

Introduction



INTRODUCTION

"To those who have not visited this region for years, the change would be a source of surprise and gratification."

Will Green, 1880
History of Colusa County

WHAT IS THE GENERAL PLAN?

The Colusa County General Plan provides the basis for decisions regarding growth and land development. It is the county's official statement of public policy for the use of private and public land. The plan provides a framework for encouraging economic development while managing growth, conserving agricultural lands, protecting the environment, and preserving the qualities that make Colusa County unique. It reflects the aspirations and values of Colusa County residents regarding the future character and form of their communities.

Perhaps the Plan's most important purpose is to govern the location and intensity of land use throughout Colusa County. By doing so, the plan provides the foundation for evaluating proposed developments or changes in zoning. It also provides guidance for public investment in new facilities such as schools, roads, and water systems. In addition to helping the public sector, the plan provides direction to the private sector by clearly stating the county's expectations for growth and conservation.

State planning law provides a detailed procedure for the adoption of general plans so that individuals may express their values or persuade others to accept or acknowledge their values regarding the community's future. In exchange for this opportunity, all participants share in the responsibility to accept and support the policies which are incorporated in the adopted plan. Once adopted, these policies become the basis for day-to-day decisions by elected officials and county staff.

Because the general plan is long-range (the horizon year for this plan is 2010), it does not always reflect the current situation. The land use "plans" should not be confused with existing land use maps, which show the uses that currently exist on each parcel. The general plan strives to look beyond individual small-scale differences in land use and presents a generalized picture of the dominant character of the area. In other instances, the plan may show the transition of an existing use to a new, different land use. As the name implies, the plan is **general**. It provides broad guidelines for development rather than site-specific instructions on where and how to build.

But while the plan is general, it is also comprehensive. It addresses a wide range of issues that will affect the county's desirability as a place to live and work. In the absence of such a perspective, development proposals would be approved one-by-one, in a piecemeal fashion. Such an approach could lead to serious problems, like overcrowded schools, overtaxed sewer systems, traffic, flooding, and environmental degradation.

The General Plan should not be seen as the "final" statement of the county's vision. As years go by, its population will change, its goals will be redefined, and its physical environment will be altered. At best, the Plan represents a summary of the hopes

for the future at this particular point in time. In order for the plan to be useful, it must be periodically updated to respond to changing priorities and conditions.

BACKGROUND

HOW IS THIS PLAN DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS?

The first General Plan for Colusa County was prepared in 1970. The Land Use, Open Space, and Conservation Elements were updated in 1974, and the Housing Element was updated in 1983 as part of a Tri-County (Colusa, Glenn, Tehama) Plan that was never adopted. A comprehensive update of the plan has not been done since it was written 19 years ago. In the interim years, attitudes and perceptions about the county's future have changed. Demographic and social shifts in the county have altered the way residents view the future. Priorities and expectations for the future have changed.

Now more than ever, Colusa County finds itself in need of an updated general plan. The County is continually buffeted by external changes that are beyond local control. California continues to lead the nation in population and economic growth, and its metropolitan areas continue to swell outward into traditionally rural or agricultural counties. The real estate market is dynamic and often unpredictable; many towns throughout the Central Valley have been transformed from farming centers to commuter suburbs in less than a decade. A new general plan is needed to anticipate how this phenomenon might affect Colusa County in the next two decades and to develop an appropriate response.

At the same time, the counties that have been bypassed by growth during the 1970s and 1980s have found their voices muffled by the urbanizing counties. With a declining percentage of the state's population, the rural counties have been asked to accept a shrinking proportion of the state's financial resources. A plan is needed to set priorities so that the resources that are available can be used judiciously and efficiently. The general plan also is intended to send a unified message to the State and to surrounding jurisdictions regarding the priorities and perspectives of Colusa County residents.

