



**LASSEN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
- 2000 -**

INTRODUCTION



LASSEN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

The following is the Vision Statement of the Lassen County General Plan and an expression of primary goals for this plan:

GENERAL PLAN VISION STATEMENT

Lassen County's General Plan is a tool to shape the use of land which will affect the quality of life and economic opportunities for generations.

The goals of the Plan are to:

- Protect for its residents the rural character and culture of Lassen County life.
- Maintain economic viability for existing industries such as agriculture, timber and mining.
- Promote new compatible industries to provide a broader economic base.
- Create livable communities through carefully planned development which efficiently utilize our natural resources and provide amenities for residents.
- Maintain and enhance natural wildlife communities and recreational opportunities.
- Sustain the beauty and open space around us in this effort.

The result of this planning document will produce a landscape where clean, blue skies overlook Lassen County's farms, rangelands, lakes, streams, and forests. Residential and commercial areas are clustered and include buffers for agriculture, timber, and key wildlife areas. Wildlife coexists within this rural perspective as important habitats and corridors are maintained. Productive, civic-minded industries find a niche that allows them to capitalize on the clean living benefits their employees enjoy in Lassen County. Recreational opportunities are planned with the existing land uses so conflicts can be minimized. The rural character and landscape that defines Lassen County in 1999 will be prevalent in 2028

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because decisions have been and will be made that respect its value and provide for their continued existence.

The Lassen County General Plan constitutes Lassen County's comprehensive plan for the development of the county. It was adopted by the Lassen County Board of Supervisors to address the requirements of California Government Code Section 65300 et seq, and related provisions of California law pertaining to general plans.

The General Plan reflects the concerns and efforts of the County of Lassen, as the local governmental entity having jurisdictional authority and responsibility for planning and development decisions in the unincorporated area of the county, to efficiently and equitably address a wide range of development issues which confront residents, property owners, and business operators. Many of these issues also challenge organizations and agencies concerned with the management of land and resources and the provision of community services within Lassen County.

The General Plan, as revised herein, consolidates all previous general plan elements and policies by either revising and incorporating them into this plan or by recognizing and incorporating them by reference.

It is the initial intent of the County upon adoption of this General Plan revision that it shall serve as the fundamental plan for Lassen County until the year 2020, subject to periodic amendments and supplementation (e.g., area plans, revised Housing Elements, etc.) which may be needed and warranted in the judgement of the Board of Supervisors.

1.2 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Since 1971, the general plan in California has grown in importance. Before then, a general plan was usually considered to be more or less an advisory guideline for development. It is now considered to be a "constitution" for development and a basic land use charter governing the direction of land use and development in local jurisdictions.

Section 65300 of the California Government Code states, in part, that each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body of each county and city shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city. The Government Code further elaborates on the required content and scope of the general plan. Section 65302 states, in part, that the general plan shall include seven mandatory elements. These elements may be summarized as follows:

Land Use Element: The land use element identifies the proposed distribution and intensity of uses of the land. This element serves as the central framework for the entire plan and is

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intended to correlate all land use issues into a set of coherent development policies.

Circulation Element: The circulation element identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities. It serves as an infrastructure plan and must be correlated with the land use element.

Housing Element: The housing element consists of an identification and analysis of existing and projected housing needs and a statement of goals, policies, quantified objectives, and scheduled programs for the preservation, improvement and development of housing.

Conservation Element: The conservation element of the general plan addresses the identification, conservation, development, and use of natural resources including water, forests, soils, waterways, wildlife, and mineral deposits. (A "Natural Resources Element" has been prepared to serve as the County's Conservation Element for the 1999 revision.)

Open Space Element: The open space element is the plan for the "comprehensive and long-range preservation and conservation of open space land. It specifies plans and measures for preserving open space for natural resources, for managing the production of resources, for outdoor recreation, and for public health and safety.

Noise Element: The noise element identifies and appraises noise problems in the jurisdiction. Implementation measures and possible solutions to noise problems shall be included.

