

3.13

RECREATION

3.13 Recreation

This section of the Draft EIR focuses on recreational facilities in Merced. A description of existing facilities is given, as well as an analysis of the potential project-related impacts related to future demand for recreational facilities. During the NOP period, no comments were received regarding recreation.

3.13.1 SETTING

Environmental Setting

The City of Merced has a well developed network of parks and recreation facilities. The City of Merced has historically used the standard of five acres of City park land for every thousand residents. In addition to the five acres of City park land per thousand people, the parks and open space system is supplemented by school grounds, church grounds, Lake Yosemite and other similar facilities. These supplemental recreation opportunities are not included in the standard.

According to the 2004 Park and Open Space Master Plan, the City has acquired park land, as well as providing other recreational opportunities, using the five acres per 1,000 population standard for almost 30 years. In 2004, the overall ratio was 4.98 acres per 1,000 population.

In terms of developed parks, approximately 328 +/- acres have been developed into usable parks and open space as of 2010, up from 311 acres in 2004. See [Table 3.13-1](#) for an inventory of City park land and [Figure 3.13-1](#) for a map of existing and proposed parks in the Merced area.

**Table 3.13-1
Merced City Park Land Inventory by Type (2010)**

| Summary | No. | Improved Acres |
|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Total Community Parks | 3 | 83.6 |
| Total Neighborhood Parks | 7 | 63.8 |
| Total Mini-Parks | 10 | 4.2 |
| Total Linear Parks | 4 | 120.4 |
| Total Other Park/Rec. Sites | 5 | 56.6 |
| Total | 24 | 328.6 |

According to the Park and Open Space Master Plan, parks in Merced are classified as follows.

- **Mini-Parks**, tot lots and children's playgrounds are all small, single purpose play lots designed primarily for small children usage. Due to their size, the facilities are usually limited to a small open grass area, a children's playground and a small picnic area.
- **Neighborhood Parks** are a combination playground and park, designed primarily for non supervised, non-organized recreation activities. They are generally small in size (about 5 acres) and serve an area of approximately one-half mile radius. Typically, facilities found in a neighborhood park include a children's playground, picnic areas, trails, open grass areas for

passive use, outdoor basketball courts and multi-use sport fields for soccer, softball, and baseball. Optimum size is between three and seven acres.