Although the plan has not been substantially updated in 19 years, long-range planning has by no means been "dead" in Colusa County. A number of planning activities have occurred since 1970, particularly during the past five years. Area Plans were prepared for the spheres of influence of Williams and Colusa and for the Stonyford-Lodoga area. A corridor plan was prepared for lands adjoining Interstate 5. Development standards were set for the Lurline Road area and for the 14th Street Area near Colusa. The Department of Planning and Building continues to play an essential role in advising the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors on development decisions. Individual county departments, such as the school districts and the Environmental Health Department, have on-going long-range planning programs. Wherever possible, these plans and programs have been incorporated into the General Plan.

Most importantly, during the last 18 years, the citizens of Colusa County have played an active role in shaping the decisions that affect the long-range future of their

communities. The participation of the public at town meetings, specialized committee meetings, and various civic organizations during the last two decades have made an important contribution to the quality of life in Colusa County today.

Nonetheless, much of the planning that has occurred since 1970 has been on an "ad hoc" basis. Plans have been prepared in response to a particular crisis such as poor well water quality in a semi-rural area or a sudden large development proposal along the freeway. Community participation has often occurred in response to a singular issue such as future use of the Evans Landfill or development of low-income housing. As these efforts have progressed, the need for a plan which looks at all aspects of life in Colusa County simultaneously has mounted.

One aspect of the new general plan that sets it apart from the planning efforts of the last 18 years is its countywide perspective. Although this document contains plans for individual towns as much as 60 miles apart, it is first and foremost a county plan. It balances the priorities of individual communities with one another and considers the welfare of both "town" and "country". It protects the interest of the farmer while recognizing the importance of economic growth and diversification. It does not favor one town over another. It promotes a philosophy that residents live in Colusa County, rather than in Grimes or in Stonyford.

TIME FRAME AND PLAN REVISIONS

Traditionally, general plans projected an ultimate land use pattern and established a date for its achievement. These "end-state" general plans presented many problems, the most significant of which was unresponsiveness to changing conditions and the difficulty of implementation. End-state plans have largely been replaced by plans using frames of 10, 15, or 20-year horizons. The Colusa County General Plan uses a horizon year of 2010. This does not mean that the plan should not be updated for 21 years.

To provide for flexibility and responsiveness to change, the plan requires a comprehensive review and revision, if appropriate, at five-year intervals. The periodic update should allow the plan to continue to maintain a 20-year perspective; thus, if the plan is updated in 1995, it should set 2015 as its horizon year.

It should be emphasized that periodic review of the plan is not synonymous with total overhaul. Once adopted, the Colusa County General Plan establishes a basic policy framework which must be followed over time. The purpose of reviewing the plan every five years is to allow it to adjust to changing conditions, and the availability of more recent planning data, such as the 1990 Census. Only under extraordinary circumstances would complete overhaul be required.

USE OF THE PLAN BY LOCAL CITIZENS

The General Plan is designed to be used by elected and appointed county officials on a daily basis in making decisions with direct or indirect land use implications. It is also to be used by officials and staff of other government agencies--federal, state, and local--and to provide a framework for interjurisdictional coordination of

planning efforts. The Plan is designed for frequent consultation. Failure to use it will quickly cause it to become outdated and irrelevant.

County residents and property owners are expected to be major users of the Plan. Members of these groups may choose to use the Plan as it regards a particular geographic area or as it addresses a particular subject of interest to them. In either instance, the Plan must be used comprehensively and all objectives and policies must be viewed in the context provided by all other relevant objectives and policies.

The General Plan can be regarded on two levels. First, it is the local "constitution"; its policies reflect the local vision for the future and prescribe the means for achieving that vision. Second, it is an educational and informational tool. In many ways, the document is an "encyclopedia" of current and future conditions in Colusa County. The document contains the first comprehensive analysis of land use, community character, transportation, community services, housing, conservation, open space, and public safety in 19 years.

THE PROCESS

The Final General Plan is the culmination of a 2-1/2 year process that began in October, 1986. At that time, the Board of Supervisors established a 60-member General Plan Citizen's Advisory Committee composed of representatives of each community and major interest group in the County. The Committee was divided into five subcommittees--land use, economic development, natural resources, human resources, and community services. Committee and subcommittee meetings were held throughout late 1986 and 1987. The purpose of earlier meetings was to discuss issues and set goals and objectives addressing the issues. Later meetings were generally held to receive feedback on various physical planning concepts or development policies.