Safety Element: The safety element establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood and wildfire hazards.

In addition to the seven mandatory elements, the general plan may include any other elements or address any other subjects which, in the judgement of the county, relate to the physical development of the jurisdiction. For example, an energy element is not mandatory but may be useful in addressing specific energy-related issues. Also, the adoption of an agriculture element may allow an agency to focus on related issues more effectively than it might in the overall conservation element. Once an optional element is adopted, it becomes part of the general plan with the same legal force and effect as one of the mandatory elements. The requirements for internal consistency among all general plan elements, and of consistency between the general plan and other land use decisions, apply equally to optional elements. An area or community plan must be internally consistent with the general plan of which it is a part.

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Although state law specifies the basic content of the general plan, it leaves the format of the plan to local discretion. Government Code Section 65301(a) provides that the general plan may be adopted in any format deemed appropriate or convenient by the legislative body. Jurisdictions may combine two or more elements.

Any land use project and decision, such as zoning or subdivision approval, must be consistent with a current and legally adequate general plan. An action, program or project is consistent with the general plan if, considering all aspects of the plan, it will further the objectives and policies of the general plan and not obstruct their attainment (*General Plan Guidelines*, page 212.)

1.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE LASSEN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

Lassen County adopted its first comprehensive General Plan in 1968. That plan contained five basic elements: land use; circulation; recreation and tourism; housing; and natural resources conservation. Planning policies for the Westwood Area and the Eagle Lake Area were also adopted in 1968 as part of the General Plan.

In 1972, the County adopted an "Open Space Plan" to serve as the Open Space Element of its general plan. In 1974, the County adopted Noise, Safety, and Seismic Safety Elements with one resolution.

Between 1974 and 1995, two elements were revised and one element was added. They consisted of:

- Noise Element (revision, 1989)
- Housing Element (revisions, 1989 and 1993)
- Energy Element (1993)

In 1982, Lassen County adopted the *Eagle Lake Area Plan* as a revision of the 1968 plan. That area plan was the first in a new series of area plans designed to address specific planning issues in defined planning areas and to adopt detailed development policies and land use designations for those planning areas. Area plans are, in fact, adopted as amendments to and part of the County General Plan. The list of area plans, as of 1999, consisted of:

- Westwood* (1968)
- Eagle Lake* (1982, replacing the 1968 plan)
- Hallelujah Junction* (1984)
- Susanville Vicinity* (1984)
- Pittville* (1986)
- Standish/Litchfield* (1986)
- Johnstonville* (1987)

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Wendel (1987)

Richmond/Gold Run (1993)

In 1991, the *Hayden Hill Resource Plan* was adopted as an amendment to the Lassen County General Plan in conjunction with approval and development of the Hayden Hill Gold Mine. The planning area was focused on the vicinity of the Hayden Hill mining project, and this plan was intended to serve as an area plan for the immediate area. The *Hayden Hill Resource Plan* also contained a special element entitled "Mineral Resources" which included specific mining and reclamation policies for the mining area.

In 1993, a substantial general plan amendment was adopted for the Janesville Planning Area, an area which generally corresponded to the Janesville Fire Protection District. That amendment was adopted to clarify and strengthen the consistency of general plan land use designations with the zoning which was adopted in 1977 and which had since evolved over the years in the Janesville area.

A number of miscellaneous General Plan amendments, including amendments to Area Plans, have also been adopted over the years for certain properties and projects.

1.4 GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENTS

A general plan is a dynamic planning document and tool since it is based on community values and changing social trends and development needs. According to the state's *General Plan Guidelines*, the entire general plan should be thoroughly reviewed at least every five years and revised as necessary to reflect new conditions, local attitudes and political realities.

