

Subject: Brief comments on draft Copperopolis Community Plan

Dear Director Elliott,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Copperopolis Community Plan. I support the comments submitted by the Calaveras Planning Coalition. However, I have a couple of brief points to add.

A few county residents may have forgotten (but most will remember) the planning commissioner in 2015 who said, “The land is junk,” and “If you really want to protect the Earth, you leave the bottom land for farming and you put the people in the hills.” It didn’t go over well with the local agricultural community and the rural-centric population in general, because it demonstrated a profound ignorance of the value of rangeland. If the community plan is going to discuss what’s not in the region, i.e., prime farmland, it seems that should be balanced with a discussion of what *is* in the region, i.e., rangeland. I recommend the following changes under “Location and Community Description.”

Copperopolis was historically agricultural land primarily used for cattle grazing and certain mining activities prior to the 1950s, when numerous subdivisions near and/or adjacent to Lake Tulloch were approved. The region is classified as the Sierra Foothills ecological region. Class I and II Prime Farmland is scarce, with less than 5% of the County containing prime soils. ~~(Prime soils are defined as those suitable to maintain extended production of sustainable crop yields over a prolonged period).~~ Weathered rock is primarily present, with a thin soil mantle of less than 6 inches covering much of the Planning Area.

Land of importance to the local agricultural economy has been determined by the county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee in accordance with the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program to include “cultivated lands that do not qualify as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide importance or Unique Farmland” and all “lands zoned General Agricultural (A1) and/or enrolled in the California Land Conservation Act.” This Farmland of Local Importance would include the thousands of acres of rangeland adjacent to Copperopolis.

The Copperopolis Community Plan Area was historically mined for copper in the 1860s with gold and silver mines also established during the Gold Rush. Tailing piles, remnant mineshafts, and other structures are present within the area.

Under “Conservation and Open Space Policies,” I didn’t see any mention of a policy that relates to General Plan implementation measure COS-4C: Habitat Conservation Plan for Amphibians. Given the amount of population the county anticipates for Copperopolis and the ambitious plans of Copper Valley Development, LLC, a Habitat Conservation Plan for Copperopolis would seem like a necessity. As I mentioned in previous comments, “A January 21, 2011, letter from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to then Planning Director Rebecca Willis specifically recommended the adoption of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) or Regional Conservation Strategy to address cumulative impacts to biological resources in the Copperopolis area. There is nothing that has changed in the interim that would make that recommendation less applicable.” Happily, as I recently emailed, funding is available to begin the HCP planning process. I have attached the email for reference.

Regards,
Muriel Zeller