At the same time, a Technical Advisory Committee consisting of members of various County Departments was created to oversee the process and provide technical assistance as needed. The consulting firm of Sedway Cooke Associates was retained in October, 1986 to direct the planning program.

A number of vehicles were used to generate interest in the planning process and feedback on different options for the future. A "drawing" contest was conducted in the county's elementary schools to explore youngsters' perspectives on what the county might look like in the year 2010. An exhibit was prepared for the Colusa County Fair showing several different ways the county might grow over the next two decades. Questionnaires were distributed at General Plan Committee meetings revealing the priorities and concerns that county residents shared about the future.

Preliminary land use plans were displayed in every library and post office in the county. Residents of one community even signed the map with an emphatic message that their town should stay exactly as it is today. In October, 1987, two town meetings were held--one in Maxwell and one in Colusa--to provide residents with the opportunity to voice their opinion on proposed land use plans. The meetings were complemented by a thorough four-part series in the Colusa Sun Herald highlighting the key aspects of the land use plan.

The Draft General Plan was released to the public in January, 1988. The Draft EIR was submitted approximately one month later. Over a dozen public hearings were held between February and November, culminating with the adoption of a revised plan by the Planning Commission in November, 1988. In addition, the cities of Colusa and Williams each conducted special meetings to discuss the plan.

Comments on the plan were received through July, 1988, and individual responses were prepared for every comment made. Comments generally concerned the wording of policies, changes to land use designations for individual properties, and questions about the data presented in the plan. The Planning Commission began making its decisions about reworded policies and changed land use designations in September, 1988. Eighty individual requests were considered.

Following the adoption of revised policy statements and land use plans by the Commission, the approved Draft Plan was forwarded to the Colusa County Board Of Supervisors in December, 1988. After two more public hearings, it was adopted on January 13, 1989. This document, the Final Plan, incorporates all changes agreed upon during the public review process.

RELATION TO THE REGULATORY SYSTEM

RELATION TO ZONING

The general plan maps should not be confused with the zoning ordinance maps. A zoning map is a parcel-specific statement of how land may be used in the present and the near future. As a legal instrument, the zoning map has immediate force and effect. In contrast, the general plan is long-range and does not necessarily have a direct and immediate effect on land use. The function of the plan is to provide a policy framework that must be reflected in the zoning ordinance and area plans. The general plan maps are long-range and reflect a vision of what each community will be like in 20 or 25 years. By contrast, the zoning map focuses on the immediate use of the land. The zoning maps should be revised periodically to reflect the long-range uses specified in the plan.

Given this relationship, the zoning map will not and should not be a mirror image of the land use plan. This type of one-to-one correspondence is not required by the consistency requirements discussed below. The plan will not provide automatic, locationally precise answers in all cases and will require interpretation of plan policies in some instances. Looked at another way, the plan may show an ultimate use for a particular area that is different from the existing use and zoning. It is appropriate to let the existing zoning stand to allow for the continuation of the existing use, provided that the zoning is gradually revised over time to phase in the ultimate land use pattern.

RELATION TO SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The California Government Code specifies that counties must not approve a proposed subdivision map unless the subdivision, including its design and proposed

improvements, is consistent with the General Plan. In a manner similar to zoning regulations, consistency may be found only when the county has adopted a plan and the proposed subdivision is compatible with the objectives, policies, general land uses, and programs specified in the plan. Counties are required to deny approval of tentative and final maps if it is found that the proposed subdivision is not consistent with the general plan.

The State Code also states that subdivision maps may not be approved unless they are consistent with the county's open space plan. In other words, the subdivision ordinance may require the dedication of parkland or payment of in-lieu fees for parks, but only if the general plan contains language which supports such principles and standards.