All general plan amendments are subject to the procedures outlined in Government Code sections 65350 et seq. In the case of counties, adoption of a proposed amendment is accomplished by a resolution of the Board of Supervisors following at least one public hearing. The Planning Commission must also hold at least one public hearing in consideration of the proposed amendment for the purpose of preparing recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

In addition, a proposed amendment must be referred to the planning agency of every city and county it abuts, the area's Local Agency Formation Commission, and any affected regional planning agency and affected federal agency (Government Code Section 65352).

It should also be noted that an amendment of the general plan is, in most cases, a "project" under the California Environmental Quality Act and must be evaluated for potential environmental effects.

There are a number of regulations in state law pertaining to when certain elements must be reviewed and revised, as well as regulations as to the number of times certain elements can be amended in

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one year and exemptions to those limitations. For example, the housing element must be reviewed and updated at least every five years (Government Code Section 65588).

Generally, local governments may not amend any one of the mandatory elements of the general plan more than four times in one calendar year (Government Code Section 65358(b)). However, this limitation does not apply to: optional elements; amendments necessary for certain affordable housing proposals; any amendment necessary to comply with a court decision in a case involving the legal adequacy of the general plan; amendments to bring a general plan into compliance with an airport land use plan; and various other exceptions. Government Code Section 65358 provides that each amendment may include more than one change to the general plan. Each of the permitted amendments within a calendar year may encompass several different changes.

The State's *General Plan Guidelines* (page 63) contain the following statements regarding general plan amendments:

If the board or council finds itself making frequent piecemeal amendments, major defects may exist in the general plan because values and needs may have altered or the plan may be too inflexible and precise. In these cases, the jurisdiction should not further erode the plan through amendments. Instead, it should undertake a major revision.

In reviewing proposals for general plan amendments, local officials should remember that the general plan is a policy document for the entire community and that it may only be amended "in the public interest" (Government Code Section 65358(a)). In other words, the plan should only be amended when the city or county, with the support of a broad consensus, determines a change is necessary. Every general plan amendment must be consistent with the rest of the general plan and appropriate changes need to be made to maintain consistency.

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SECTION TWO: GENERAL CONTENT AND AMENDMENT PROCESS OF THE LASSEN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

This section establishes and clarifies the organizational framework and contents of the Lassen County General Plan, including the manner in which the various elements and area plans are incorporated into the plan. It also addresses the means by which amendments to the plan may be considered, adopted and incorporated into the plan.

2.1 CONTENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN

Following adoption of the 1999 General Plan Revision, the Lassen County General Plan shall consist of the following components:

The 1999 General Plan revision, consisting of the following elements and components:

- Land Use Element
- Natural Resources Element (To serve as the County's Conservation Element.)
- Agriculture Element
- Wildlife Element
- Open Space Element
- Circulation Element

The Safety and Seismic Safety Element (Note: Until revised, the Safety Element shall consist of Lassen County Resolution No. 2552, Exhibit B.)

The Housing Element (under separate cover);

The Noise Element (under separate cover);

The Energy Element (under separate cover);

Area plans adopted by resolution as part of the General Plan;

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Resource plans (e.g., the *Hayden Hill Resource Plan*) adopted by resolution as part of the General Plan;

All amendments to the General Plan adopted by resolution after adoption of the 1999 General Plan revision.

The General Plan as revised in 1999 shall supersede all previous amendments to the General Plan unless specifically referenced therein, not including adopted area plans or amendments to any area plan, or any general plan element not included in the 1999 revision.

2.2 AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

It is expected that amendments to the Lassen County General Plan will typically be initiated in two ways: 1) Amendments initiated by the County to meet a general planning need (e.g., adoption of area plans, housing element updates, policy clarification, etc.) or, 2) Amendments proposed by property owners or project proponents to obtain a general plan land use designation or policy change which would support a proposed project. In either case, a general plan amendment must be considered and adopted pursuant to the processes and provisions set forth in the California Government Code (Section 65350 et seq).

