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Sebastopol a city in charge of its future

Boundaries keep urban sprawl in check

By Richard Hanner
Record Staff Writer

In Sebastopol, the houses and businesses began trickling into the idyllic orchards and wildlands that adjoin the city.

Sensing the first signs of sprawl in their Sonoma County community, citizens moved decisively. They organized, put a measure on the ballot and drew an invisible line around their town.

Within the line, development will be encouraged. Beyond, development will be sharply limited, at least for the next 20 years.

Such invisible lines are known as urban-growth boundaries. Planners say there may be no more important tool in checking sprawl and maintaining livable communities.

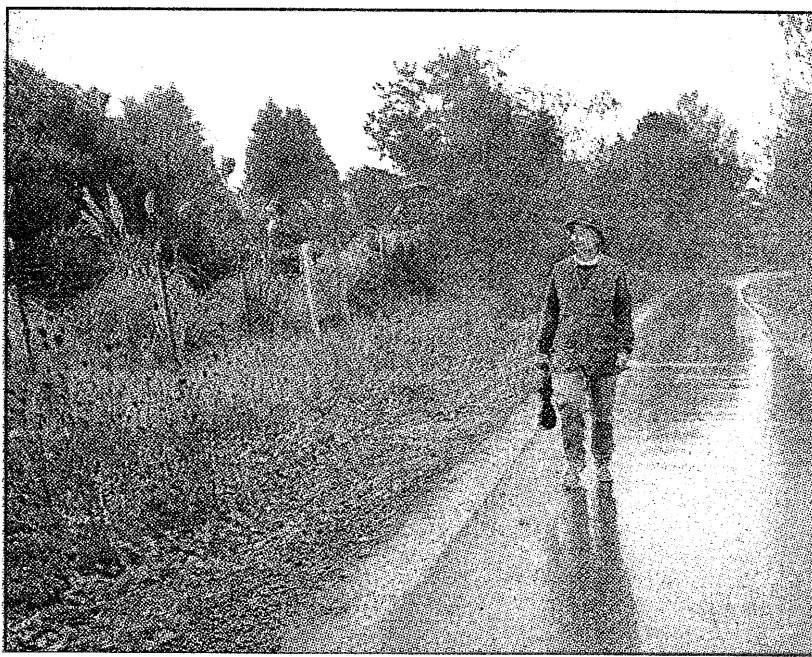
“Growth boundaries let you put your arms around your community and hold it close,” said Janet Cobb, president of the Planning and Conservation League. “They let you retain a sense of a real town where people can live and work and socialize. And they help you retain the open space and farms and wildlands outside that town.”

Creating such limits in foothill towns is a top recommendation of the Sierra Business Council, a regional group working to sustain both jobs and the quality of life in the Sierra.

“Growth boundaries are not just good for tree huggers. They are good for the economy,” said Steve Ieshara, a council leader who is executive director of the Lake Tahoe Gaming Alliance. “They allow you to maintain open space and scenic beauty — qualities that attract tourism and related businesses. They also help preserve downtown districts.”

Growth boundaries are being embraced by communities in the Napa/Sonoma region, where Sebastopol, Healdsburg and Santa Rosa have all adopted urban-growth boundaries in recent months.

In Sebastopol, citizens became alarmed as commercial and residential growth crept beyond the city edge toward the halcyon Gravenstein apple orchards, turning the city. As in many commu-



Record photo by AMELITA MANES

SAVED FROM SPRAWL: Helen Shane walks along a path in the Laguna de Santa Rosa area of Sebastopol in Sonoma County. An urban boundary keeps the area free of development. Shane was active in the effort to push for an urban boundary, which was adopted by Sebastopol voters in 1996.

How open space builds property value

Several studies show that homes next to open space appreciate faster than homes lacking access to open space. In a study by Jeff Lacey of the Center for Rural Massachusetts, two subdivisions were examined: Orchard Valley (1), with larger lots but no open space, and Echo Hill (2), with smaller lots but access to open space.

The findings:

Parameter	Orchard Valley (no access to open space)	Echo Hill (access to open space)
Number of units studied	125	102
Average lot size (sq. ft.)	24,352	12,189
Open space (acres)	None	38
Average living area (sq. ft.)	1,559	1,697
Average 1968 prices	\$26,300	\$26,900
Average 1989 price	\$134,200	\$151,300
Appreciation (1968-89)	410%	462%
Average appreciation per year	19.5%	22%

Source: “An Examination of Market Appreciation for Clustered Housing with Permanent Open Space,” by Jeff Lacey

nities, the General Plan in Sebastopol called for directing growth toward existing sewer pipes and sidewalks.

While a sound policy, it was subject to shifting political winds, said Helen Shane, a Sebastopol resident.

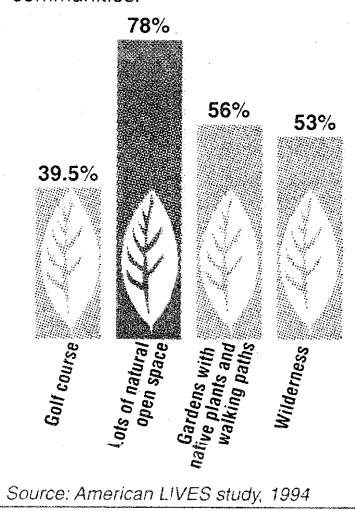
“All it takes is a simple council

majority and your General Plan is changed to allow more development. While councils are temporary, the roads or sewers or subdivisions they approve aren’t, you can’t undo bad political decisions,” she said.

Part of the concern grew from the fear that residential sprawl

Desirable features

Nearly twice the number of homebuyers want open space than want golf courses, a significant cost savings for developers and a shift from the 1980s golf-oriented communities.



Source: American LIVES Study, 1994

“We would oppose an urban-growth boundary. We believe every project should be examined on its own merits,” said Bill Breiner, chairman of Citizens for Amador County, a property-rights group. “What if a major new employer wanted to come in beyond the boundary? We have relatively high unemployment and poverty here. Would a boundary keep us from taking advantage of a wonderful economic opportunity?”

Breiner’s group believes rural preservation should be accomplished by compensating landowners for surrendering their development rights — not through “government edict and regulation.”

Gary Clark, Amador County planning director, said the idea of channeling new growth toward existing towns and villages may be noble, but it’s impractical.

“Managing growth isn’t rocket science, it’s simple politics,” he said. “People will continue to want and push for that five acres in the country with a beautiful view and nobody around.”

A landowner may be offered various blandishments, from tax credits to development credits, to keep his property in oaks or farmland. Cobb feels buying development rights from landowners holds the most promise, allowing the owner to receive cash, remain on the land and pass it on to heirs.

But while such incentives may be politically desirable, they are not required. As in Sebastopol, voters or elected leaders can lock land into open space or farm use for the perceived good of the majority.

“It comes down to whether citizens have the right to decide what kind of a community they want to have,” said Kenyon Webster, planning director in Sebastopol. “From a planning and legal viewpoint, I believe very strongly that they do have that right.”

“Residential development doesn’t pay for itself. A city builds one subdivision, then it allows another one in to pay for the first one and so on. It’s sort of like a pyramid scheme,” Shane said.

A coalition including citizens, apple growers and downtown merchants all pushed for Sebastopol’s limit. It was adopted by a 69 percent majority in November 1996. The limit cannot be revised for 20 years without voter approval.

Cobb, of the Planning and Conservation League, said citizens are stepping forward to set limits because elected officials often can’t or won’t.

The country’s first growth boundary was established in Portland, Ore., nearly 30 years ago. While there were worries the boundary would cut chances for affordable housing, that has not happened, said Sherry Oeser, a senior programmer with Metro, the Portland regional government that oversees the limit. Instead, builders have made better use of smaller lots in the urbanized areas, providing a range of affordable homes, she said.

Surprisingly, there have been few grumbles from farmers on the outer edge of the boundary. Oregon’s land-use law demands that rural land be considered for development only as a last resort, Oeser said.

Yet drawing a clear and hard line may be easier in Sebastopol or Portland than in the foothills, where property rights are strongly defended. Many rural landowners expect to be compensated for keeping their property in ranchland or open space. And there is sharp opposition in some quarters to any tightening of development controls.

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DESIGNS

Continued from page SR11

standard building without the special, Gold Rush-era design cut. Along with the new building, he’s preserved a smaller structure behind the main business. The Harley-Davidson Motel is a one-room hostelry complete with coffee cups and pillows emblazoned with the Harley-Davidson logo. In the refrigerator, there is always an ample supply of Budweiser, compliments of the house.

Even the mini-motel helps preserve Mother Lode history, though of a less-celebrated sort. “Back in the old days, they tell me the room was used pretty regularly by the working girls,” Chance said.

Preserving historic character is much more than an act of high-minded civic service, said Mark Thornton, a Tuolumne County supervisor. “History sells,” Thornton said. “It’s as simple as that. Tourism dollars flow to places where history is cherished and preserved, not paved over.”

Yet design standards and review of the type embraced by Jamestown and Nevada City remain the exception in foothill towns, not the rule.

Gary Clark, the planning chief in Amador County, said design guidelines were once considered for some communities in the county.

“We were looking at wooden facades and at all that fancy stuff on the eaves. And a guy on the committee said, ‘I couldn’t afford that. I have a metal building. If I had to do all that, I wouldn’t be in business. What’s wrong with a metal building?’ And that’s where it pretty much ended. You have to consider the costs of all this along with the benefits.”

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Increasingly, the quality of development in the foothills will rely on the quality of public involvement and awareness, he said.

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The make-or-buy importance of thoughtful planning has been overlooked by many foothill communities, said James Coyne, a Calaveras County planning commissioner. “Land-use planning dictates everything of importance to a community. The quality of schools, of neighborhoods, of economic conditions,” he said. “Ultimately, it is land use that dictates quality of life.”

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Sierra Sprawl

A look at the conflict of development and environment in the foothills

SPECIAL REPORT

“Let’s stand back and look at where we want to be in 20 years.”

— Ed Rich, Calaveras County planning commissioner



Record photos by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

HOMES IN THE PINES: The Forest Meadows subdivision represents the type of development luring new settlers to the Mother Lode. The area is experiencing a growth surge. And environmentalists worry about the continued loss of open spaces.

“We had a left wing and a right wing.” — Ken Marks, Tuolumne County supervisor

Factions learning to find common ground

Contentious debate can lead to effective land management

By Richard Hanner
Record Staff Writer

They were an unlikely group to be meeting at a Best Western motel in Sonora on a Friday night.