RELATIONSHIP TO CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Section 65401 of the California State Code authorizes the Board of Supervisors to prepare and submit lists of all public works projects recommended by them for study or construction during each ensuing year. This requirement also applies to special and school districts whose jurisdictions lie wholly or partially within the county. Upon submittal, each such list must be integrated by the county into a coordinated program which must be submitted to the Planning Commission for review as to its conformity with the General Plan.

Section 65402 requires the Planning Commission to review the conformity of the following actions with applicable elements of the General Plan: (1) acquisition of lands for public purposes; (2) disposition of lands; (3) street vacations; and (4) authorization or construction of public buildings or structures.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT PROCEDURES

An environmental impact report (EIR) must be prepared for the General Plan to determine if the Plan policies and recommendations could result in significant effects to the environment. For projects proposed within the Plan's jurisdiction, Section 15080 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines requires that an initial study of the project consider whether the project is compatible with the General Plan. Any inconsistencies between a proposed project and the General Plan must be discussed. The CEQA guidelines note that a project will normally be found to have a significant effect on the environment if it will conflict with "adopted environmental plans and goals of the community where it is located."

BUILDING AND HOUSING CODES

Section 65567 of the State Code provides that building permits must be consistent with the open space plan. The State Housing Law requires the County to adopt regulations imposing substantially the same standards as those contained in various uniform industry codes. This law also imposes special standards, which may be more burdensome than the uniform industry codes, designed to protect against certain

types of hazards and achieve certain resource goals. The County may adopt regulations and standards at variance from those mandated by state law if justified by local conditions. Although not explicitly required by the State Housing Law, the General Plan is an especially appropriate vehicle for documenting such local conditions and specifying the necessary regulatory response in order to justify variances from State law.

OTHER CONSISTENCY REQUIREMENTS

Listed below in capsule form are some other consistency requirements contained in state law which at some future date may apply to Colusa County:

- o Health and Safety Code, Section 33331 requires consistency between the General Plan and any redevelopment plans;
- o Health and Safety Code Section 34326 requires consistency between the General Plan and housing projects;
- o Health and Safety Code 34711 requires consistency between the General Plan and housing for the developmentally, physically, or mentally disabled.
- o Streets and Highway Code Section 32502 requires consistency between the General Plan and parking facilities.

HOW IS THIS DOCUMENT ORGANIZED?

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Colusa County's location relative to the State of California is shown in Figure INTRO-1. The planning area is shown in greater detail in Figure INTRO-2. The map used in Figure INTRO-2 provides the base on which most information in the Plan is presented. The plan covers the 1,153 square miles of Colusa County. Although the incorporated cities of Colusa and Williams (covering about 2 square miles) are outside the plan's jurisdiction, many of the policies and programs embodied in the plan will have a direct effect on these communities. Consistency between their general plans and the county plan is one of this document's foremost objectives.

CONTENT OF THE PLAN

The General Plan is organized into 10 chapters. Following the **Introduction**, the plan presents the statement of **Goals and Objectives** developed by members of the General Plan Committee. The following eight chapters are referred to as "elements", with each element corresponding to a particular topic such as land use or circulation. Each element contains a profile of existing conditions, an analysis of future conditions, and a series of policies which reflect goals and objectives.

