



1. GENERAL PLAN INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inyo County



Salt Creek in Death Valley



Trail Crest on the Mt. Whitney Trail



Inyo County Courthouse, Independence

Inyo County is a land of contrasts formed by the diverse and abundant natural riches located here. The County includes the lowest elevation in the Western Hemisphere (-282 feet in Death Valley), the highest point in the continental United States (14,497 feet at Mount Whitney), and one of the deepest valleys in the world (Owens Valley). Within and between each of these areas is an extremely diverse palette of communities, landscapes, and natural habitats that make Inyo County a distinct place to live and visit.

The Sierra Nevada Mountains, with their steep granite peaks, provide a striking and consistent visual backdrop along the western edge of the County. The Inyo and White Mountains form a division between the broad Owens Valley to the west and Death Valley to the east. While the Sierras are considered geologically young, the nearby White Mountains support stands of bristlecone pine, the world's oldest living plants.

The Owens Valley is filled with items of visual interest, including creeks and riparian areas, lava flows and cinder cones, interesting and unique communities, broad grasslands, and golden fall colors. Death Valley, and the surrounding Panamint and Eureka Valleys, on the eastern edge of the County, provide a diverse set of desert views and unique natural phenomenon. The valleys in the southeast corner of the County provide a quiet rural lifestyle for those wanting to live in an upper desert setting.

Although Inyo is the second largest county in the most populous state in the nation, the countywide population was estimated to be only 18,240 people in 1999. This is at least partly due to its unusually low supply of privately owned land. The federal government, by way of Inyo National Forest, Death Valley National Park, China Lake Naval Weapons Center, and Bureau of Land Management holdings manage approximately 92 percent of all land within the County. The City of Los Angeles, as part of the Owens Valley aqueduct and associated lands, owns nearly 4 percent of the County. The State of California controls nearly 2-1/2 percent. As a result of this pattern of public land ownership, Inyo is largely rural in character.

Inyo County hosts over 50 small communities (see Chapter 2 for details), and one incorporated city, Bishop. The community of Independence, located near the center of the Owens Valley, is the County seat. Highway 395 provides the primary north-south transportation link through the County with other highways providing connections to Death Valley and southeastern Inyo County. Most of the County's population and



businesses are clustered in distinct communities along Highway 395. Bishop is the largest of these communities and the economic center of the County.

Inyo County's primary employers are public agencies (including federal agencies and the City of Los Angeles), the tourism industry, and construction and mining (EDD 1999). The County economy relies heavily on tourism, with most visits occurring during the summer. The Sierras and Mt. Whitney, Death Valley, hot springs in the southeast County, and the Owens River are favorites among visitors to the County. Popular recreational activities include fishing, hiking/backpacking, mountaineering, bouldering, rock climbing, hunting, horse packing, backcountry skiing, biking, soaring, sightseeing, and photography.

1.2 General Plans in California

State law requires each county and city to prepare and adopt a comprehensive and long-range general plan for its physical development (Government Code Section 65300). This general plan must address the seven topics (referred to as "elements") of land use, circulation, housing, open-space, conservation, safety, and noise as identified in state law (Government Code Section 65302), to the extent that the topics are locally relevant. It may also include other topics of local interest, as chosen by the County (Government Code Section 65303).

The Inyo County General Plan incorporates the seven state mandated elements in five consolidated elements. Two optional elements have been added by the County to address needs specific to

Together, the **seven mandated elements** of a general plan form a comprehensive set of planning policies. The land use element designates the general distribution and intensity of land uses within the planning area. The circulation element identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed transportation facilities and utilities. The housing element is a comprehensive assessment of current and future housing needs for all segments of the County population, as well as a program for meeting those needs. The open-space element describes measures for the preservation of open space for the protection of natural resources, the managed production of resources, and for public health and safety. The conservation element addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources. The safety element establishes policies to protect the community from risks associated with natural and man-made hazards such as seismic, geologic, flooding, wildfire hazards, and air quality. The noise element identifies major noise sources and contains policies intended to protect the community from exposure to excessive noise levels.

A **comprehensive general plan** provides the County with a consistent framework for land use decision making. The general plan has been called the "constitution" for land use development to emphasize its importance to land use decisions. Once a general plan is adopted, its maps, diagrams, and development



policies form the basis for County zoning, subdivision, and public works actions. Under California law, no specific plan, area plan/community plan, zoning, subdivision map, nor public works project may be approved unless the County finds that it is consistent with the adopted General Plan.