There was the Sierra Club member who fought vigorously to protect the wild Clavey River.

The plastics company owner who heads the Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce.

And even the county supervisor, the one who proudly keeps a photo of a stony-faced John Wayne on his office wall inscribed with the words, “If you want to be a part of Earth First, I’ll put you in the ground.”

The three were joined by 69 others, including foresters and teachers, welfare recipients and artists.

One by one, they each entered the main conference room at the motel, past the sign reading: “All guns, egos, and positions shall be left at the door. It’s time we all pull together.”

In the preceding months, there had been plenty of debate and divisiveness in Tuolumne County. Now, over a long weekend, there would be a search for common ground.

“We had a left wing and a right wing,” said Ken Marks, the supervisor who has John Wayne’s visage pinned to his office wall. “But we needed to put them together so we could all finally get off the ground.”

In many parts of the West today, including the Sierra foothills, there is a new push to make peace, not war.

It’s a trend toward collaboration instead of confrontation, a campaign to find early solutions so bodies do not go down in front

of growling bulldozers and spikes are not shoved deep into towering redwoods.

The movement toward friendly discussion is clearly apparent in the Sierra, where erstwhile enemies are shaking hands, sitting down and looking for ways to get along. Behind this new amiability is a growing awareness of how much is shared by tree lovers and tree cutters alike.

“A healthy environment and a healthy economy go together,” said Laurel Ames, of the Sierra Nevada Alliance, a nonprofit group working to protect Sierra resources. “That makes for an increasing number of interesting bedfellows.”

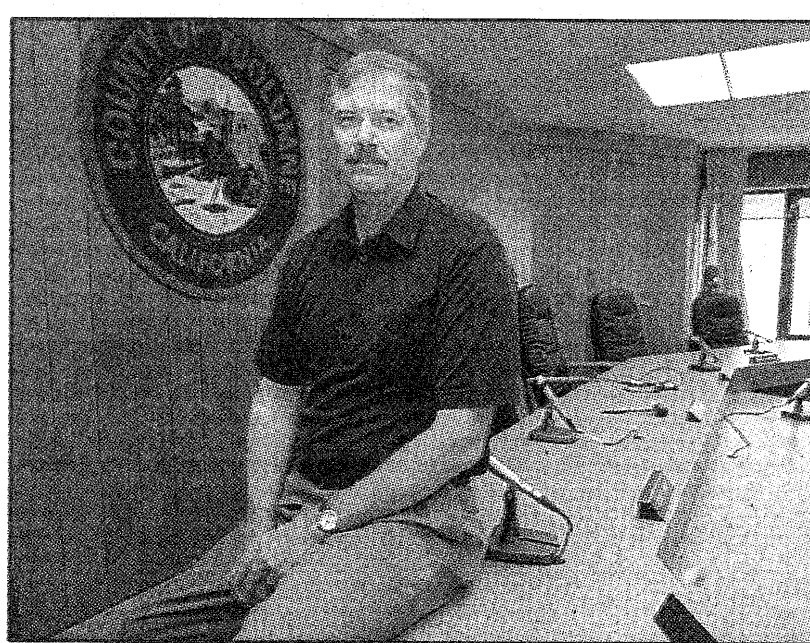
Recent surveys by the Sierra Business Council, which includes 350 businesses in the region, underline the fact that real estate agents, potters and poets are all drawn to the region by its scenic splendor. As a result, more and more issues are being discussed and resolved in coffee shops, not courthouses.

In Quincy, for example, environmentalists, foresters and timber company executives put aside differences and decided to meet at the library. Over months, they hashed out an unprecedented plan for managing the national forests that ring the Plumas County town.

The first meetings were held in the public library, said Michael Jackson, a lawyer and one of the participants, for very specific reasons. “One, it’s hard to yell in a library. Two, we wanted everybody to know we were meeting. There was nothing done here behind closed doors — everything was out in the open.”

In Nevada County, federal managers working with locals drew up plans to manage 1,500 acres of public land interspersed with private property.

And on the eastern slope of the Sierra, the Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra, or CURES, is bringing together foresters, motel owners and



Record photo by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

KEEPS PHOTO OF JOHN WAYNE: Tuolumne County Supervisor Ken Marks, a conservative, has met with foresters, land owners and others in an effort to reach common ground on the issue of growth.

cycling enthusiasts to work for scenic highway status for Highway 395 and set up informational kiosks for visitors on public lands.

Still, reaching out to someone on the other side is not always easy.

In Tuolumne County, the political divide had been deepened by a hard-fought battle over a dam on the Clavey River. The plan was eventually scuttled, but resentment between those for and against the project lingered.

And hard feelings had built over a major rewrite of the county’s General Plan, with some leading key protections were gutted from the final version.

Even so, many of the antagonists agreed to meet and talk during a long weekend in April at the Best Western. They were joined by other so-called “stakeholders” representing such diverse interests as the media, social services and the arts. The retreat was organized by Marks and other community leaders, and participants were chosen to reflect a breadth of communi-

ty interests. Called “Our Backyard — Tuolumne County in 2020,” the sessions, it was hoped, would be a starting point for better, more constructive dialogue.

But nobody was quite sure what would happen.

“I was skeptical about the process at first,” said Glenda Edwards, a Sierra Club leader who helped lead the fight against damming the Clavey. “I was looking for the hidden agenda.”

Likewise, Dan Buckman, owner of a plastics company and the chief executive of the Tuolumne Chamber of Commerce, held reservations.

“I was going to be sitting down with people considered the enemy,” he said. “So I was a little anxious. I felt there were people there from an environmental perspective who would simply refuse to compromise.”

Among the first orders of business: Participants told about themselves. On butcher paper tacked to the wall of the meeting rooms, people wrote down some

of their major life experiences, from serving in Vietnam to serving prison time. Even with no names attached, the scribbles allowed the attendees to share, connect and even laugh a little.

“We started to break down the stereotypes and see each other as people. Not just chamber of commerce leaders or environmentalists. But people,” Buckman said.

During Our Backyard talks, Buckman agreed to join non-chamber types and explore a roller rink catering to the community’s youth.

Marks, the conservative supervisor, learned an environmental leader actually supported his call for a new turning lane into a school.

At the close of Our Backyard, task forces were formed to pursue various community goals, from the roller rink to the possible consolidation of the county’s school districts.

Hard, tangible results may take months or years. Even so, those who are part of Our Backyard say there is a little less tension now in Tuolumne County, a little more trust.

In recent weeks, Buckman attended a weeklong seminar on nurturing collaboration sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service.

And a course in collaborative process is even being considered for Columbia Community College.

“The old ‘us versus them’ mentality seems to have faded somewhat,” Edwards said.

Marks has no plans to take down his John Wayne poster. Still, he is optimistic there will be more compromise in the future, and he vows to be part of that.

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New land rush changing face of foothills

By Jim Nickles
Record Staff Writer

Once, Miwok Indians roamed the verdant canyons, fishing, hunting and gathering acorns.

Later, miners streamed in from around the world, lured by the golden flakes in its streams and hills.

A unique contest involving jumping frogs helped launch the literary career of Mark Twain.

and business leaders say it’s not too late to save the fragile belt of foothills between the Central Valley and the High Sierra, time is running out.

Grasslands, oaks and ponderosa pines are disappearing under the spread of Wal-Mart, ranchettes, mini-malls and trailer parks.

Drive along any major highway and you can see it.

In Tuolumne County, the route to Sonora Pass along Highway 108 leads through a commercial strip that extends for miles, nearly from Jamestown to Twain Harte. At peak hours, traffic can come to a standstill amid hamburger joints, shopping centers and car dealerships that could



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Discussions of rural growth are often peppered with phrases such as internalized costs and parcelization. What does it all mean? Among the most common words and phrases:

■ **BIG BOX:** A reference to giant stores such as Wal-Mart and Costco, which require large parcels and have a box-like appearance.

■ **CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT:** Some planners believe clustering new homes near existing towns makes more sense than allowing them to sprawl into the hills and fields.

■ **COMMUNITY PLAN:** Many counties have detailed plans for unincorporated communities that spell out where residential or commercial growth may occur. Such plans, say land-use experts, are a good step toward providing continuity as growth occurs.

■ **EXURBS (or exurbia):** First there were the suburbs, the neighborhoods that rose on the fringe of the cities in the '60s and '70s. More recently, people have been streaming into the rural areas beyond the suburbs, known as the exurbs.

■ **GENERAL PLAN:** A master blueprint for a city or county's growth. General plans include maps that show places where houses should go, where factories should be built, and so on. But not all general plans are created or maintained equally. Some stick to the basics, while others lay out ways to attract jobs, protect farmland or preserve historic resources.

■ **INTERNALIZED COSTS:** The costs paid by a developer to help pay for new streets or schools to serve his project. Usually, developer fees alone do not cover the costs of building or maintaining infrastructure, though, so money is also needed from other sources. Those are known as "externalized" costs. Many foothill communities now are grappling over how much of a project's costs should be internalized, how much externalized.

■ **PARCELIZATION:** The slicing up of farmland or open space into residential parcels, typically one to 10 acres in size.