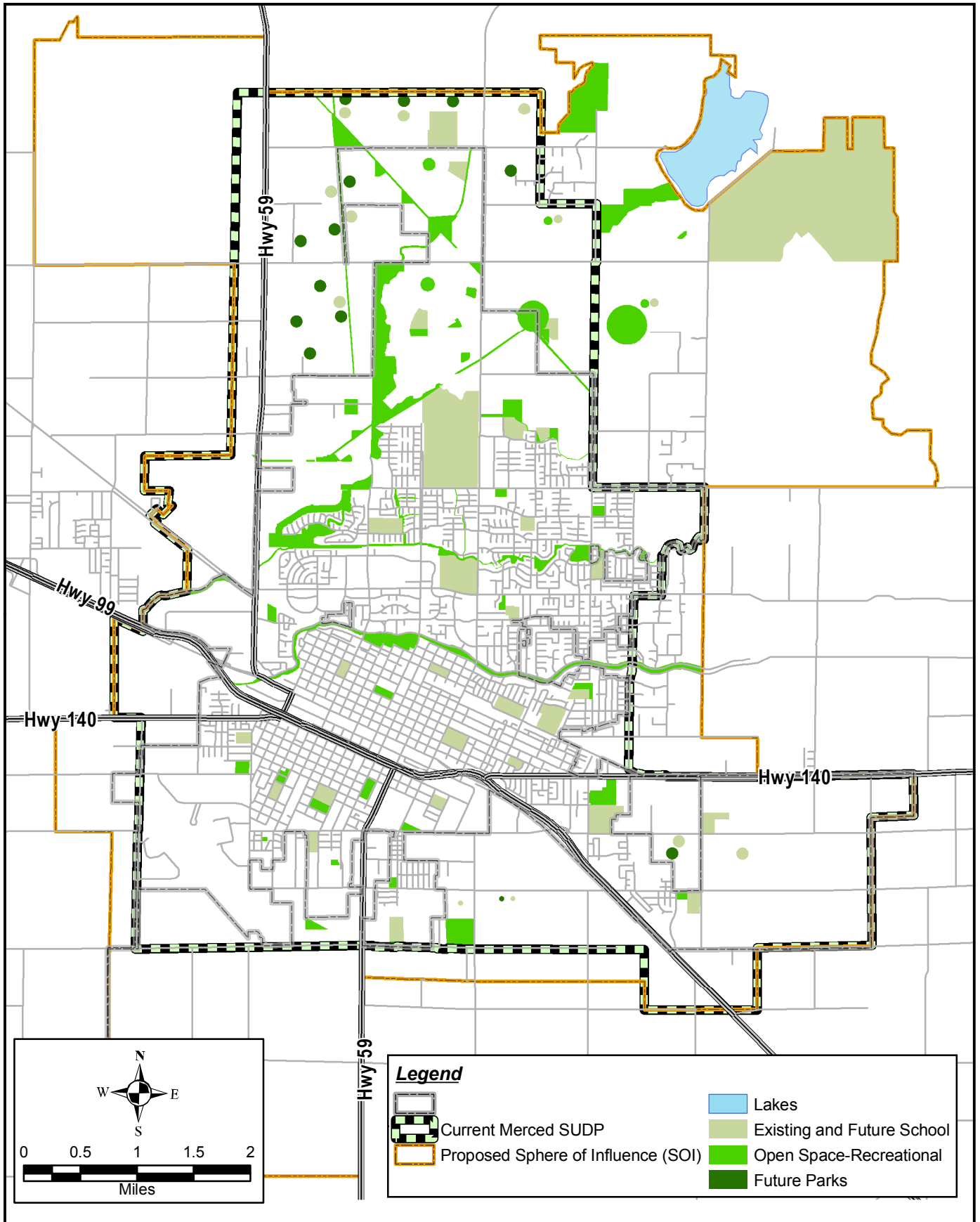
- **Community Parks** are planned primarily to provide active and structured recreation opportunities. In general, community park facilities are designed for organized activities and sports, although individual and family activities are also encouraged. Community parks serve a much larger area and offer more facilities. As a result, they require more in terms of support facilities such as parking, restrooms, and covered play areas. Community parks usually have sport fields or similar facilities as the central focus of the park. Their service area is roughly a one to two mile radius. Optimum size is between 15 and 20 acres.
- **School Parks** are park facilities, usually neighborhood park facilities that are developed adjacent to or on school grounds.
- **Special Use Areas** are miscellaneous public recreation areas or land occupied by a specialized facility. Some of the uses falling into this classification include community centers, skate parks, community gardens, or sites occupied by buildings.
- **Urban Plazas** are small parks, usually passive, that provide an opportunity for the public to gather in urban locations. Size varies, but urban plazas are typically small and primarily hard surfaces.
- **Athletic Parks** are sites where sports fields are the central focus. Facilities may consist of baseball, softball and soccer fields. Supplemental activities may include tennis, volleyball, playgrounds, and picnic areas.
- **Linear Parks** are open spaces or developed landscaped areas that follow linear corridors such as creek corridors, canals, trail corridors, abandoned railroad right-of-ways, canals, and other elongated features. This type of park usually contains pedestrian/bicycle trails, landscaped areas, viewpoints and seating areas. Neighborhood park facilities may be incorporated when space is available.

SCHOOLS AND PARKS

School facilities act as a supplement to the park system in Merced. They provide virtually the same active recreation facilities and opportunities as a typical City park; however, passive recreation facilities are usually limited at school recreation sites. The City of Merced and local school districts have worked closely in the past to share facilities and programs. The City and school districts have promoted development and design of combined facilities, incorporating active and passive recreation opportunities. Ada Givens and Burbank School/Parks are examples of combined facility planning.