The County may adopt a general plan in the format that best fits its unique circumstances (Government Code Section 65300.5). In doing so, the County must ensure that the general plan and its component parts comprise an integrated, internally consistent, and compatible statement of development policies. Inyo County has chosen to adopt a General Plan that consolidates some of the mandatory elements, includes two optional elements (Government and Economic Development), and integrates background information, goals and policies, and environmental analysis, as described below.

1.3 Inyo County General Plan

Inyo County began its General Plan revision process in earnest in 1997. The previous General Plan had been adopted in 1986, and the County concluded after undertaking a review of the General Plan that it was no longer in compliance with State law, nor was it current. The objective of the update is to create a General Plan that meets the requirements of State law while reflecting the policy needs of Inyo County, including economic development. Additional objectives of the update include the following:

- create a user-friendly and internally consistent General Plan;
- implement the settlement agreement between the County, City of Los Angeles, State of California, and other interested parties over the pumping and export for ground waters from the County;
- reflect the land use policy changes made by the federal government such as the expansion of Death Valley National Park, expansion of wilderness areas resulting from the Desert Protection Act, changes in the role of China Lake Naval Weapons Center, and proposals for a high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain;
- incorporate the Darwin Specific Plan, Starlite Estates Specific Plan, and Bishop Community Plan into the General Plan; and
- eliminate the inconsistencies between General Plan elements that affected the 1986 General Plan.



The General Plan and Zoning Ordinance update will be used to replace the Starlite Estates Specific Plan.

A general plan must be comprehensive both in geographic scope and the range of subjects covered. In the case of the Inyo County General Plan, the planning area encompasses the entire County, minus the



incorporated City of Bishop. The range of subjects included in the General Plan addresses those topics of importance to Inyo County, including economic development. The policies of the General Plan are implemented by the implementations contained in this General Plan, standards contained in County zoning and subdivision ordinances, and the public works activities of the County. The County General Plan may influence, but does not control, activities within non-jurisdictional areas, such as the City of Bishop or lands under federal management. Lands owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) are subject to the General Plan related to land development and use.

The Inyo County General Plan blends the mandated general plan elements and adds a Government and Economic Development element not required under state law. The elements of the plan are described below. The Inyo County General Plan is comprised of several related documents, including the General Plan Summary, Goals and Policies Report, Background Report, Issues and Alternatives Report, and the Environmental Impact Report. A short description of each of these documents follows the discussion of individual elements presented below.

General Plan Documents

The Inyo County General Plan is comprised of six individual documents designed to allow readers to easily access the

One objective in updating the Inyo County General Plan is to make the plan user-friendly. To do this, the General Plan has been divided into several documents so that its goals and policies can be easily referenced, while detailed background and environmental information is also easily available when needed. The heart of the General Plan – the Goals and Policies Report, Background Report, Issues and Alternatives Report, and Environmental Impact Report – use the same numbering system so that readers can easily find corresponding discussions in each of the reports. For example, if someone wanted information on agricultural resources that exist in the County today, they can turn to Section 8.3 of the Background Report. If they want to know the County’s policies related to agriculture, they can refer to Section 8.3 in the Goals and Policies Report.

Here is a summary of the six component documents that comprise the Inyo County General Plan. The documents marked with a link symbol (§) are linked to each other by using the same internal organization and numbering system.

General Plan Summary. This document provides an overview of the General Plan and its component documents. It describes the Planning Area, summarizes the General Plan’s goals and policies, provides an overview of existing conditions, summarizes the issues raised during the



preparation of the General Plan, and identifies the environmental impacts associated with the General Plan.

- § **Goals and Policies Report.** This report is the essence of the General Plan. It contains the goals and policies that will guide future development within the County. It also identifies a full set of implementation measures that will ensure the policies of the Plan are carried out.

Land Use and Circulation Diagrams. For land use, this booklet contains diagrams of the communities within the County and the land use designations applied to properties in these communities and other areas in the County. For circulation, these diagrams show the designation and general location of current and proposed roadway/highway and bicycle/trails system components.

- § **Background Report.** This report provides a detailed description of the conditions that existed within the Planning Area prior to adoption of the General Plan.

- § **Issues and Alternatives Report.** This report discusses the major planning issues facing the County and alternative approaches to address those issues. The report distills the input of advisory committees, members of the Inyo County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, County staff, and private individuals.