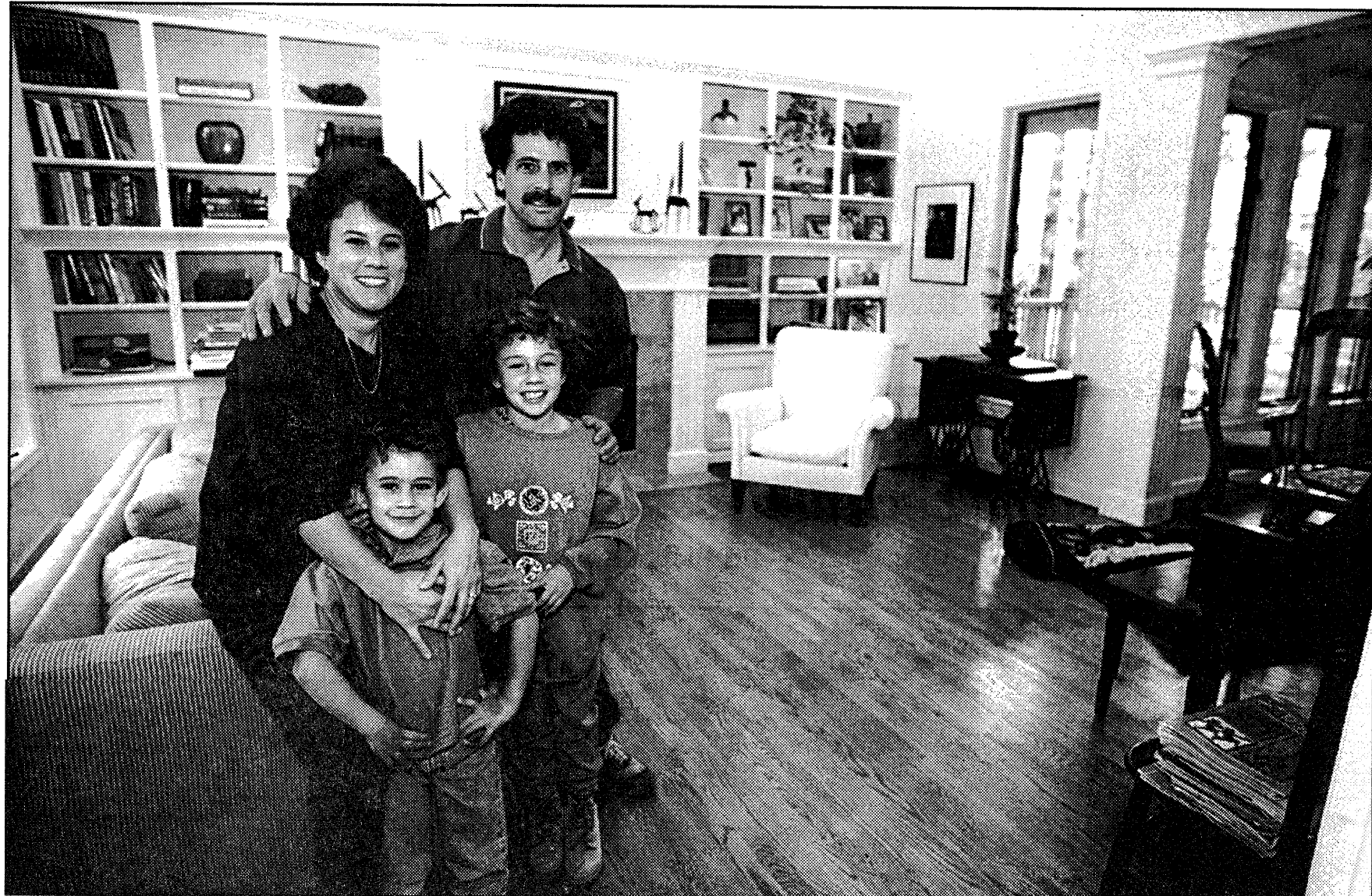
■ **SPRAWL:** Typically, planners like urban growth to occur in orderly patterns within towns or cities. When such growth leaps city limits into the hills or fields beyond, that's sprawl.

■ **URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY (UGB):** A sort of line in the sand draws around a city that allows urban growth to go only so far and no further. The idea is to reduce sprawl and protect outlying farms and open space. Once set, these boundaries, typically approved by elected officials or even voters, are difficult to adjust.

■ **WILLIAMSON ACT:** A state law giving farmers tax breaks to keep their land in agriculture instead of subdivisions. The tax break is outlined in a 10-year contract between the farmer and the county in which he operates.

■ **VIEWSHED:** A variation of watershed, a viewshed is the vista of hills or valleys that can be seen from a certain point. Some foothill residents, dismayed to find rooftops and neon creeping into their viewsheds, feel development in such visually valuable areas should be limited.

■ **ZONING FOR DOLLARS:** Also known by the bulky phrase, "fiscalization of land use," this refers to how some cities and counties bend policies to allow the construction of new stores, such as big boxes, so they can capture much-needed sales-tax revenue.



CONTENT IN THE FOOTHILLS: Lisa and Jeffrey Schwartz live in Forest Meadows, east of Murphys, with their two children Aron and Hilery. The couple left behind the fast pace of Los Angeles, shortly after they married, in favor of a slower-paced lifestyle in the Sierra foothills.

"We never could have afforded the same type of lifestyle in the city." — Lisa Schwartz, Forest Meadows

New settlers after peace in the Lode

Lure of the land still strong after Gold Rush

By Francis P. Garland
Lode Bureau Chief

VALLEY SPRINGS — They migrate from the Bay Area, from the suburban sprawl of the San Fernando Valley and the nearby flatlands of Stockton and Modesto.

They come looking for different things — a quiet, country backdrop to live out their golden years, a few acres of privacy to raise a family and perhaps a pygmy goat or two, an upscale neighborhood built around a championship golf course.

They're the new settlers — a blend of retirees, young professional couples and blue-collar workers who have helped turn the foothills into one of California's fastest-growing areas.

Between 1970 and 1990, the Sierra Nevada region grew by 130 percent to about 618,000 people. And while the growth has slowed in the last year or two, experts say the Sierra's population could more than triple by the year 2040.

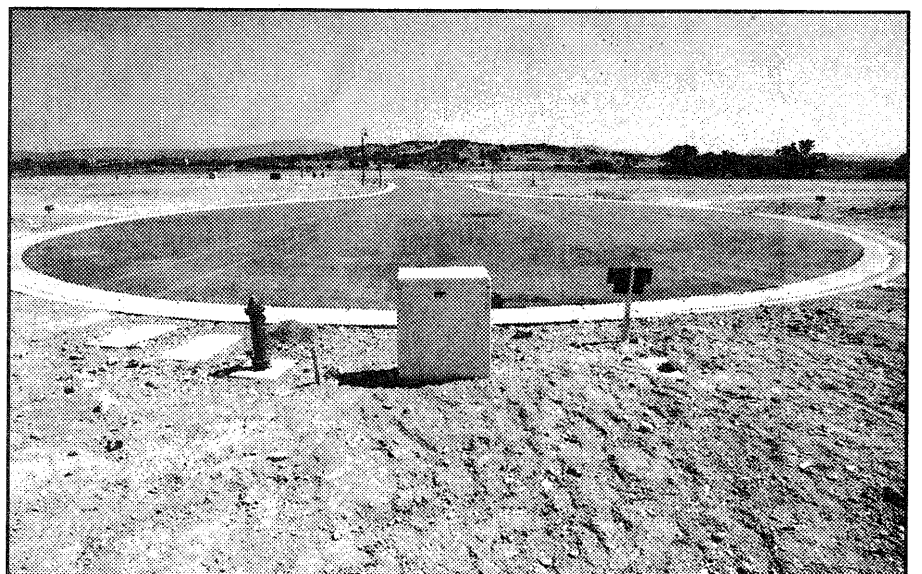
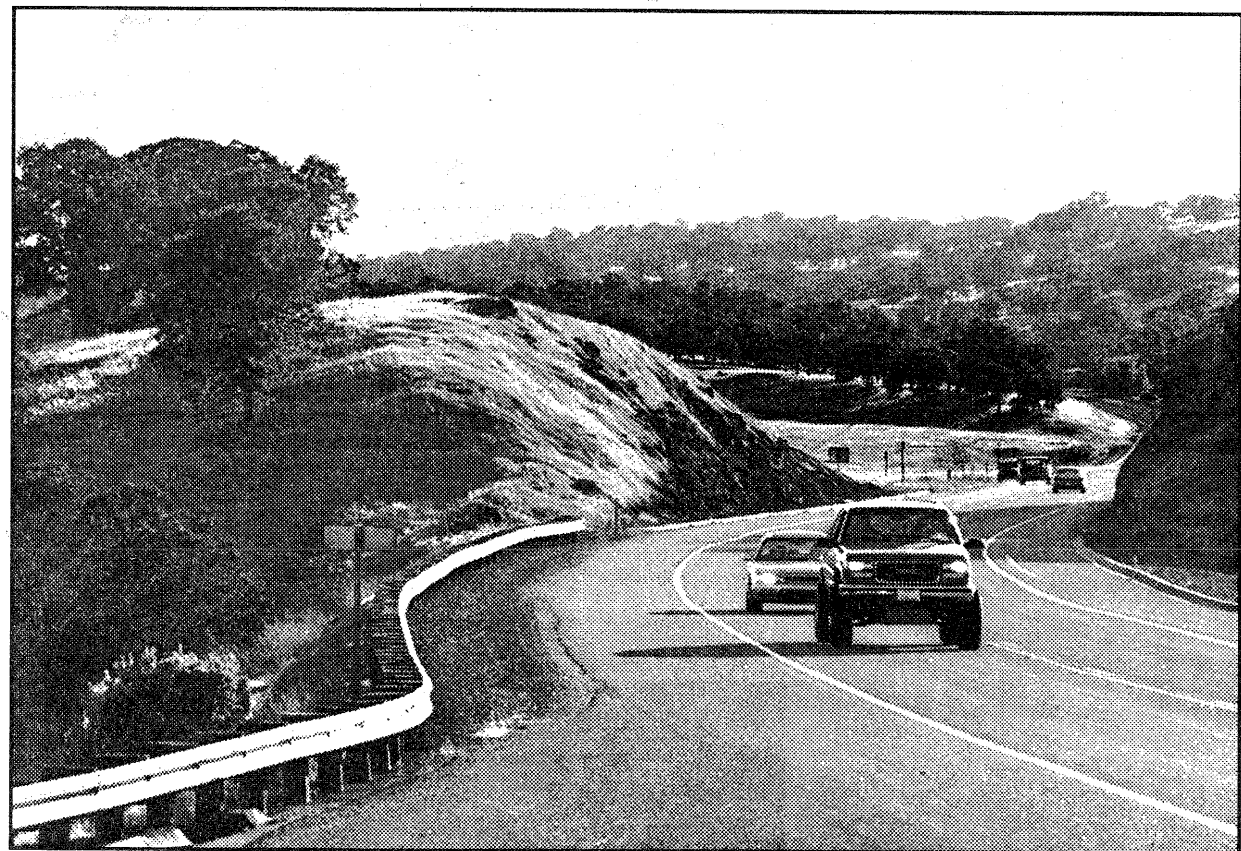
Fueling that new "Gold Rush" will be a mix of old and young — the same mix that in recent years has turned western Calaveras County into an oak-studded sociological test tube of sorts.

Commuters adding up Figuring prominently in that mix has been the commuter: those who can't work from home or find a job locally and must hit the highway to earn a living.