State law (Government Code Section 65860) requires that zoning must be consistent with the County's General Plan. In most cases related to a proposed change in a general plan land use designation, the County must consider the need for an application or proposal for a corresponding change in the zoning to ensure consistency with the proposed general plan amendment. Additionally, a general plan amendment will normally require environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

The County may initiate or consider general plan amendments when it determines that such amendments are needed and warranted in the public interest, consistent with related policies of the plan and subject to related procedures and amendment limitations set forth in state law. The County will need to ensure that all amendments maintain internal consistency within and related to all elements of the General Plan, including relevant area plans.

As discussed in Section One above, a general plan is a policy document for the entire community and it should only be amended "in the public interest". The plan should only be amended when the County determines a change is necessary. Every general plan amendment must be consistent with the rest of the general plan and related changes may need to be made to maintain internal consistency.

2.3 SUMMARY OF AMENDMENTS

Following adoption of any amendment to the Lassen County General Plan, the amendment should be referenced in the supplement attached to this General Plan entitled "Supplement One: Summary of General Plan Amendments". This supplement is intended to serve as an open, frequently updated summary of all amendments to the General Plan.

At least one page of the summary should be devoted to each amendment. Each listing should include the following information: 1) Any assigned general plan amendment number; 2) The date of adoption; 3) The number of the resolution by the Board of Supervisors approving the amendment; 4) A brief summary of the amendment, clarifying the nature of the amendment and the location of any specific land use designation with reference to a graphic representation of the location. If the amendment is short (e.g., up to three pages), it may be included in its entirety. If the amendment is longer (e.g., an area plan, new element, etc.) the summary should include reference to a file and/or document which contains the complete text and all maps and graphic representations of the amendment.

The act of updating the summary itself is for reference purposes only and shall not be construed to be an amendment of the general plan.

2.4 GENERAL PLAN TERMINOLOGY

A short explanation may be helpful in understanding the terms "goals", "policies", and "implementation measures" as used in this element.

"Goals" establish the overall direction for addressing a particular issue. They are ideal future results or conditions for which policies will be proposed. According to the General Plan Guidelines, a "goal" is a general expression of community values and, therefore, is abstract in nature. Consequently, a goal is generally not quantifiable, time-dependent or suggestive of specific actions for its achievement. Examples of goals statements are, "A diversified economic base", or, "Quiet residential streets".

A "policy", in general plan terminology, is a specific statement that guides decision making. It indicates a clear commitment of the local legislative body. To quote the General Plan Guidelines:

For a policy to be useful as a guide to action it should be clear and unambiguous. The practice of adopting broadly drawn and vague policies is unacceptable. Clear policies are particularly important when it comes to judging whether or not zoning decisions, subdivisions, public works projects, etc., are consistent with a general plan.

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Regarding “implementation measures”, the State's *General Plan Guidelines* state:

A community's commitment to its adopted goals, objectives and policies can be determined by the manner in which they are implemented. The selection of implementation measures should be considered throughout the general plan preparation process. Not only must these measures follow logically from adopted policies, they should also be attainable by the local government.

The implementation measures included in this General Plan are proposed as initial actions which could help achieve the goals and support the policies of the plan. These measures are not, however, intended to be exclusive. Future projects, programs and general opportunities will arise which may also be helpful in the attainment of particular goals. The fact that certain implementation measures may not have been anticipated and specified in this plan shall not constrain the County from taking those additional measures when appropriate and necessary, provided that such actions are consistent with the policies of the General Plan.

To differentiate from introductory material and background narrative, the goals, policies and implementation measures of this General Plan are presented in "Arial" font. Policies are denoted with the initials of the element (e.g., LU for Land Use) and are numbered consecutively within the element. Implementation measures are denoted with the element's initials and with consecutive letters within the element. For example:

GOAL N-22: Air quality of high standards to safeguard public health, visual quality, and the reputation of Lassen County as an area of exceptional air quality.

NR74 POLICY: The Board of Supervisors will continue to consider, adopt and enforce feasible air quality standards which protect the quality of the County's air resources.