- § **Environmental Impact Report.** The environmental impact report (EIR) prepared for the General Plan meets the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors relied upon the EIR during the process of considering the draft General Plan in order to understand the potential impacts associated with this General Plan. See Section 1.5 below for more information on how the EIR complies with CEQA.

Elements Included in the Inyo County General Plan

The Inyo General Plan contains seven elements. The following paragraphs display the name of each element, the chapter the element can be found in this General Plan, and a discussion on the contents and purpose of each element. If the element is further divided into topic areas, these are also identified.



In each element, goals and policies are numbered according to the topic they address. In the following discussion, a one-, two-, or three-letter acronym will be given for each topic area covered by an element. This acronym is used to identify all goals and policies in a given element, and is used to identify which policy and implementation measures go together. For example, goals and policies for Land Use have the acronym "LU". The acronym used for each topic area is shown next to each topic, below.

Chapter 3	Government Element topics: GOV Government	Section 3.2	Government Element Much of the land area in Inyo County is managed by federal and state agencies and the major circulation systems are managed by Caltrans. The purpose of this element is to express the expectations of the County in how plans and decisions made by these agencies are developed and carried out.
Chapter 4	Land Use Element topics: LU Land Use PSU Public Services and Utilities	Section 4.2 Section 4.3	Land Use Element The Land Use sub-element establishes goals and policies for residential, commercial, industrial, public services and utilities, and other land uses in the County. In addition, this sub-element also includes a set of land use diagrams (bound separately) that show the land use designations applied to properties in the County. The second sub-element is Public Services and Utilities. This sub-element presents County goals, policies, and implementations as they apply to water (domestic), solid waste, electricity, fire protection, communications, law enforcement, and schools.
Chapter 5	Economic Development Element topics: ED Economic Development	Section 5.2	Economic Development Element This element establishes goals, policies, and implementation measures intended to encourage and guide economic development within the County. Major topic areas covered in this element include tourism, local retail and service commercial, and industrial.



Chapter 6	<u>Housing Element topics:</u>		Housing Element This element complies with the housing element requirements of state law in identifying housing needs and providing programs to meet these needs. This element covers the maintenance and preservation of housing, provision of adequate sites, housing opportunities, home ownership, removal of constraints on housing development, and accessibility of housing.
	H	Housing Section 6.2	

Chapter 7	<u>Circulation Element topics:</u>		Circulation Element This element identifies the goals, policies, and implementation measures needed to ensure an adequate and functional circulation system. This element covers the systems needed to move people, products, and materials in and through the County using a variety of conveyances, from roads to aircraft, bicycles to transmission lines.
	RH	Roadways and Highways Section 7.2	
	SH	Scenic Highways Section 7.3	
	PT	Public Transportation Section 7.4	
	BT	Bicycles and Trails Section 7.5	
	RR	Railroads Section 7.6	
	AVI	Aviation Section 7.7	
	CPT	Canals, Pipelines, and Transmission Cables Section 7.8	
OCT	Other Circulation Topics Section 7.9		

Chapter 8	<u>Conservation/Open Space Element topics:</u>		Conservation/Open Space Element This element identifies the goals, policies, and implementation measures needed to ensure the appropriate use, enjoyment, and protection of natural resources within the County.
	S	Soils Section 8.2	
	AG	Agricultural Resources Section 8.3	
	MER	Minerals and Energy Resources Section 8.4	
	WR	Water Resources Section 8.5	
	BIO	Biological Resources Section 8.6	
	CUL	Cultural Resources Section 8.7	
	VR	Visual Resources Section 8.8	
	REC	Recreation Section 8.9	



Chapter 9	Public Safety Element topics:			Public Safety Element This element identifies the goals, policies, and implementation measures needed to ensure the public health, safety, and welfare related to both natural and man-made hazards.
	AQ	Air Quality	Section 9.2	
	FLD	Flood Hazards	Section 9.3	
	AVL	Avalanches	Section 9.4	
	WF	Wildfires	Section 9.5	
	GEO	Geologic and Seismic Hazards	Section 9.6	
	NOI	Noise	Section 9.7	

Table 1-1 illustrates how the elements of the Inyo County General Plan relate to the seven mandatory elements set out in state law. A solid square (■) indicates that the issues identified in a state-mandated element are covered in the County element identified in the left column.