The number of commuters has grown in recent years, particularly in the western foothills. One recent study of Valley-to-foothill travel patterns, for example, estimated that about one in five Calaveras County workers commuted to the Central Valley every day.

Cathy Shepard has been among that growing group since she and her husband, Bill, moved to Rancho Calaveras 12 years ago. They're like many commuter couples who live a sort of tag-team existence — working different shifts or staggering their departures so one is home to corral the children after school or pick them up from day care.

Bill Shepard, who commutes to his steel job in Stockton, usually leaves the house first in the morning, sometimes joining the Highway 20 parade as early as 4 a.m. He's able to get home in time to cook dinner before his wife makes it back from her job in Oakland at an auto dealership.



NEWCOMERS OFTEN COMMUTE: Highway 4 is a lifeline connecting the Valley to the Mother Lode. Every day, residents of the Sierra foothills leave their homes for jobs in the Valley or even the Bay Area.

MAKING ROOM: A new cul-de-sac is just the beginning of a subdivision going up near Copperopolis.

freeway. The pace has gotten fast — almost too fast."

Still, the Shepards and other commuters say while it's no snap to drive 40 to 50 minutes to and from work every day, it's nowhere near the stressful drive they might find if they lived in the Valley or the big city.

Jo-Ann Frank, who grew up in Los Angeles County, said her 45-minute drive from Valley Springs to Sutter Creek is a breeze by Southern California standards.

"You're not on a freeway — you're driving through the country," she said. "And that makes it easier. It's a lot more pleasant and less stressful. You don't have people passing you and flipping you off, and you're not scared they'll shoot you because you're not driving fast enough."

Cathy Shepard, who more apt to run into a cattle drive along her back-road commute to Oakland than she is a traffic jam, said the driving is a small price to pay to be able to live in the foothills. "Anything I deal with trying to get between here and there is worth it," she said.

What makes it worth it? A sense of security, and of commu-

Quality of life cited And it's not just in Valley Springs. Throughout the foothills, the quality of life has attracted thousands like Lisa Schwartz, who left the constant hum of freeway traffic in Southern California for the birdsongs that flutter onto the deck at her Forest Meadows home, east of Murphys.

Like many who've arrived in recent years, Schwartz wasn't looking for something in particular. "It was more of an escape from somewhere than a conscious effort to go to something," she said.

Forest Meadows, which opened the first of its 400 or so homes about 20 years ago, is primarily a mix of retirees, second-home owners and those who work in the area.

In western Calaveras County, one finds an evolving mix of young and old, some who prefer

affinity for the arts. Many of Anema Garten's neighbors, for example, turned out each week during the summer for the Calaveras County Arts Council's Music in the Parks series.

While the foothills' newest residents in general feature a mix of retirees and young professionals, that evolution is particularly evident in La Contenta. Envisioned as a golf-course retirement community when it opened, the 700-lot subdivision is getting younger.

To folks like Anema-Garten, that's good. "If I'd have wanted a retirement community," she said, "I'd have moved to Sun City. It's very healthy to have a mix, whether it's ages or ethnic diversity. It's more like real life."

Danny Mao, who moved to La Contenta in 1989, said the changes in the neighborhood have been for the better. "It's a more dynamic place," he said. "You get the young and the old, but the thing they both bring with them is a desire to protect and contribute to the community."

"They are very concerned about what's happening around here." Not everyone, though, likes what they see of the evolving Valley Springs area. Pat Stone, who moved to La Contenta with her husband, Richard, in 1989 after he retired from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, said more commuter families like the Franks mean more children home alone.

"They're moving up to get away from the city, if you will," Stone said of the typical La Contenta commuter family. "Mom and Dad get up in the morning and go back to the city to work and leave the kids here. They get in trouble. They're not supervised, and there's nothing for them to do."

Less crime a factor Mary Cox, whose family moved from Stockton eight years ago to escape what she called growing crime and gang problems, agreed that aside from traditional youth-sports programs, there's not much for youngsters to do. "There's no bowling alley or movie theater," Cox said. "There really should be more."

But others say there's plenty if you know where to look. "There's fishing and hunting and swimming and walks around the lakes and nature trails," Frank said. "My kids can go climb trees and no one's going to have a fit about it."

Kim Bristow, who lives in Rancho Calaveras, said just feeling safe about one's surroundings makes it easier on young families because children can feel free to play down the road with friends. The sense of security also makes people more apt to lend a hand in time of need, Bristow said.

"In the city, people don't help others because they're afraid of what might happen," she said. "Here, you never have a fear of something coming back on you for being a good Samaritan."

They're bringing a willingness to volunteer in things like Habitat for Humanity or Santa's Express, a program to find toys for needy kids. And they're bringing an

"We're not talking about stopping growth. We're talking about managing it intelligently."

— Steve Teshara, business leader

Designs on the future

Protecting habitats, people possible

By Richard Hamner
Record Staff Writer

Developers in Copperopolis are creating a huge new community where they hope both people and opossums can live in peace.

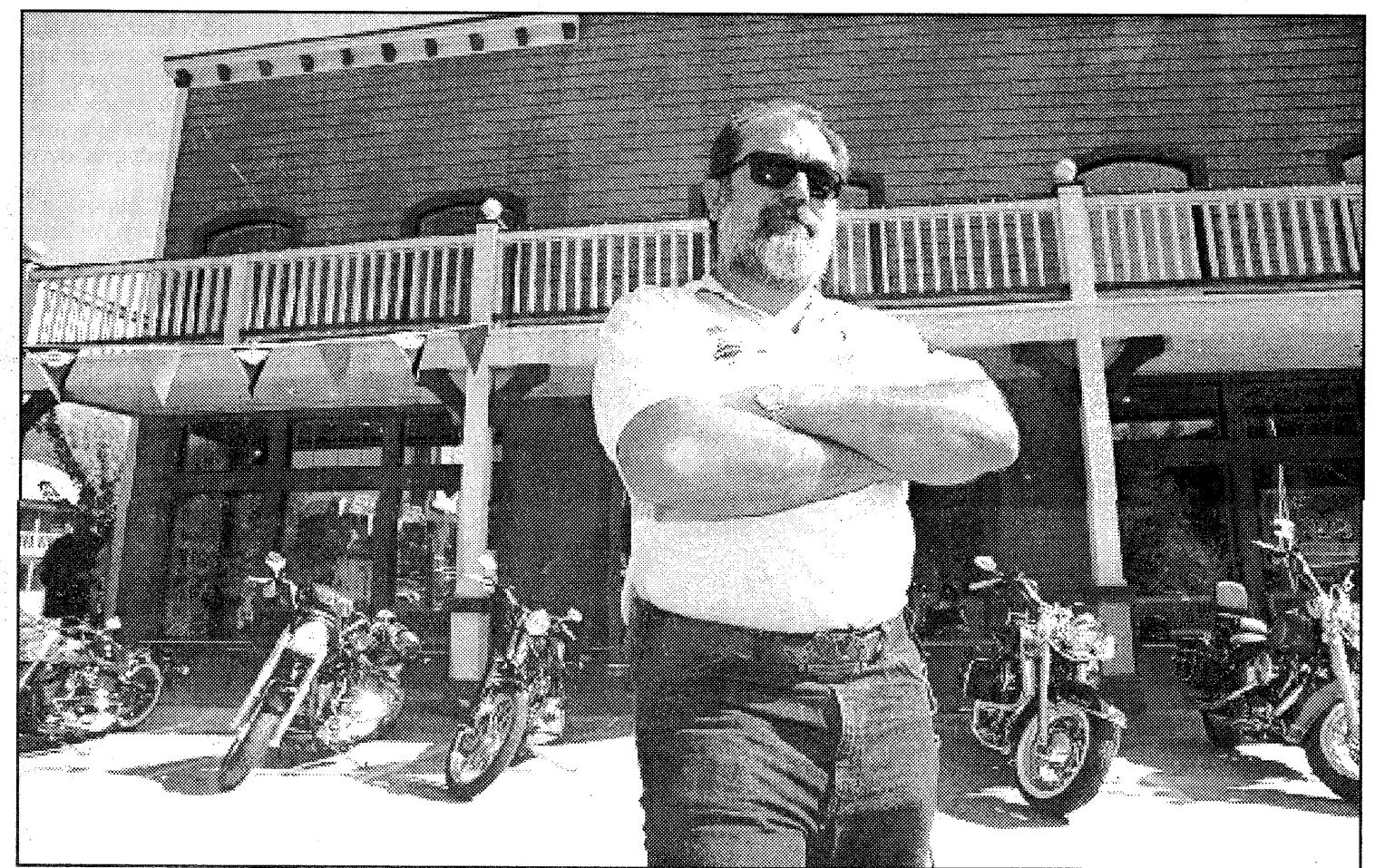
Community leaders in Nevada City are slapping down attempts by merchants to install neon signs in their quaint and rustic downtown.

And merchants in Truckee hired a New Jersey professor to help maintain the frontier chic of their central business district.

If the Sierra foothills are to remain a uniquely beautiful place to live and work, sharply different planning strategies are needed, business and planning leaders say.

The strategies are propelled by a radical premise: Only by protecting history and habitat can citizens of the Mother Lode assure their jobs, their property values, their quality of life.

"People in the Sierra are starting to understand that their history and natural beauty is their principal. As a businessperson, you protect your principal. You certainly don't squander it," said Janice Forbes, publisher of Sierra Heritage magazine in Auburn. Forbes is president of the Sierra Business Council, a regional group working to strike a balance



HOGS IN JAMESTOWN: Instead of a neon-lit strip mall, Dan Chance's Harley-Davidson shop is located in a building that reflects the Wild West character of the Mother Lode. Many land-use experts say it is an example of what could be the future of the foothills.

between economic and environmental needs.

Forbes and others say it's time to revise planning practices in the foothill counties, where residential and commercial sprawl have transformed thousands of acres in the last 15 years. The council recently published "Planning for Prosperity," a study outlining how planning practices can be shifted to protect both pines and paychecks.

"We're not talking about stopping growth. We're talking about managing it

intelligently," said Steve Teshara, executive director of the Lake Tahoe Gaming Alliance and a business-council leader.

"Not just for ourselves. But for our kids and our grandkids." As new strategies are adopted, Teshara said, it is important to enrich them through diverse and lively public involvement. "We've driven people away from planning by making it too distant, too bureaucratic," he said. "We need people to become excited about planning their own communities."