Implementation Measures:

NR-P The County will continue to regulate the emission of pollutants within its jurisdiction through the regulations and procedures adopted for the Lassen County Air Pollution Control District (APCB).

A glossary has been included in the Lassen County General Plan to help define many terms which are commonly used in respect to general plans.

When the term “County” is used with a capital “C”, it is almost always intended to signify the “County of Lassen” as the governmental entity administered by the Lassen County Board of Supervisors. When the word County is used in a different context, the Plan has attempted to qualify the term, as in “County Planning Commission”.

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SECTION THREE: LASSEN COUNTY PROFILE

Lassen County is located in northeastern California. It is bordered on the north by Modoc County, on the south by Plumas and Sierra Counties, on the west by Shasta County, and on the east by the State of Nevada.

Lassen County is characterized by forest-covered mountains and plateaus roughly covering the western one-third of the County and sagebrush and juniper rangeland with a number of interspersed valleys covering the eastern two-thirds. Part of the Warner Range extends into northeastern Lassen County. Most of the large valleys are comprised of the remnants of ancient lake beds. The largest valley is the Honey Lake Valley in the south central part of the County, which extends into Nevada and joins Long Valley to the southeast. The Honey Lake Valley is generally considered to be part of the Great Basin. Another large valley consists of the Madeline Plains, which includes Grasshopper Valley. Big Valley is located in the northwestern part of the County. A portion of Fall River Valley extends into the northwestern part of the County from the west. Elevations range from 3,300 feet in the Fall River Valley to about 8,700 feet at Hat Mountain in the northeast corner of the County.

Eagle Lake, located 16 miles north of Susanville, is the second largest natural lake located wholly within California. At an elevation of 5,100 feet, the lake covers 42 square miles and offers a variety of recreational resources and attractions, including the famous Eagle Lake Trout.

The climate of Lassen County is variable but in general is characterized by warm dry summers and cold moist winters. Most of the precipitation falls between October and May. The average annual rainfall ranges from four inches along the Nevada border in the eastern Honey Lake Valley and increases going west to 48 inches near Juniper Lake in Lassen Volcanic National Park. Average daily temperatures range from 69.6 degrees fahrenheit in July to 20.4 in January. The frost-free growing season ranges from 142 days at Susanville to 65 days in the Madeline Plains.

Lassen County has a total area of 3,001,780 acres (4,690.3 square miles). Over 63 percent of the land area in Lassen County is administered by Federal, state or local agencies.

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The City of Susanville is the county seat and only incorporated city in Lassen County. Unincorporated community centers include Westwood, Clear Creek, Bieber, Johnstonville, Janesville, Standish, Litchfield, Doyle, Herlong, Milford, Leavitt Lake, and Little Valley.

Census figures indicate that, between the years of 1940 and 1970, Lassen County's population fluctuated up and down with a sizable loss of population between 1950 and 1960 (see Table 1). Since 1960, the County's population has grown at a relatively rapid rate for a "rural" county. Table 2 summarizes population and housing characteristics from the 1990 Census.

Table 3 summarizes 1996 population and housing estimates. According to the California Department of Finance, the total population of Lassen County, as estimated for January, 1996, was 31,057. This total was comprised of an unincorporated population of 16,377 and a population in the City of Susanville (including the California Correctional Center) of 14,680.

In April, 1993, the California Department of Finance made the following projections of total population for Lassen County (including the City of Susanville):

YEAR	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040
POPULATION	27,800	35,700	39,900	44,000	47,900	51,800

The predominant sector of employment in Lassen County is government, which comprised 48.2 percent of jobs in the county in 1992. This is largely due to employment at the California Correctional Center, but is also augmented by employment with the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Lassen College, as well as other schools and governmental agencies.