Table 1-1. Relationship Between Inyo County General Plan Elements and the State-Mandated Elements

	State-Mandated Elements						
	Land Use	Circulation	Housing	Conservation	Open Space	Noise	Safety
Government							
Land Use	■	■					
Economic Development							
Housing			■				
Circulation		■			■		
Conservation/ Open Space				■	■		■
Public Safety						■	■



1.4 Public Participation

Throughout the preparation of the General Plan, a number of public participation opportunities were provided to allow for the widest public participation possible within the constraints of the County's budget and geographic size. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the public participation techniques used as part of the General Plan program.

- **General Plan Website.** During preparation of the General Plan, a website was maintained that provided information on upcoming events and allowed individuals to download any of the published General Plan documents.
- **Newsletters.** During preparation of the General Plan, a series of newsletters were prepared and distributed to give the public a better understanding of the General Plan's progress. The first newsletter covered the overall General Plan program. The second newsletter provided an update on the status of the General Plan and provided details on the Background Report and upcoming Issues and Alternatives Report. A final newsletter will be published to go along with the draft Goals and Policies Report and will provide highlights of the proposed General Plan.
- **Land and Water Advisory Committee Workshops.** During the initial stages of the General Plan program, the County had five advisory committees set up to work on some land use, land release, and water system issues. The five geographically oriented committees were the Bishop Land and Water Advisory Committee, Big Pine Land and Water Advisory Committee, Independence Land and Water Advisory Committee, Lone Pine Land and Water Advisory Committee, and the Southeast County Advisory Committee (Shoshone/Tecopa area).

During the early stages of the General Plan, these committees hosted a community workshop on the General Plan. These workshops were used to provide an overview of the General Plan program and to gather public input on the issues, opportunities, and alternatives that should be addressed in the General Plan.

- **Interviews.** During the start of the General Plan, the General Plan consulting team conducted one-on-one interviews with County decision makers, County and agency staff, the City of Bishop, and representatives from some of the Indian tribes living in the County. These interviews were used to frame the General Plan.



The Inyo County 2020 Forum brought together people from around the County to discuss issues and opportunities.

- **Public Workshop.** In December 1998, the County hired the Sierra Business Council to organize an all-day workshop in Bishop to discuss the future of Inyo County. This workshop, attended by citizens from all over the County, provided a great deal of insight into the vision for the future of the County, and ways that the County could reach this envisioned future. During this event, attendees were asked to discuss the opportunities and challenges that they feel face the County both today and in the future. They were also asked to help formulate a vision for what the County should be like in the future.
- **Agency Coordination.** During the preparation of the General Plan, the consulting team met with agency representatives to ensure that their input and concerns were heard.
- **Written Comments.** Throughout the General Plan process, written comments were always reviewed and utilized.
- **Board of Supervisor and Planning Commission Workshops.** During preparation of the General Plan, workshops were held with the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission to correspond with the release of the Background Report and the Issues and Alternatives Report. These workshops were held to give County decision makers and the public insight on the progress of the General Plan and input on the direction that the General Plan was taking. Input on the Issues and Alternatives Report was especially vital since this document included policy choices on the top 15 issues facing the County. The Board of Supervisors direction on these issues helped frame the direction of the General Plan Goals and Policies Report.
- **Community Workshops.** After release of the draft Goals and Policies Report, the County is planning to hold community workshops in the different geographic areas of the County. These workshops will be held to discuss the changes in the new General Plan and to get public input and questions on the General Plan.
- **Public Hearings/Adoption.** A series of public hearings before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will be held on the draft General Plan. Like the Community Workshops, these hearings will be used to describe the changes proposed in the new General Plan and to receive guidance on revisions needed prior to adoption.



1.5 Environmental Analysis

As required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq.), the Board of Supervisors will consider the findings of an environmental impact report (EIR) prior to adopting the General Plan. In order to minimize redundancy, the General Plan and EIR were prepared as a combined document, as allowed under Section 15166 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Linking the General Plan documents by common organization and numbering helps organize the EIR as well. The components of the General Plan taken together meet the CEQA requirements for EIR content and analysis. The Background Report provides the environmental setting, the Goals and Policies Report embodies the project description, the General Plan Summary provides an executive summary of the EIR, and the EIR includes the remaining components required by CEQA. All mitigation measures recommended to reduce the potential environmental impacts of the General Plan below a level of significance are integrated into the policies of the General Plan. Mitigation monitoring, as required under CEQA, will be done by compliance with the General Plan and through annual reports to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors on the status of General Plan implementation.

