroville Quadrangle and 25 percent of the land in the Palermo quadrangle has been surveyed for cultural resources. To date, no cultural resources sites have been recorded in Thermalito. This study area lies within in a valley region, and abuts the Feather River on the east side. The lack of previously recorded sites, as well as modern buildup within this study area indicates that this study area is of low sensitivity for cultural resources.

##### **1. Alternatives 1 and 2**

Alternatives 1 and 2 would result in more than 90 percent of the study area used for medium and medium-high density residential development. Although there are no previously recorded cultural resources in the study area, there is no designated Resource Conservation land use for these alternatives that could be used to protect potential significant cultural resources. Due to the large acreage and high density of development and the lack of Resource Conservation, Alternatives 1 and 2 receive a D.

##### **2. Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 allows for far fewer new residential homes than the other alternatives. It does not include designated Resource Conservation land use that could be used to protect potential significant cultural resources. Despite

BUTTE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2030  
ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION  
STUDY AREA 21: THERMALITO

the lack of Resource Conservation, because of the much lower density of development compared to the other two alternatives, Alternative 3 receives a B.

*K. Notes*

**BUTTE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2030  
ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION  
STUDY AREA 21: THERMALITO**