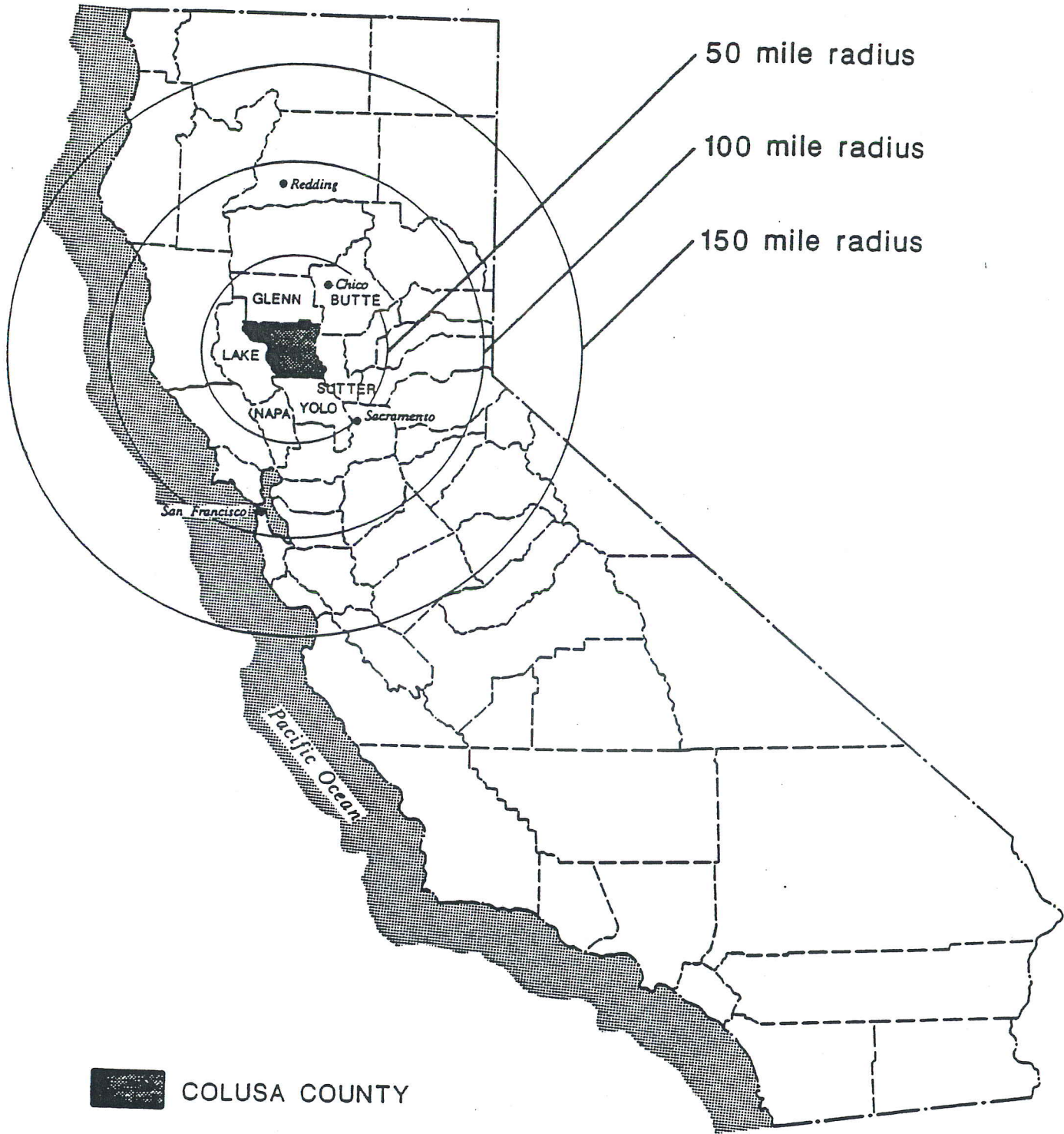
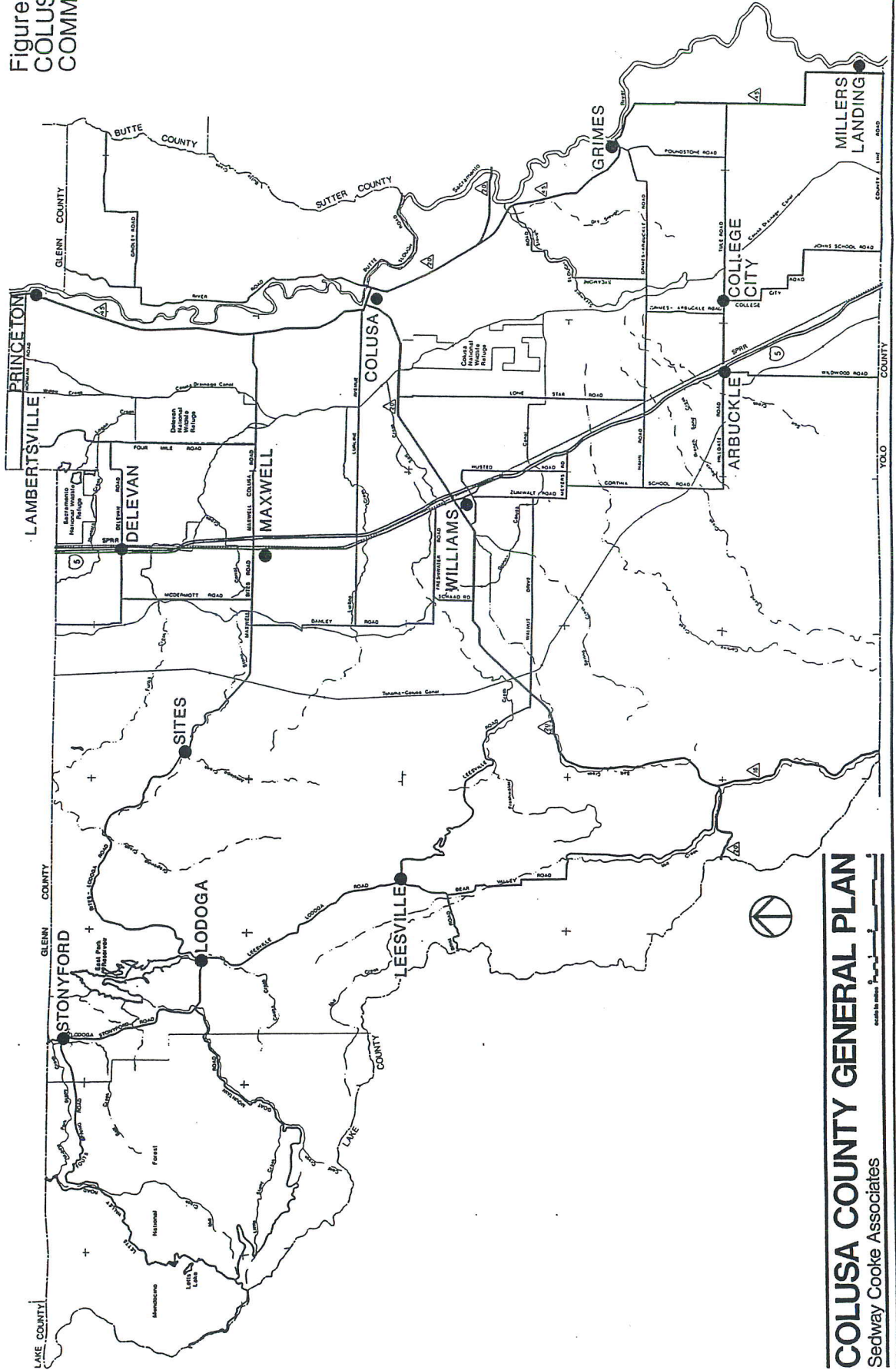


Figure INTRO-1
REGIONAL LOCATION



Figure INTRO-2
COLUSA COUNTY
COMMUNITIES



COLUSA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
Sedway Cooke Associates

The overall concept for the county's physical development is set forth in the **Land Use Element**, while the **Community Plan Element** describes planning concepts for individual communities. Movement between communities is the subject of the next chapter, the **Circulation Element**. This is followed by a **Community Services Element** which profiles water, sewer, drainage, solid waste, police, fire, school, and library systems. The **Housing Element** explores demographic conditions and residential development trends and determines how housing needs can be met in the future.

The focus of the last three elements is on the natural environment. The **Conservation Element** focuses on utilization of the county's natural resources. The **Open Space Element** concerns the preservation of these resources for visual and recreational enjoyment. The **Public Safety Element** describes where these resources pose a hazard or constraint for future development.

The **Final Environmental Impact Report**, including the Draft EIR and Responses to Comments, has been incorporated into this document. This document also includes an appendix containing existing land use maps for eight communities, and a bibliography listing persons contacted and resources used.