The operation of the two prisons in Lassen County (which are "within" the City of Susanville even though they are located several miles east of Susanville) has become a large factor of the population numbers for this area. In 1997, the California Correctional Center reported an inmate count of 5,760. The second and newest facility, the High Desert State Prison, was opened in 1995. In 1997, the new prison reported an inmate population of 4,012. The combined total of the two prisons, 9,772, comprises over 57 percent of the city's 1997 population of 17,077 and 28.4 percent of the total population of Lassen County, which in 1997 was estimated by the California Department of Finance to be 34,360. The prison system also greatly affects workforce numbers. In 1997, the two prisons together reported a total of 2,197 people on staff.

In terms of employment, the job classifications of agriculture and forestry together comprise only 3.2 percent of the annual average employment figures. In production terms, however, agriculture has long been identified as Lassen County's leading industry. In 1994, the gross dollar value of all

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agricultural commodities (including timber and cogeneration fuels) was estimated to be \$94,900,550.

Significant trends and recent developments which are shaping the social and economic identity of Lassen County include:

Expansion of the California Correctional Center, generating related jobs and economic stimulus as well as related housing and community service needs;

Growth of tourism and the recreational industry, especially related to Eagle Lake;

Renewed interest in mineral resources and the mining industry, including the Hayden Hill gold mine;

Changes in the resource management policies of Federal agencies which affect the timber and agricultural livestock industries;

Increasing demand for, and depleting supplies of, water resources;

Demand for rural residential development and related impacts to agriculture and wildlife resources and on community services, including schools;

Concern over the proposed "realignment" of the Sierra Army Depot and resulting reduction and elimination of military operations and related employment, along with interest in and need for plans and proposals for new, productive uses of the land and facilities in the event of significant realignment.

REFERENCES:

Lassen County, *Housing Element*, 1993.

California Employment Development Department, *Annual Planning Information, Lassen County*, 1992.

California Department of Finance, *Lassen County Population and Housing Estimates, January 1, 1996*, 1996.

Lassen County Department of Agriculture, *Annual Crop Report for 1994*, 1995.

California Office of Planning and Research, *General Plan Guidelines*.

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TABLE 1.
POPULATION GROWTH: 1940 - 1990
LASSEN COUNTY (INCLUDING THE CITY OF SUSANVILLE)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
1940	14,479	
1950	18,474	22
1960	13,597	-35
1970	16,796	19
1980	21,661	29
1990	27,598	27

Source: *Lassen County Housing Element*, April, 1993.

TABLE 2. LASSEN COUNTY DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS: 1990 (Including the City of Susanville)	
Population	27,598
Percent under 18	24.7 %
Percent 65 and over	10.4 %
Percent White	79.4 %
Percent African American	6.1 %
Percent Asian	1.1 %
Percent Native American	2.9 %
Percent Hispanic	10.4 %
Households	8,543
Persons per Household	2.66
Persons in Group Quarters	4,896
Percent Owner-occupied units	69.4 %
Percent Mobile Homes	24.7 %
Percent Vacant (not seasonal)	10.0 %
Median Home Value	\$70,400
Median Monthly Rent	\$412
Per Capita Income	\$12,626
Percent below Poverty Level	10.9 %

Source: 1990 Census

**TABLE 3.
ESTIMATED LASSEN COUNTY POPULATION AND
HOUSING STOCK CHARACTERISTICS - (January, 1998)**

	<u>Susanville</u>	<u>Unincorporated</u>	<u>Total County</u>
Population	17,128	17,009	34,137
Households Population	8,384	16,778	25,162
Group Quarters Population	8,744	231	8,975
Total Units	3,711	7,755	11,466
Single Detached	2,418	5,020	7,438
Single Attached	52	29	81
Multiple (2-4)	342	112	454
Multiple (5 plus)	607	154	761
Mobile Homes	292	2,440	2,732
Total Occupied Units	3,375	6,112	9,487
Percent Vacancy	9.05	21.19	17.26
Persons per Household	2.484	2.745	2.652

Source: *California Department of Finance Report E-5, Lassen County Population and Housing Estimates, April, 1998.*