EXISTING RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

The Merced park system consists of both active and passive recreational areas, including a variety of park types, as well as an extensive off-street bicycle path system. The City of Merced



has approximately 187 acres of active parkland, more than 120 acres of linear parkland encompassing the stream corridors where the bike paths are located, and more than 56 acres of undeveloped parkland. The bike trail system is contained in four creek corridors, and currently totals 13 miles. Expansions to this system are planned, and funding is in place for some of them. In Merced, the inventory of recreation facilities such as sports fields used by the public is relatively low, and the City itself provides only a few facilities. The City owns one gymnasium, except the McCombs Youth Center, which is operated by the Boys and Girls Club. The City relies heavily on the local school districts for athletic fields and gymnasiums. The following facilities are available for public use in Merced:

- 23 youth softball/baseball fields (3 lighted);
- 5 adult softball fields (all lighted);
- 13 soccer fields (does not include open turf areas); and
- 6 tennis courts; and
- 5,450 s.f. of pool space.

Other recreational sites in the planning area owned by public agencies include the Merced County Fairgrounds (owned by the State of California), Courthouse Park, and Flanagan Park, (the latter now owned by the City of Merced). Lake Yosemite, also owned by Merced County, is located to the northeast of the planning area and is adjacent to the U.C. Merced campus. A full list of the City of Merced Parks can be found in [Table 3.13-2](#).

Table 3.13-2
Merced City Park Land Inventory

| | Acres | Facilities | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|------------|----|----|---|----|----|----|
| | | RB | PG | PS | S | BF | BB | RR |
| Regional Parks: | | | | | | | | |
| Applegate Park | 32.37 | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| Youth Sports Complex | 12.34 | | | | | X | | X |
| Community Parks: | | | | | | | | |
| Fahrens Park | 47.62 | | X | | | | X | X |
| Joe Herb Park | 26.74 | | X | X | | X | | X |
| McNamara Park | 8.70 | X | X | | X | | X | X |
| Neighborhood Parks: | | | | | | | | |
| Ada Givens Park | 10.00 | | X | X | X | | | X |
| Bob Carpenter Park | 5.99 | | | | | | | |
| Burbank Park | 3.28 | | X | | | | | |
| Davenport Park | 7.5 | | | | | | | |
| Gilbert Macias Park | 4.91 | | | X | | | X | X |
| Rahilly Park | 28.91 | | X | X | | | | X |
| Roland D. Brooks Jr. Park | 4.00 | | | | | | | |
| Stephan Gray Park | 2.50 | | | | | | | |
| Stephen Leonard Park | 2.70 | X | X | | X | | X | X |
| Mini Parks: | | | | | | | | |
| 12 th and G St. | 0.19 | | X | | | | | |
| 11 th and H St. | 0.17 | | X | | | | | |
| 8 th and V St. | 0.89 | | X | | | | | |

| | Acres | Facilities | | | | | | |
|---|-------|------------|----|----|---|----|----|----|
| | | RB | PG | PS | S | BF | BB | RR |
| Dennis Chavez Park | 0.28 | | X | | | | | |
| William Lloyd Garrison Park | 1.02 | | | | | | | |
| Diego Rivera Park | 0.25 | | X | | | | | |
| Love Veasley Park | 0.17 | | X | | | | | |
| Harriet Tubman Park | 0.45 | | X | | | | | |
| Charles Richard Drew Park | 0.52 | | X | | | | | |
| Circle Drive Park | 0.26 | | X | | | | | |
| Linear Parks: | | | | | | | | |
| Sante Fe | 15.60 | | X | | | | | |
| Black Rascal Creek | 22.00 | | X | | | | | |
| Bear Creek | 8.00 | | | | | | | |
| RB=Recreation Building S=Pool PG= Playground BF=Ballfields PS=Picnic Shelter RR=Rest Room BB-Basketball | | | | | | | | |

Source: City of Merced Parks and Community Services Department, 2007

Recreational Programs

A variety of programs for youth, adults and seniors are organized through the City of Merced Parks and Community Services Department, including swimming lessons, leisure classes, youth services and after school programs, senior activities, and youth and adult sports.

Bike Paths

The City of Merced has an extensive City bikeway system and has recently added a number of new lanes and routes. North-South additions include “G” Street, “R” Street, and “V” Street. East-West additions include Childs Avenue, 13th Street, East Main Street, and Yosemite Avenue. Bicyclists can follow these routes to nearly any area within and surrounding the City. The Bicycle Transportation Plan is shown on Figure 4.9 of the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan document.