Some of the council's recommendations are based in part on the ills suffered by Placer, Nevada and El Dorado counties in recent years, where growth has outstripped infrastructure and damaged both natural and historic treasures. Demographers see similar pressures building over the next decade in Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.

Big projects have value One strategy holding promise for foothills growth, say planners, may be mega-projects, the staged development of very large properties over a period of several years. Instead of slicing up a 1,000-acre ranch into a patchwork of individual 10-acre lots, they argue, it is better to develop the property as a whole. That way, the most sensitive habitat and open space can be preserved and homes may be clustered closest to services and public improvements.

A handful of such developments are under way or on the drawing boards in the foothills, including Shenandoah Springs in Amador County and Saddle Creek and Flowers Ranch in Calaveras County.

At Saddle Creek, manager Joe Boss said his project includes tunnels for wildlife to cross below roads and a special water-treatment system to cleanse runoff from the golf course, which carries fertilizers.

"The way we're doing it costs more money. We're

running the roads along the contours of the land, for instance. It's cheaper to cut the roads in straight lines when you can. But we think the extra thought and investment will be worth it in the long run," he said.

Large developments can work if enough money is set aside for such things as roads, schools and police service, said Tim Duane, a professor of planning at the University of California, Berkeley.

There must also be guarantees that enough open space of the right kind will be protected. "A golf course is nice to look at, but it is not prime wildlife habitat," he said. "The open space must have value."

Along with protecting open space, planners advise safeguarding the historic personalities of downtown districts. That's happened in Nevada City, where leaders moved in 1989 to rescue their quaint but struggling business district.

"The city was divided by a new freeway and the downtown business area was suffering," said Cathy Wilcox-Barnes, a former mayor who is now the city clerk.

Council members took what they felt was a drastic but necessary step. They designated the downtown area as a historic district, with an elaborate set of design guidelines. That meant new construction had to blend with the brick-and-gingerbread style of the downtown. It has also meant reigning in some merchants from time to time.

"We had to prohibit these little sandwich boards that were going out in front of some businesses. Some businesses have wanted to put up neon signs. That's not allowed. We do allow white Christmas lights during the holiday season, and some merchants have tried to keep them on all year," Wilcox-Barnes said.

Today, Nevada City's once-forsorn downtown boasts a piquant blend of cafes, bed-and-breakfast inns and specialty stores. Downtown vacancy rates are low, and the district channeled a rich stream of sales tax for city coffers.

Jamestown has guidelines The historic district's rustic appeal is not unlike that of Jamestown in Tuolumne County, a place with its own set of design guidelines, and home to one of the nation's most striking motorcycle shops.

Rather than a grease-spattered storefront, Jamestown Harley-Davidson is housed in a bright and distinctive new building that mimics the look of a set for "Bonanza." The shop reflects what many land-use experts say is the future of foothill downtown districts: respect for Old West design blended with cutting-edge business savvy.

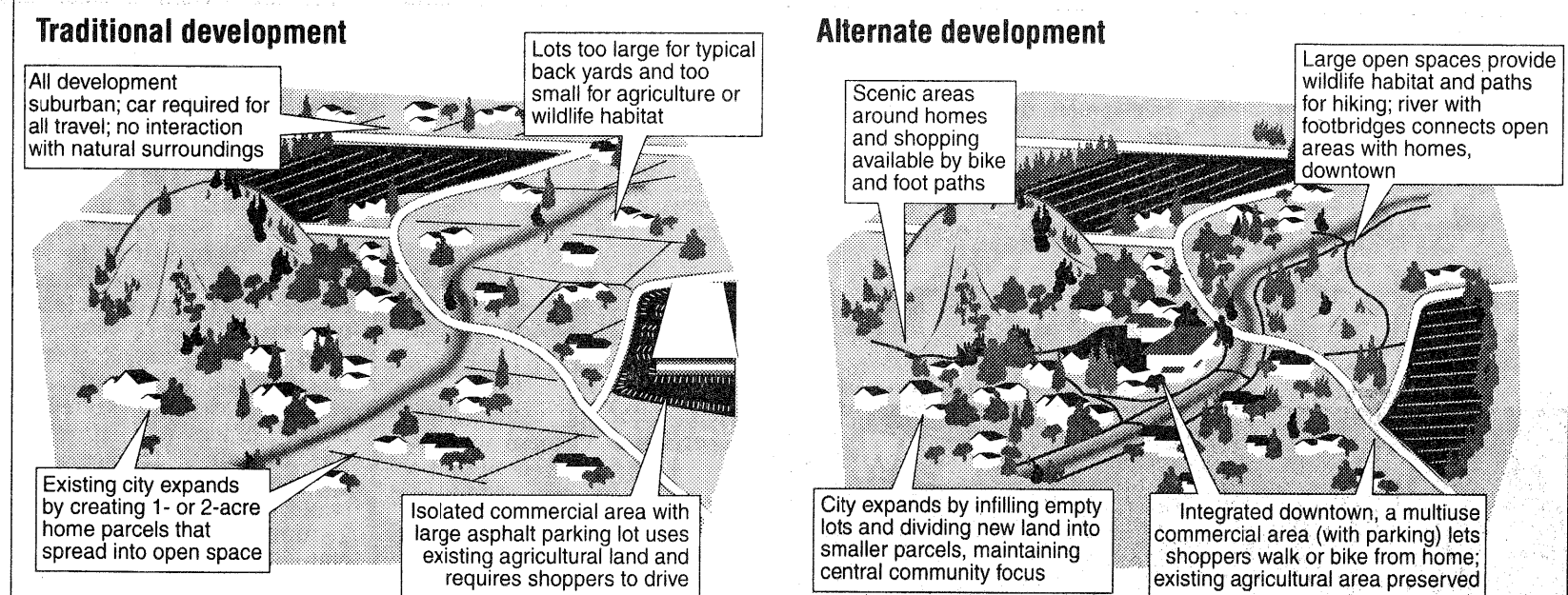
Inside the Harley shop, old-fashioned light fixtures descend from the ceiling, illuminating everything from gleaming \$22,000 motorcycles to leather bikinis. Outside, a balcony sweeps across the front of the shop, which is painted in pleasing tones of cream and cinnamon.

I live here in Jamestown, and I wanted to help maintain the look of the town," said Dan Chance, the shop owner. "So we worked with an architect to come up with a design that was practical as well as something the people of the town could be proud of."

Chance said the final product cost about what he would have paid for a

Two views of how communities can grow

Patterns of growth in foothill and mountain towns often harm the scenic beauty and feeling of open space which make the communities desirable in the first place. Planning with an area's natural features in mind can allow substantial growth, minimize the costs of new infrastructure, and preserve habitat and open space.



Source: Based on information from "Planning for Prosperity," a study prepared by the Sierra Business Council

Maggie Leighy/Record

Conservationists want to keep homes off the range

Land trusts could help preserve ranches

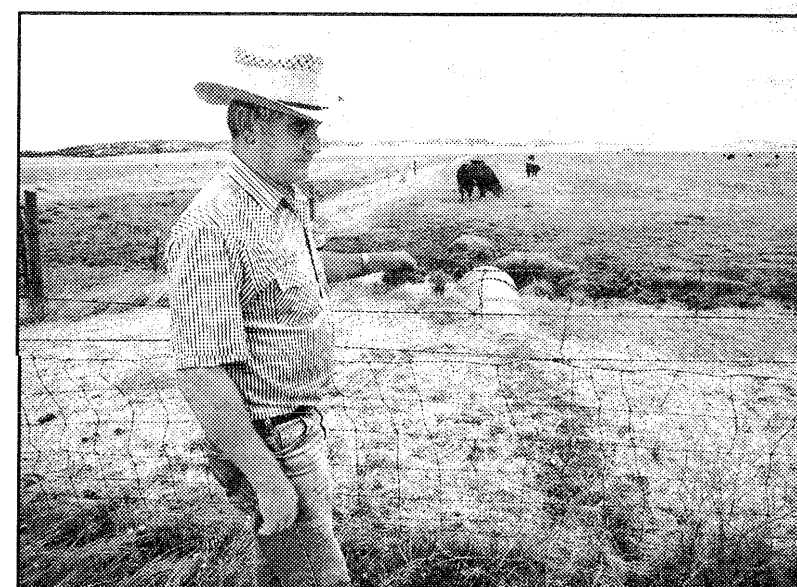
By Jim Nickles
Record Staff Writer

Environmentalists say they want to help ranchers stay in business. But many ranchers don't want their help.

The large ranches of the Mother Lode, which can spread across thousands of acres, contain some of the Sierra's most important habitats, including oak woodlands, grasslands and small streams.

Conservationists say they'd like to see the ranches preserved as open space, not divided up into endless subdivisions and "ranches" or converted to vineyards, which have less value for wildlife.

Under a conservation easement, a nonprofit group buys the development rights to a farm or ranch, thus lowering the land's market value and — it is hoped — the property taxes. Under the agreement, the nonprofit group has



Record photo by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

FENDES OFF BUYERS: Bruce Orvis and his family have been ranching in the Copperopolis area since the late 1800s. Orvis says he's had several offers from developers seeking to subdivide his ranch.

They can't just dig into their own pockets and start protecting land for everybody else.

Aside from the general woes of the cattle business, property and estate taxes are big factors in the spread of subdivisions, ranchers and environmentalists say.

Under a conservation easement, a nonprofit group buys the development rights to a farm or ranch, thus lowering the land's market value and — it is hoped — the property taxes. Under the agreement, the nonprofit group has

required to keep the land in agriculture forever.

Similarly, under a land trust, a property owner deeds the ranch to a nonprofit group that is required to keep the land in open space. The rancher's heirs avoid estate taxes that can amount to 55 percent of the property's value — taxes that can prompt the sale of the land to subdividers.

Conservation easements and land trusts aren't for everyone, said Susan Bragstad, secretary of the Amador Land Trust, which has

Differing viewpoints

"It's to all of our benefit for the private landowners to be able to keep their land for grazing."

— Laurel Ames
Sierra Nevada Alliance

"I'm really not in favor of (land trusts). You don't like to tie up your property for your heirs."

— Eloise Fischer
Mokelumne Hill rancher

established 36 conservation easements ranging from 15 to 600 acres in Amador, Calaveras and El Dorado counties.

"What's nice is it's all voluntary. It's for people who want their land to remain open forever," said Bragstad, who also is mayor of Amador City.

But such arrangements can be a tough sell, especially among longtime farm families.

