

COMSTOCK HOMES DEVELOPMENT AND ELLWOOD MESA OPEN SPACE PLAN FEIR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ES-1 OVERVIEW

The City of Goleta has prepared this project level Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), to address the potential environmental impacts of the Comstock Homes Development, various land use designation changes, and implementation of Ellwood-Devereux Coast Open Space and Habitat Management Plan components that fall within the City's jurisdiction. The EIR process for the proposed Comstock Homes Development and Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan project has included: issuance of the Draft EIR on March 23, 2004; a 45-day public comment period (including five public hearings) for comment by the public and federal, state, and local agencies; and preparation of this Final EIR. This Final EIR addresses comments received on the Draft EIR in Appendix E. The text of the Final EIR includes revisions made in response to comments received on the Draft EIR. Text changes are indicated by a vertical line in the margin on applicable pages of the Final EIR. Due to the extent of changes to Table ES-1, vertical lines indicating text changes are not shown. The figures and maps in Sections 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 4.0, and 6.0 of the Final EIR are the same as presented in the Draft EIR.

The Final EIR will be reviewed by the City of Goleta City Council and, if deemed by the City Council to be adequate under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will be certified by the City Council. Since the proposed project is located in the California Coastal Zone, the California Coastal Commission would also need to approve the project before the City of Goleta can issue Land Use Permits for the residential and open space plan components of the project. Other related actions that would need to occur before the project could proceed include completion of the land exchange involving privately owned Ellwood Mesa and a portion of the City of Goleta's existing Santa Barbara Shores Park.

The Comstock Homes Development project as considered in this EIR is a proposed 78 unit single-family development. The Ellwood-Devereux Open Space and Habitat Management Plan includes a roughly 650-acre contiguous area along the coast managed for public access and natural resource protection. Approximately 238 acres of this total fall within the City of Goleta. This EIR refers to the City of Goleta components of the Ellwood-Devereux Open Space and Habitat Management Plan as the Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan.

In addition to the proposed Comstock Homes Development, this EIR also includes the environmental review for proposed land use designation changes including a rezone of the 136 acre Ellwood Mesa properties from residential to recreation and a rezone of three parcels within or adjacent to the Coronado Preserve area from residential to recreation

Although the potential environmental impacts of the Comstock Homes Development and implementation of the Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan are dealt with separately in the EIR, the projects are closely linked. The establishment of the Open Space Plan area and associated public access and habitat improvements are dependent upon approval of the proposed relocation of

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Executive Summary Comstock Homes Development away from the Ellwood Mesa site with its more sensitive coastal resources.

The intent of this EIR is to present the consequences and benefits of carrying out these projects. To this end, the document presents both short-term and long-term impacts in terms of their significance and extent. Mitigation measures and monitoring programs for avoiding or reducing adverse impacts are discussed, along with any residual impacts that would remain. Alternatives to the proposed Comstock Homes Development and the Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan are presented and their impacts are compared with those associated with the projects. Finally, to assess how these projects fit in with other approved and proposed projects, the EIR contains an analysis of cumulative impacts.

The process that led to the definition of the proposed projects is key to understanding how they relate to each other and what their critical components are. Briefly, three entities, the City of Goleta, the County of Santa Barbara, and the University of California at Santa Barbara were faced with development applications or needs that could have lead to the construction of several housing projects on vacant coastal property. The City of Goleta, the County, and the University realized that the coastal properties in question were exceptional, both in terms of natural resources and recreational opportunities. By working together, the three entities sought to relocate proposed residential development away from sites nearer the coast. They decided to acquire and combine the vacated parcels with existing managed areas to create an Open Space consisting of roughly 650 acres of coastal bluffs, dunes, wetlands, grasslands, and eucalyptus groves hosting monarch butterfly overwintering sites and raptor nests.

The process for this ambitious undertaking formally began with the release of the Joint Proposal for the Ellwood-Devereux Coast in March 2002 as amended by a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Goleta, the County, and the University in March 2003. These documents laid out a series of recommendations for providing needed housing; for protecting and managing valuable coastal resources; and for maintaining quality recreational opportunities. Shortly thereafter, the three sponsoring agencies initiated a Joint Review Panel that has supervised the development of this EIR; the preparation of an Open Space Preliminary Concepts document and a Draft Open Space Plan; and the development of EIRs for the City of Goleta, County of Santa Barbara, and the University. The Joint Review Panel also has actively solicited public input through a series of workshops, scoping meetings, public hearings, and presentations. It is currently anticipated that the Draft Open Space Plan will be finalized in August of 2004.