Existing bike paths include, but are not limited to the Class 1 bike paths along existing waterways such as Bear Creek and Black Rascal Creek. Each of these bike paths extends from McKee Road (east) to Highway 59 (west). The system will also be extended to complete a larger loop sub-route along Fahrens Creek, to Lake Yosemite and down Lake Road (extended) to Black Rascal Creek. Ultimately, this could allow the system to be extended to provide regional bicycle access to the UC campus. Class I bikeways will also extend along powerline easements and the old Yosemite Valley Railroad corridor that criss-cross the northern growth area.

Grounds & Maintenance

In addition to the parks and bike paths, the Public Works Department also maintains an extensive amount of medians, parkways, and public City grounds. These areas include but are not limited to, Civic Center, Senior/Community Center, Downtown, Olive Ave Medians and more totaling over 35 acres of land.

Private Facilities

The City of Merced also has a number of private or commercial recreational facilities such as racquet ball courts, swimming pools, church-operated facilities, gyms and fitness clubs, and nearby golf courses, which contribute to overall recreational opportunities for the City's residents.

Merced County

Merced County offers thousands of acres of federal, state and recreation facilities to accommodate many types of outdoor leisure activities ranging from sightseeing to boating, picnicking and camping. These facilities provide both economic and open space benefits to county residents. These lands represent a unique assortment of facilities that provide recreational opportunities to both residents and visitors.

There are eight federally-managed parks and recreation areas in Merced County offering a wide range of activities. There are nine state-managed areas in the County. Merced County operates 11 parks and recreation areas, including Courthouse Park in central Merced and Lake Yosemite Park, located four miles north of Merced.

Regulatory Setting

FEDERAL

There are no specific federal regulations applicable to recreation.

STATE

Quimby Act

Cities and counties have been authorized since the passage of the 1975 Quimby Act (California Government Code §66477) to pass ordinances requiring that developers set aside land, donate conservation easements, or pay fees for park improvements. Revenues generated through the Quimby Act cannot be used for the operation and maintenance of park facilities. The amount of the fee is limited by statute and must be based upon the policies and standards contained in an adopted general or specific plan. The City has a parkland/dedication in-lieu fee, and has also adopted a development impact fee for community parks and Class 1 bike paths.

LOCAL

Park and Open Space Master Plan

The City updated and adopted the Park and Open Space Master Plan in 2004. The 2004 Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan contains an assessment of park, open space, and facility needs; recommendations and policies for the acquisition and development of future park sites as well as improvements to existing parks and facilities; recommendations on organization, operations, and maintenance to manage the park and recreation programs in the City; and a list of projects and

actions necessary to implement the Master Plan, identifies project priorities, and potential funding sources. Standards identified in the Master Plan indicate that the City will need approximately 180 acres of additional parkland for the projected 2030 population of 116,800. The City park system will need to provide for other types of recreational facilities, such as gymnasiums and swimming pools, as part of its development.

General Plan Consistency

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains a number of policies that apply to recreation impacts in conjunction with ultimate build-out of the City in accordance with the General Plan. The specific policies listed below contained in the Land Use, Transportation and Circulation, Public Services and Facilities, and the Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Elements of the General Plan are designed to ensure that recreation impacts are minimized as development occurs in accordance with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*.

Land Use Policies:

L-1.8 Create livable and identifiable residential neighborhoods.

Transportation and Circulation:

T-2.6 Maintain and expand the community's existing bicycle circulation system.

Public Services and Facilities Policies:

P-1.3 Require new development to provide or pay for its fair share of public facility and infrastructure improvements.

P-5.2 Integrate drainage facilities with bike paths, sidewalks, recreation facilities, agricultural activities, groundwater recharge, and landscaping.

P-8.1 The City will support the cultural and health related needs of the community by incorporating such facilities and services in development and redevelopment proposals.

P-8.2 The City shall promote consolidation of complementary or support services to avoid duplication of programs.

Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Policies:

OS-1.2 Preserve and enhance creeks in their natural state throughout the planning area.

OS-3.1 Provide high-quality park and open space facilities to serve the needs of a growing population.

OS-3.2 Maintain and expand the City's Bikeway and Trail System.

OS-3.3 Maintain the City's existing high-quality open space facilities.

OS-3.4 Develop a diverse and integrated system of park facilities throughout Merced.

3.13.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project will have a significant impact on the environment if it will:

- Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated
- Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment

3.13.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact #3.13-1: Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities.