"I'm really not in favor of them," said Eloise Fischer, a Mokelumne Hill rancher and president of the Calaveras County Farm Bureau. "You don't like to tie up your property for your heirs."

Dave Forrest, who runs cattle in Stanislaus and Tuolumne counties, said many ranchers want to maintain their independence and don't want "environmental wackos" telling them what to do.

Still, high taxes and low cattle prices have many ranchers under intense economic pressure, and some might be receptive to new ideas, he said.

"It depends upon where you are in your life and what the bank is forcing you into doing," Forrest said.

Bruce Orvis, whose family has been ranching in the Copperopolis area since the late 1800s, said he is struggling with ways to fend off subdivisions that are creeping upward from Oakdale and Stockton.

Despite the area's lack of water, "I've had several offers to buy up the ranch to subdivide it," he said.

But he is suspicious of conservation easements or other schemes that would increase scrutiny of his ranching operation or public access to the land.

masses of people — they can be hogs," he said.

Environmentalists say the terms of each deal are different, and public access may or may not be allowed.

They admit they'd like to see some ranchers adopt more wildlife-friendly grazing methods, such as restricting cows' access to sensitive stream courses and areas where they might eat oak seedlings.

"Overgrazing is a real problem for oaks. It's a problem for the watershed as well," said Janet Cobb, manager of the California Oaks Foundation.

"You start with the tiniest members of the food chain and they're all impacted by cattle grazing," said Jane Baxter, director of Range Watch, which is trying to reform cattle ranching. "A cow that can get into a stream for a day can do a tremendous amount of damage."

But most ranchers and farmers see themselves as custodians of the land who are also trying to make a living. They deny trashing the landscape.

Forrest said he enjoys seeing ducks, bobcats, coyotes and hawks when he's out tending his cows. "We love the land," he said. "We don't want to leave the land. Part of the reason we put up with working so hard and losing lifestyle is something that's worth having."



"We've had a (fuel) buildup now that is an enormous safety threat." — Doug Leisz, forest-management consultant

Wildfires nature's way of cleaning house

■ New homes are increasingly in the line of fire

By Jim Nickles
Record Staff Writer

For decades, firefighters tried to knock down the smallest brush-burner that erupted in California's wildlands.

Now they want to re-establish fire's natural role in the ecosystem.

It's a difficult and often hot task. And it's made more troublesome — but also more necessary — by the continuing spread of homes into fire-prone areas like the foothills and lower-elevation forests of the Sierra Nevada.

"We've got fire on the ground!" yelled state park Ranger Dave Collins as rangers and firefighters ignited some 275 acres of weed-choked hillsides in an isolated corner of Folsom Lake State Recreation Area in El Dorado County.

Over the next several hours, two dozen firefighters from the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and other agencies set a series of low-intensity fires to burn off an explosive mixture of dry weeds, brush and downed trees.

The special fire crews, all trained to ignite and contain such burns, used the terrain, the cool evening temperatures and a series of backfires to keep the blaze from spreading out of control.

Their goal, largely attained, was to clear out the low-lying scrub — the understory — but leave the oak canopy unscathed.

Collins, a supervising ranger with the Auburn State Recreation Area, said state agencies have been using controlled burns for more than two decades. But both state and federal agencies are trying to do more as evidence mounts that California's epidemic of severe wildfires can be blamed at least in part on decades of fire suppression.

80,000 acres burned
Last year alone, the Ackerson Complex and Rogge fires destroyed more than 80,000 acres

in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding Stanislaus National Forest.

And, in the same area south and east of Sonora, the Stanislaus Complex fire burned nearly 146,000 acres in 1987 — one of the state's largest wildfires ever.

In the past, low-intensity fires ignited by lightning or American Indians swept routinely through the grasslands and forests of the Sierra, clearing out the understory but leaving the large trees unharmed. Fires rejuvenated the soil and left the forests clear and parklike.

"Fire played a very important role historically in the ecosystem throughout California," Collins said. "Native Americans used to use fire to clear up areas — to enhance habitat for the wildlife they hunted."

But that all changed with the arrival of white settlers and parklike.

"Fire played a very important role historically in the ecosystem throughout California," Collins said. "Native Americans used to use fire to clear up areas — to enhance habitat for the wildlife they hunted."

Several decades' worth of fire suppression have left both the oak and conifer woodlands choked with shrubs, small trees and invasive, non-native plants such as yellow star thistles.

With the tremendous fuel buildup, the fires that do erupt are hotter and more difficult to fight. Once they reach the upper canopy of forests, they can turn into firestorms that spread across thousands of acres, consuming millions of trees and hundreds of homes.

Controlled burns are tough to pull off, however. For one thing, they can take months to plan. Most are scheduled during the cooler months of the year, when the fires are easier to control and the smoke doesn't contribute to air-quality problems. Fire officials also have to take the time to notify neighboring property owners so they don't get alarmed, Collins said.

More protection sought
Complicating the equation, more and more people are building expensive homes in the fire zones and demanding greater levels of fire protection.

"We've had a (fuel) buildup now that is an enormous safety threat to houses and residents," said Doug Leisz, a retired forester for the U.S. Forest Service and a forest-management consultant.

In the past decade, the value of property lost or damaged has skyrocketed in wildfires battled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which leads the firefight in many foothill areas.

According to CDF reports, damage was assessed at about \$2 million in 1950 from fires that scorched 303,393 acres statewide. In 1979, when fires spread across 247,000 acres, the damage totaled \$30.4 million.

In 1996, CDF crews battled blazes that scorched 232,624 acres — but the damage to property amounted to \$100.3 million.

Even allowing for inflation, the numbers show the increasing value of property threatened by wildfires, CDF spokeswoman Karen Terrill said.

To see how dramatic it has been the spread of homes into the woodlands, fly over the mountains before and after the sun goes down, Terrill said. During the day, the forest looks undisturbed, but after dark, a galaxy of lights pops up through the trees — each one marking someone's new dream home.

"Houses are going in everywhere," she said. "The places some people put their homes, they're just asking for trouble, Leisz said."

"Ridgetops and draws are just terrible places to put homes because you stand the full brunt of the fire that comes upslope. Little draws become chimneys of wildfires," he said.

When blazes do erupt, protecting such homes diverts fire crews from the overall firefight.

"The more that people move into the midst of the wildlands, the more that there's a risk to them, but also the more demand it puts on those who are trying to



SETTING FIRE: State parks Ranger Shannon Long sets a control burn in the Folsom Lake area. The Sierra Nevada foothills are a hotbed for undergrowth. Fires are nature's way of controlling brush, also known as understory.

protect the wildlands," said John Buckley, director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center in Twin Harle, a fast-growing community in the heart of fire country.

Wildfires vs. structures
"When a fire burns, instead of the engines going to try to put out the fire, they have to go and (do) structure protection," he said. The Stanislaus Complex fire was a wake-up call for the nearby community of Pine Mountain Lake, near the Tuolumne County town of Geowland.

The private, gated subdivision has launched a long-term program to clear brush around homes to reduce the chances of a catastrophic fire, said John Gray, who manages the Pine Mountain Lake homeowners association.

Much of the clearing, which can cost upwards of \$700 per lot, has been borne by individual homeowners.

But the price is worth it, Gray said. Pointing to one weed-infested hillside, where oaks and other large trees were barely visible, Gray said: "Seventy years of fire suppression is what has caused that. We're not going to improve that overnight."

Throughout the Sierra, said Leisz, the forest-management consultant, in both the high country and the foothills, the story is the same: Without a comprehensive program to reduce fuels and steer growth away from high-risk areas, the region will continue to be a tinderbox.

"The job is so enormous that while we know what should and could be done, the actual carrying out is going to take cooperation from all of the parties," he said. "From federal agencies, state agencies, from homeowners, the homeowners associations, the county governments and local fire districts. And it's going to be costly."

Seventeen years ago, Patch said, Sonora had one stoplight and no traffic problems. Now, it has four stoplights — and rush-hour backups. "You get to the major intersections and it's like a traffic jam," he said.

Homes are spreading across the landscape far outside the Mother Lode's historic villages.

Much of the growth is in the form of low-density sprawl becoming known throughout the West as "exurbs," which some say have less cohesiveness and sense of community than even traditional suburbs.

"They aren't really towns. They aren't really anything," said Tuolumne County resident and environmental activist Cienda Edwards. "It's really ugly."

Many local officials and planners say growth is being adequately controlled.

They say general plans and other policies, many recently updated, will minimize the impact of development on sensitive wildlife areas, scenic corridors and public services.

"I believe if the General Plan is followed, the growth can be directed into areas that can accommodate it," said Bev Shane, Tuolumne County's planning director.

Growth needed, some say
Ken Marks, a Tuolumne County supervisor, said the foothills need more development — but in the right places.

"Where growth is allowed, let's let it happen," he said. "Let's provide some jobs and stop chasing our kids out of the county because they can't find work."

But other officials and business leaders say now is the time for Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne counties to avoid what happened in Placer and El Dorado counties, where inadequate planning in the 1970s and 1980s allowed rampant sprawl around such towns as Auburn and Placerville.

"We need to look at the big picture. Many people still say development should be case by case. We can't afford that anymore," said James Coyne, a Calaveras County planning commissioner. "It's just too complicated. We can't divorce the regional issues from the local issues."

Calaveras County needs to do more long-range planning to determine where growth is appropriate and where it is not, said Planning Commissioner Ed Rich said.

"I think we have a tremendous opportunity in Calaveras," he said. "Let's stand back and look at where we want to be in 20 years."

Even more than in the Valley, sprawl in the foothills poses special perils.

"I say if you want to see the future ... just drive north on (Highway) 49." — Tim Duane, University of California, Berkeley

Growth: Sierra's fragile foothills at risk

Continued from SR1
have been transplanted from San Jose or Stockton.

In the sleepy Amador County town of Martell, once the site of a well-known Georgia-Pacific lumber mill, the "big boxes" of two large discount stores are now the dominant landmarks.

Suburban-style homes and ranchettes — small 1- to 5-acre plots — now cover the bucolic hillsides along Highway 26 near the exploding Calaveras County village of Valley Springs.

Also in Calaveras County, subdivisions are planned or under way that could quadruple the number of residents living in and around the tiny burg of Copperopolis.

The influx of newcomers is changing the economy and culture of the Mother Lode, as cappuccino shops and boutiques pop up in old mining towns like Murphys and Jackson. Tourism is replacing ranching, mining and logging, and pickup trucks are giving way to sport-utility vehicles.

