

15 NOISE

The Noise Element addresses sources of noise that could affect the character and health of the County. It provides policies to help ensure that noise does not disturb the quality of life for Mariposa County residents.

15.1 NOISE ISSUES AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

According to the State of California General Plan Guidelines, the Noise Element should address those issues and sources of noise that are relevant to the local planning area, and should be as detailed as necessary to describe the local situation and offer solutions to local noise problems. Therefore, in evaluating the noise environment, it is important to establish appropriate local standards for assessing noise levels and for establishing land uses compatible with the noise environment.

The rural lifestyle found in Mariposa County results in a noise environment which is typically well below 55 dB(A) CNEL. The type of large lot development that predominates in the County provides for adequate site flexibility to locate residences away from a potential noise generator. Given this rural lifestyle, it is quite common to hear chainsaws, barking dogs, tractors, and similar sounds that are part of the rural lifestyle. While these sounds may momentarily detract from the quiet aspects of the rural lifestyle, they are not seen as being significant.

As discussed in Section 15.2.02, the major noise generators in the County tend to be intermittent in nature and the low population density of the county along with the intermittent nature of the noise reduces the effects on the County's population.

At the present time, Mariposa County is not developing a noise exposure inventory because of the barriers to obtaining meaningful data concerning the exposure of the County's population to projected levels of noise. The utilization of Census Block data, as suggested by the State Noise Element Guidelines, is not a useful geographic unit of analysis for the purpose of evaluating noise in Mariposa County. Some census blocks are hundreds of acres in size, and without more refined data, the County cannot determine precise population counts. In light of the low-level noise environment of the County, and the relatively few noise generators, the County has determined that developing a noise exposure inventory is not a cost-effective, necessary, or meaningful tool and therefore is not practicable.

Sources of environmental noise such as passenger and freight line railroad operations and ground rapid transit systems; scheduled airport operations; large local industrial plants; and other stationary noise sources do not occur in Mariposa County, and as such are not evaluated for noise exposure.

The noise sensitive land uses of hospitals, schools, and rest homes exist at various locations throughout the county. When the location of these facilities is compared to the chief noise generators (highways, roads, and airport), it is relatively apparent that these uses would lie outside of any 55 dB(A) CNEL contour developed. Since no other noise generators have been identified, these noise sensitive uses are not affected by noise levels above 55 dB(A) CNEL. On-site monitoring of these noise sensitive uses is seen as unnecessary and ineffective. It is recognized that the noise environment could change over time, and future evaluations will be necessary to determine whether such monitoring is appropriate.

Chapter 14 in Volume III of the General Plan includes an assessment of roadway noise levels; fixed noise sources; noise levels related to operations at the Mariposa-Yosemite Airport; and existing community noise levels. The major sources of noise and potential noise issues in the County are characterized below.

The following are the chief sources of noise generation within the County.

- Mariposa Yosemite Airport
- Motor vehicle noise
- Off-road vehicles and recreational uses
- Special events

15.1.01 MARIPOSA YOSEMITE AIRPORT

Aircraft take-offs and landings represent a source of transportation noise. As late as 2002, the Mariposa County Airport did not generate complaints from nearby residences. Future growth of the airport may generate additional operations; both the Airport Land Use Plan and the General Plan reflect preventive policies to accommodate both a growing airport and desirable area development. Heliports and helispots are located in the County, but used intermittently.

15.1.02 MOTOR VEHICLE NOISE

The majority of the traffic on the various state highways comes from automobiles, tour buses, and light trucks. None of the highways in the County serve as interstate truck transportation routes. The heavy trucks that do use the roads are generally commercial carriers for products and supplies, construction activities, and some limited industries. Noise from the highways is relatively low when compared to noise from major truck routes on freeways.

15.1.03 OFF-ROAD VEHICLES AND RECREATIONAL USES

Off-road vehicles create potential noise problems in the County. During summer months, motorcycles use mountain roads and trails for recreational travel. Noise from these vehicles can extend for miles in quieter mountain areas.

15.1.04 SPECIAL EVENTS

Significant sources of noise are sometimes emitted from outdoor special event activities, although these events are limited in duration.

15.2 GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 15-1: Preserve the quality of life in Mariposa County by controlling noise at its source.

Policy 15.1a: Control noise at its source.

Implementation Measure 15.1a(1): A noise ordinance should be considered to define the standards for the County.

Timing: Intermediate-term
Responsibility: Public Safety Officer.
Fiscal Impact: Unknown.
Consequences: Noise reduction.

Implementation Measure 15.1a(2): County development standards shall require means of controlling noise at its source as opposed to imposing mitigation as the means of offsetting noise impacts.

Timing: Intermediate-term
Responsibility: Public Safety Officer.
Fiscal Impact: Unknown.
Consequences: Noise reduction.

Implementation Measure 15.1a(3): The County shall develop and implement standards that will reduce vibration from construction activities to a level that is less than perceptible at adjacent property lines.

Timing: Intermediate-term
Responsibility: Public Safety Officer.
Fiscal Impact: Unknown.
Consequences: Noise reduction.

Goal 15-2: Protect County residents from the harmful and annoying effects of exposure to excessive noise.

Policy 15-2a: Siting and construction of facilities intended for noise sensitive uses shall comply with the noise reduction standards of applicable State building codes.

Implementation Measure 15-2a(1): The State building standards for the proper insulation of new dwellings for noise reduction shall be enforced.

Timing: Ongoing review standard
Responsibility: Building Department.
Fiscal Impact: Ongoing program.
Consequences: Code compliance.

Policy 15-2b: New projects with extensive noise potential shall incorporate mitigation measures.

Implementation Measure 15-2b(1): Where proposed non-residential land uses are likely to produce excessive noise levels at existing or planned noise-sensitive uses, an acoustical analysis shall be required as part of the project review process. An acoustical analysis should:

- be prepared by a person qualified in environmental noise assessment and architectural acoustics,

- include representative noise level measurements to adequately describe local conditions,
- recommend appropriate mitigation to achieve compliance with the adopted policies and standards,
- estimate noise exposure after the prescribed mitigation measures have been implemented, and
- describe a post-project mitigation measure effectiveness assessment program.

Timing: Ongoing review standard
Responsibility: Mariposa County Planning Department and Building Department.
Fiscal Impact: Applicant cost for noise studies.
Consequences: Noise reduction.

Implementation Measure 15-2b(2): Noise created by new transportation noise sources shall be mitigated.

Timing: Ongoing review standard
Responsibility: Planning Department.
Fiscal Impact: Ongoing review.
Consequences: Noise reduction.

Implementation Measure 15-2b(3): The County shall require appropriate noise reduction measures for outdoor public events. Such measures may include:

- preparation of a noise impact analysis by an appropriate licensed professional;
- identification of best sound management practices for avoiding impacts;
- restrictions on the level of amplification of sound systems;
- conditions on the start, finish, and duration of the event; limitations on the number of participants; and
- a requirement to install temporary noise reduction devices or barriers.

Timing: Ongoing review standard
Responsibility: Mariposa County Planning Department and Health Department.
Fiscal Impact: Ongoing review.
Consequences: Noise reduction.

Policy 15-2c: Ensure that new development does not produce noise levels that create an unacceptable noise environment in those existing areas of the County where the noise environment is deemed acceptable, and also in those locations deemed noise sensitive.

Implementation Measure 15-2c(1): The County shall assess development activities and determine whether the Noise Element shall be updated or whether to undertake studies to create noise contours and noise exposure indices.

Timing: Intermediate-term
Responsibility: Mariposa County Planning Department.
Fiscal Impact: Cost of noise studies.
Consequences: Noise reduction.