1.6 Using This General Plan

Organization

As stated above, this General Plan includes seven elements, many of which are further divided into related topic areas. To make the elements easier to use and reference, each element is set up with the same structure. Each of the topic areas covered in a given element has five major parts, as follows.

- **Definitions.** This section provides a set of definitions for terms used in the discussion of this topic.
- **Existing Setting.** This section provides a brief summary of the existing conditions in the planning area for a given topic. A detailed discussion on existing conditions can be found under the same section number in the *Inyo County General Plan Background Report*.
- **Issues.** A brief summary of the major issues discovered during the public participation portion of the General Plan program are included to provide a context for the goals, policies, and



implementation measures presented. A more detailed discussion of the major issues identified can be found in the *Inyo County Issues and Alternatives Report*.

- **Goals and Policies.** This section contains the goals and policies that will be used by the County to guide future land use decisions. In general terms, a goal is a statement that describes in general terms a desired future condition or “end” state. A goal serves as a general direction-setter. In this General Plan, goal statements will be formatted like the following example. In the black box is the goal’s reference number: “AG” refers to the Agricultural Resources topic area and the “1” means this is the first goal under this topic. Each topic area will have one or more goals.

Example

GOAL AG-1	Provide a viable and diverse agricultural industry in Inyo County. [Conservation & OS Element - A. - Modified Goal 4, Modified Goal 5, Modified Goal 6; M. - Modified Goal 2, Modified Goal 3, Modified Goal 4]
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For each goal, the information in the brackets shows if this goal is a modification of a goal(s) from the existing General Plan or if this is a new goal.

A policy is a statement that guides a specific course of action for decision-makers to use to achieve a desired goal. A policy must be clear and unambiguous; it indicates a commitment of the local legislative body to a particular course of action. The example below shows what a policy statement looks like. In this General Plan, every goal has one or more policies associated with it. The letters and first number (e.g., “AG-1”) shows what goal this policy supports. The final number in the identifier (e.g., “.1”), shows that this is the first policy that supports Goal AG-1.

Example

Policy AG-1.1

Identify Important Agricultural Lands

Support and encourage the identification of important agricultural lands within the County. [New policy]

Similar to the goal statements, the information in the brackets for each policy shows if it was based on a modification of an existing policy, or if this is a new policy statement.



- Implementation Measures.** To ensure that appropriate actions are taken to implement the General Plan, a set of implementation measures are provided. An implementation measure is a specific measure, program, procedure, or technique that carries out plan policies. Following the goals and policies for each topic area, a table is provided that shows the implementation measures. This table lists the implementation, states which policy(ies) this implementation supports, states what County departments or outside agencies are responsible to see this implementation gets done, and provides a timeline for when this implementation will be done.

Table 8-2. Agricultural Resources Implementation Measures

<i>Example</i>	Implementation Measure	Implements What Policy	Who is Responsible	Timeframe				
				2001- 2003	2003- 2005	2005- 2010	2010- 2020	On- going
1.0	Work with the NRCS and California Department of Conservation to complete studies needed to identify Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance.	AG-1.1 AG-1.3	Agricultural Commissioner Farm Advisor NRCS		■			
2.0	The County shall develop a program to identify Farmland of Local Importance and shall maintain a diagram showing the location of these lands. Primary locations for these lands are in the Owens Valley and Sandy Valley areas.	AG-1.1 AG-1.3	Agricultural Commissioner Farm Advisor		■			


Symbols in the General Plan

In this General Plan, there are two symbols used to point out items of interest to the reader. The first is the information symbol (represented by the symbol “**i**”). This symbol will point to other goals and policies in the General Plan that are closely related to the topic being discussed.

Example

i See also the Goals and Policies in Chapter 9, “Public Safety”



While the entire General Plan requires the active involvement of the County and other agencies, districts, and utilities to ensure its success, the County felt that there were some specific issues that will require significant involvement by an agency, district, or utility in addition to Inyo County. When the issue is primarily a governmental issue, it was included in the Government Element (Chapter 3). For other items that had both a strong government cooperation issue and a topic area issue, the policy was left in the appropriate element/topic area (Chapters 4 through 9). To make sure the reader knows this policy requires a significant interaction by another agency, district, or utility, a  symbol will appear following the policy's title (as shown below).

An example is the desire to complete the 4-lane development of U.S. 395. While this depends greatly on Caltrans working with the County, it is an important Roadways and Highways issue. Therefore, this policy was left in the Roadways and Highways section and marked with the government symbol.

Example

Policy RH-2.1

Improve State Highway 395 in Sections 