Quality of life eroding

The attractions of the foothills are obvious, especially to people from California's smog-choked cities: Clean air, less traffic and crime, a slower-paced lifestyle and a chance to own a piece of land — all within commuting distance of the Valley and even the Bay Area.

"I can't stand the big cities," said Robert Patch, a physician's assistant who moved to Sonora after living in Sacramento and Modesto. He was lured simply by the quality of life, such as the proximity to fishing and skiing in the high country.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, though, that quality of life is eroding.

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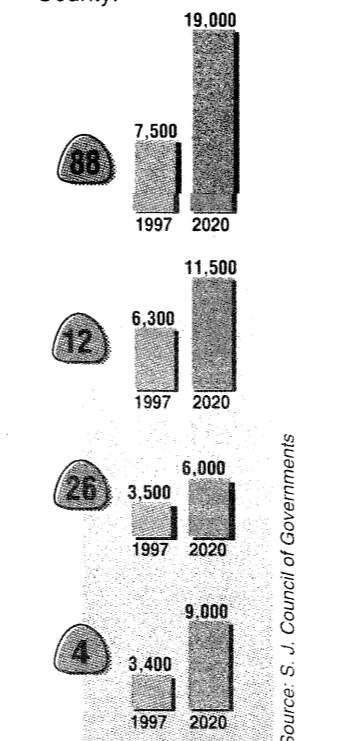
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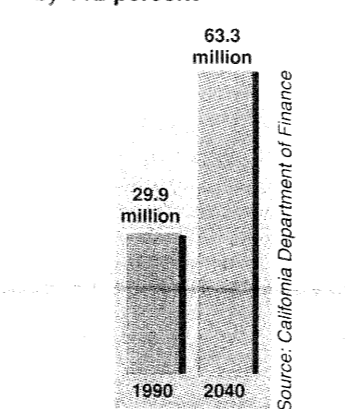
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Growth explosion in the Sierra foothills

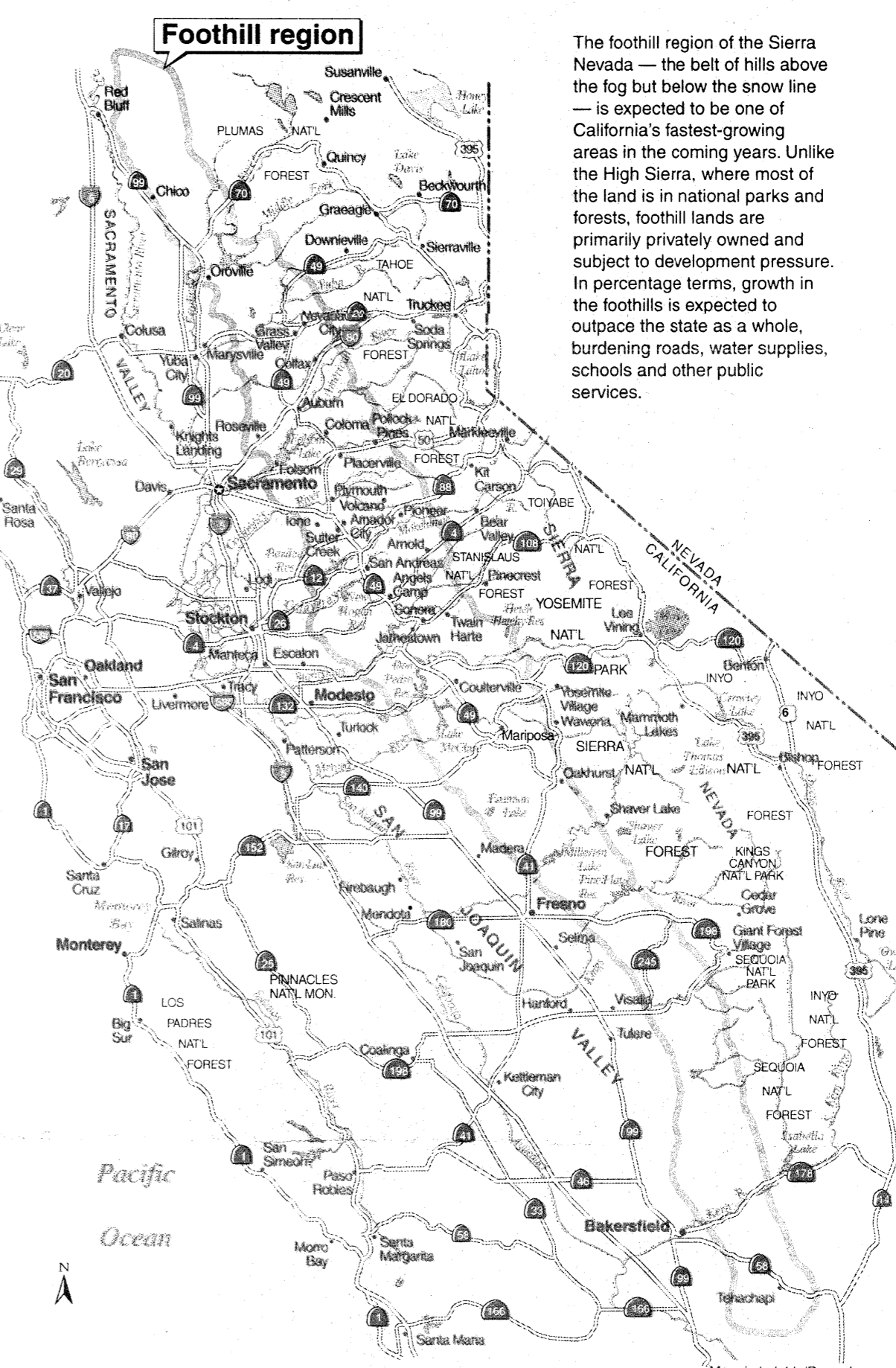
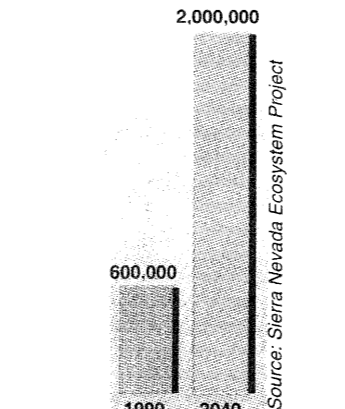
Traffic
Key traffic corridors between the central foothills and the Central Valley. Average daily traffic counts are for highway sections nearest to San Joaquin County.



California growth
Overall state population is expected to increase by 112 percent



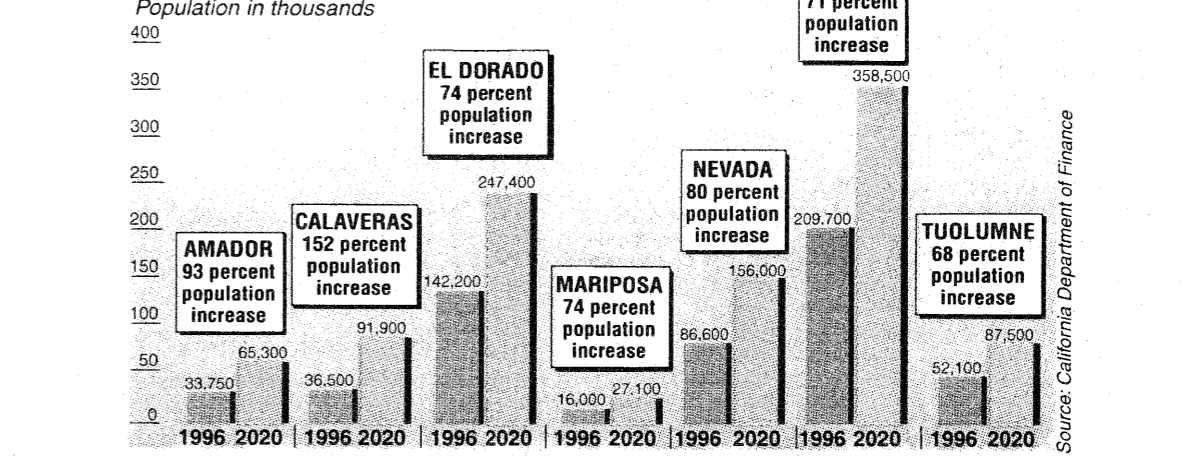
Sierra growth
Sierra Nevada foothills and mountain region population is expected to increase by 230 percent



The foothill region of the Sierra Nevada — the belt of hills above the fog but below the snow line — is expected to be one of California's fastest-growing areas in the coming years. Unlike the High Sierra, where most of the land is in national parks and forests, foothill lands are primarily privately owned and subject to development pressure. In percentage terms, growth in the foothills is expected to outpace the state as a whole, burdening roads, water supplies, schools and other public services.

Foothill counties growth

Estimated population by county as of Jan. 1, 1997, and projections for 2020.



Public services and infrastructure — roads, sewers, water lines — are more costly in a region with rocky soil, steep hillsides and deep canyons. Many of the major roads — including portions of historic Highway 49 — are already being overwhelmed by the growth, and numerous water agencies are scrambling for new supplies to serve burgeoning foothill communities.

Wildfires pose a constant threat to homes tucked along ridgelines or deep in ravines.

Forests, grasslands and streams harbor an astonishing trove of wildlife, from black bears and cougars to the elusive red-legged frog — the failed "jumping frog" of Calaveras County.

But with 85 percent of the land in private hands — unlike the preserves and parks of the upper Sierra — the fate of wildlife depends largely on individual property owners.

The red-legged frog, for one, has all but vanished from the region it made famous, and scientists say numerous other species are also in decline.

Environmentalists worry
Environmentalists and business leaders alike worry that unchecked growth could ruin the

scenic beauty, rural character and quality of life that are attracting people to the region in the first place and the source of much of its economic vitality.

"The health of the environment is critical to the health of our economy," said Peggy Mosely, owner of the Groveland Hotel in Tuolumne County. "My business, like many up here, relies on tourism."

Tourism depends on clean air and open space. I will fight very hard to preserve my business and the qualities that allow my business to prosper."

Sprawl, moreover, has impacts far beyond the mountains themselves.

Healthy watersheds in the Sierra Nevada, for instance, help maintain the quality and quantity of much of California's water supply.

But as watersheds deteriorate — as oak woodlands disappear under pavement, meadows are damaged by overgrazing, logged hillsides erode — water quality declines and the severity of downstream flooding increases, many conservationists and scientists say.