The proposed Comstock Homes Development project will be sited at the northwestern boundary of the Ellwood Mesa Open Space. This is a 36-acre vacant, but previously disturbed, area in the existing City of Goleta Santa Barbara Shores Park. While many of the impacts associated with the construction of 78 single-family houses would be either insignificant or capable of being mitigated to acceptable levels, there are also several Class I impacts in the areas of biological resources, visual resources, recreation, traffic and circulation, noise, and air quality. Class I impacts are defined as impacts that will be significant in spite of possible mitigation

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measures. The applicant (Comstock Homes) for the proposed residential development submitted a revised site plan (Comstock Alternate 1) subsequent to preparation of the Draft EIR. The Comstock Alternate 1 site plan would reduce many of the impacts associated with the proposed 78-unit project evaluated in the EIR. Refer to Master Response L in Appendix E for a description and evaluation of the applicant's proposed revised site plan (Comstock Alternate 1).

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The re-location and permitting of the Comstock Homes Development, and related City of Goleta actions will result in the creation of approximately 238 of the total 650 acres comprising the Ellwood-Devereux Coast Open Space Plan area. These acres are characterized by expansive vistas of grasslands, coastal bluffs, beaches, the Pacific Ocean and Channel Islands, and the Santa Ynez Mountains. In addition, this portion of the Open Space contains monarch butterfly over wintering sites and raptor nesting areas.

Proposed restoration and enhancement opportunities in the Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan will improve the quality and productivity of sensitive habitats. Trails, access points and related public amenities included in the Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan, are intended to provide passive recreational opportunities consistent with environmental protection goals. For the most part, impacts associated with implementation of this Plan are insignificant or capable of being mitigated to acceptable levels. Many of the impacts of implementing the Plan are beneficial in terms of improving and protecting sensitive habitats. However, significant and unavoidable impacts associated with trail closures are expected to result from the change in recreational user experience and from limitations on equestrian access.

ES-2 GOALS AND CHALLENGES

By approving and carrying out the Comstock Homes Development, the City of Goleta intends to provide move single family housing (previously approved by the County of Santa Barbara) to a location that is less environmentally sensitive than the one originally proposed. In addition, the City of Goleta intends to acquire the land originally slated for residential development and rezone it as recreational open space. This will allow the City to create a contiguous expanse of permanent open space that links to the rest of the proposed Ellwood-Devereux Coast Open Space Plan area.

Within the newly created Ellwood Mesa Open Space, the City plans to balance recreational opportunities with the restoration and preservation of sensitive habitats including monarch groves, vernal pools, grasslands, and aquatic habitats. Proposed trails, access points and other amenities are designed to provide hiking, biking, horseback riding, and other passive recreational opportunities that do not encroach upon or adversely affect coastal resources. Furthermore, the City of Goleta is committed to retaining the natural, unspoiled, and undeveloped character of the Ellwood Mesa. Where appropriate, trails will remain "as is" or will be improved slightly with the addition of natural surface materials. Where conflicts between existing trails and sensitive resources occur, trail closures and re-routes are proposed.

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Executive Summary The City has faced a number of challenges in developing the Ellwood Mesa Open Space Plan. These include balancing a wide variety of opinions regarding appropriate uses of the Open Space; considering conflicting viewpoints regarding potential restrictions; and a range of concepts regarding the type of management, if any, that should be responsible for the Open Space.

Assuming the Goleta City Council certifies this Final EIR, the City expects to take action on the residential, land use, and open space components through the City's discretionary permitting process and to subsequently submit Coastal Development Permit Applications to the California Coastal Commission for its approval.

Table ES-1 (Summary of Environmental Effects and Mitigation Measures), which comprises the remainder of this Executive Summary, presents a summary of the environmental impacts resulting from the proposed project. It is organized to correspond with the order of the environmental issues discussed in Section 4.0 and is arranged in four columns: the identified impact under each EIR issue area; the level of significance prior to mitigation; mitigation measures that would avoid or reduce the level of impacts; and the level of significance after implementation of feasible mitigation measures, if applicable. Where no mitigation is required, it is noted in the table. The table is further organized by classification of impacts. Class I impacts are presented first, followed by Class II, Class III, and Class IV Impacts.