Discussion/Conclusion: New development under the proposed General Plan has the potential to increase the demand for parks and recreational facilities. The Plan Update includes a policy of providing five acres of parkland for every new 1,000 residents (Policy OS-3.1, Implementing Action 3.1.a), as allowed under the Quimby Act. Based on the expected 2030 population of approximately 116,800 persons, there would be a need to provide a total of 180 acres of additional parkland to maintain this policy. Without additional park acreage, there could be an increase in the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities, which could hasten the deterioration of the existing facilities.

The General Plan includes policies and implementing actions to ensure that the City's parkland goal is met and existing facilities are not negatively impacted by future growth. Policy OS-3.1 calls for the City to provide high quality park and open space facilities to serve the needs of a growing population. With Implementing Action 3.1.a, the City will continue efforts to acquire new park sites within future growth areas in advance of development to meet the recreation open space needs of an expanding population. With Implementing Action 3.1.b, the City will consider density bonuses for development proposals which offer extra park land dedications. The City will continue to implement the Park and Open Space Master Plan (Implementing Action 3.1.c). When feasible, the City will continue to encourage joint use agreements with the local school districts to combine the design and use of park and school facilities (Implementing Action 3.1.d). The City will continue to use the Park Dedication Ordinance to develop the City's park system (Implementing Action 3.1.e) as well as the impact fee ordinance and policy (Implementing Action P-1.3a).

The City will maintain its existing high quality open space facilities and design park facilities so that a high level of maintenance can occur with minimum effort (Policy OS-3.3, Implementing

Action 3.3.a). The City will develop a diverse and integrated system of park facilities throughout Merced (Policy OS-3.4). With Implementing Actions 3.4.a and 3.4.b, community parks should be distributed throughout the City and neighborhood parks and village greens are to be located within villages. With Implementing Action 3.4.c, greenways should be designed to connect various park sites, schools and other public places with paths exclusively for pedestrians and bicyclists. Implementing Action 3.4.d calls for the City to cooperate with the County and MID to evaluate the Lake Yosemite regional park to identify how it might adequately meet the needs of the City of Merced and the new growth areas in the region including the U.C. Merced campus.

The General Plan Update includes additional policies and implementing actions to expand the City's bikeway and trail system and provide open space for public health and safety (Policies OS-3.2 and OS-4.1).

Implementation of the policies proposed in the General Plan, adherence to the guidelines and standards in the Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan, collection of fees for development of new parks, and mitigation measures would ensure that increased demand associated with an increase in population would not significantly accelerate the deterioration of existing park areas or recreational facilities. Therefore, this impact would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact #3.13-2: Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment.

Discussion/Conclusion: Future development assumed under the 2030 General Plan could result in a total population of 116,800 residents. However, these new residents are anticipated as part of the General Plan and policies have been created to accommodate this increase in population. Based on park standards set in the proposed General Plan and Park and Open Space Master Plan, the proposed General Plan would require approximately 180 additional acres of parkland. These needs would be met through implementation of the proposed General Plan policies. For example, Policy OS-3.1, Implementing Action 3.1.a, states that five acres of parkland should be provided per 1,000 residents. The acquisition of additional park land and open space will continue as development occurs through use of the City's Park Dedication Ordinance, the required dedication of creekside open space, the payment of Park In-Lieu fees, and the Public Facilities Financing Plan (impact fee). The expansion, planning, development, and use of joint facilities are additional means to provide recreational opportunities and to offset needs of park and recreational facilities. The policies set forth in the 2030 General Plan are designed to ensure that future development within the Planning Area would not create a need for construction or expansion of recreational facilities beyond what was anticipated in the General Plan. Therefore, this impact would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

A cumulative impact or effect results when two or more individual effects are combined together, which when taken together are considerable. For the 2030 General Plan, the effects of buildout of the General Plan and the increase in population is considered the “project.” In terms of the provision of parks and recreation services and facilities, the effects of buildout of the plan on existing park facilities are already evaluated in Impacts #3.13-1 and #3.13-2. There are no other projects that, when combined together (within the SUDP/SOI), along with the project, would compound or increase environmental effects on park facilities. Therefore, the cumulative impacts of the project are addressed in Impacts #3.13-1 and #3.13-2 and would ***not result in a significant cumulative impact.***