"The people of the Valley should care as much as people in the Sierra about the watersheds, because that's where you get your water," said Laurel Ames, executive

director of the Sierra Nevada Alliance, a coalition of residents and business leaders working to preserve the mountain range.

"You are interested in water quality, water-supply reliability and water storage. And you get all three benefits from healthy watersheds."

Ironically, a huge wave of growth seems a long way off to many foothill residents, who point to the sluggish economy and a less-than-vibrant real estate market.

Calaveras County's population has actually gone down recently — from an estimated 36,950 at the start of 1996 to 36,500 early this year, the state Department of Finance said.

Population heads for hills
But most forecasters say the long-term trend is for the Sierra Nevada — particularly the western foothills, the home of four of every five Sierra residents — to be one of California's fastest growing regions.

According to the U.S. Census, the population of the Sierra Nevada more than doubled from 1970 to 1990, to just over 600,000.

Most forecasters, including those with the state Department of Finance, predict the Sierra pop-

Check out future on 49

Shopping centers and mini-malls sprawl for miles along Highway 49 north of Auburn. The commercial strip hurt the economy and property values in the downtown core, Forbes said. And with inadequate sidewalks and traffic lights, it's an inhospitable place for people whether they are on foot or in a car.

Despite recent waves of growth around Valley Springs, Sonora, Jackson, Copperopolis and other communities, Amador and Calaveras counties are still relatively unspoiled. All have vast tracts of grasslands, blue-oak woodlands and conifer forests.

But that could change quickly, especially as the Bay Area and the San Joaquin Valley grow, Duane said.

"I've given talks in Sonora and Jackson and Placerville," he said. "In Sonora and Jackson, I say if you want to see the future — if you don't change what you're doing — just drive north on (Highway) 49."

People assume the region's rural character will "go on forever," said Don Erman, a biologist with the University of California, Davis, and director of UC's Centers for Water and Wildlands Resources.

But unless decisions are made to protect them, the foothills' biodiversity and scenic beauty will be lost, Erman said.

"Most people around there don't even think about it being changed," he said. "But if you don't provide for it, it surely would be. It's like saying San Jose once was surely much different than what it is now."

Land-use decisions — good and bad — last forever, or at least a very long time, she said. "It's like the Sierra Nevada Alliance.

"It's very hard to reverse bad decisions," she said. "If you do it wrong the first time, you have to live with it for a long time — 50 years at a minimum."

Minimize the impact

The key is not to stop growth but to minimize its impact on the landscape — most significantly, by "clustering" development in existing communities and ending the sprawl of "exurbs," said Erman and other scientists and conservationists.

"You can't have preservation. We found that out years ago," said Robert Tardif, a resident of the Calaveras County community of Avery and a leader of the Mountain Alliance, an environmental group. "But we can have conservation — wise use of the resource."

Unfortunately, most people aren't moving to the hills to live in compact, urban "clusters."

"We have mixed social values. People love to look at open space, and they want their own five acres," Ames said. "It's difficult. There's no easy answer."

Much of the future growth has already been approved — in the form of outdated subdivision maps or lot splits that are still valid — or is subject to little review.

Tuolumne County alone has about 1,500 vacant lots, of which approximately 10,000 could be built on at any time, county planning officials say. That represents a potential population increase of 20,000 to 30,000 people without any new subdivisions being approved.

"Probably the worst thing we have going is the shotgunning — just scattering of 10-, 20-, 30- or 40-acre lots out there," said Dave Leisz, a retired forester with the U.S. Forest Service. "That way it's usually poor standard roads, lack of a community water supply ..."

Whether it's fire equipment or police protection, schools — you run the infrastructure costs up incredibly high."

Moreover, one lot split almost always leads to another.

"Over time, one home on 40 acres leads to several homes on 40 acres," Leisz said.

Rancher Dave Forrest, who runs cattle operations in Stanislaus and Tuolumne counties, said the ultimate solution is to fix California's cities so people don't feel the need to flee.

"How do we turn downtown Stockton, or downtown Modesto, or downtown San Jose, into a place people want to be? Until we get rid of the hemorrhage of people out of the city to the country, the pressure is going to be tremendous."

The Record's Lodi Bureau Chief Rich Hamner and Lodi Bureau Chief Francis P. Garland contributed to this report.

Population growth brings traffic jams to foothills

■ Roads poorly equipped to handle gridlock

By Francis P. Garland
Lodi Bureau Chief

BURSON — Just about any weekday, Philip Cain can stand in his corner of Calaveras County and watch a parade.

It's the morning commute on Highway 26. Workers from the growing west-county area leave homes in Rancho Calaveras or La Granta and make their way to jobs in Stockton or other parts of the Valley. Some travel even further, to jobs in the Bay Area.

Cain moved to the area in 1953. Back then, no one thought in terms of a daily commute that crossed county lines. Now, it's the norm for about four out of 10 working people who call Calaveras County home. And with growth projected to increase in Calaveras County and its Mother Lode neighbors, that commute is expected to get only more congested.

Vehicle-registration records help explain why some foothill roads are on the verge of gridlock: There are more cars per capita in the foothill counties than in Orange or Los Angeles counties.

Adding to the travel woes for the foothill counties are the hordes of people who visit the area for rest and relaxation. Thousands take advantage of the quaint Gold Rush-era towns, the numerous lakes and rivers and acres of forest that provide a year-round panoramic playground. And in the process, they clog the roads.

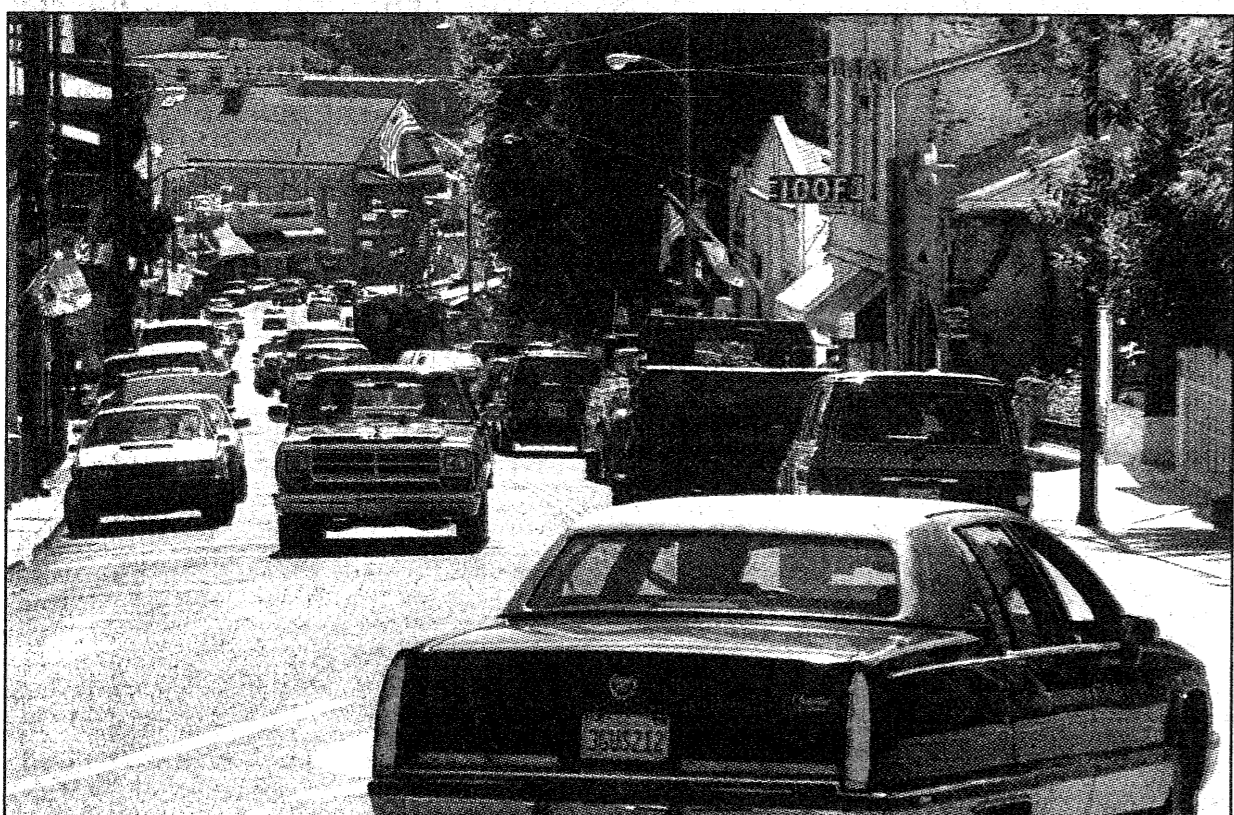
Traffic volumes at six key locations — Highway 4 at Jack Tone Road and the intersections of Highways 12/26, 88/124 and 49/108 — have increased annually from 2 percent per year to 4 percent except for the Highways 12/26 junction, which saw 9 percent annual growth.

Carlos Yanzon, an associate transportation planner who works on traffic volumes for Caltrans, said 3 percent annual growth is "reasonable."

Those in the business of forecasting just how the foothills' growth will be served, at least in terms of coming and going, say unless substantial money is pumped into improving Highway 26 and other state and local roads, gridlock will become the norm in many locations by the year 2015.

In Calaveras County alone, stop-and-go traffic could surface on Highway 49 between Angels Camp and San Andreas; Highway 4 between Murphys and Calaveras Big Trees State Park; Highway 4 west of Angels Camp; and Highway 26 west of Valley Springs.

According to Calaveras County's regional transportation plan, without any improvements, virtually



FOOTHILLS GRIDLOCK: Traffic slows as it goes through Sonora. Sierra foothill roads were originally intended to handle a low volume of traffic. That, coupled with a surge in population, contributes to traffic jams.

the entire network of state highways — with the exception of parts of Highways 26 and 49 — will see high traffic volumes by the year 2015.

Terrill Bailey isn't at all surprised to hear such forecasts.

Bailey, who moved to Rancho Calaveras six years ago from Stockton and is the chairwoman of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, said the traffic woes that exist in west Calaveras County in part resulted from a miscalculation of what he living there.

"Some of those larger subdivisions were approved with the idea they'd be second homes or retirement homes," she said. "Back in the 1960s, when Rancho Calaveras was approved, no one drove 20 miles to a job, much less 80 or 90."