

VI. Thresholds of Significance for the Loss of Oak Woodlands

Upon receipt of an application for a permit or other discretionary approval, the County is required to perform a CEQA review of the proposed project. The County review will include potential effects to the oak woodland resources as addressed in this plan. Once the extent and severity of the impacts are determined, the mitigation standards of PRC 21083.4 and Policy 7.4.4.4 Option A and/or Option B will be applied as described in Section V.

To facilitate the County's CEQA review process relative to oak woodlands, a list of impact issues and questions has been developed for County staff to evaluate. These same questions and issues can and should be used by applicants when designing a project or plan. To the extent that applicants can avoid, minimize, or otherwise reduce adverse effects to the oak woodland resources through project design, the County's review process and the applicant's mitigation requirements will also be reduced.

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Certain projects will be exempt from impact significance thresholds and mitigation. The exemptions have been established by the County and will be specified in the Oak Woodland and Oak Tree ordinances to be approved upon adoption of this OWMP. For projects that are not exempt, the following guidelines are recommended for assessing impact significance to oak woodlands:

- Would the proposed project have a substantial adverse effect on wildlife habitat associated with removal of oak trees or oak woodland?

This question addresses the potential impact to wildlife utilizing or dependent upon oak trees and oak woodlands on a local level. Habitat values such as snags, cavity nests, downed woody debris, and granaries (i.e., trees and limbs with holes in which acorns are stored) should be included in the consideration of effects.

- Would the proposed project have a substantial adverse effect on wildlife movement associated with oak woodland removal (e.g., reduce, constrict, or eliminate oak woodland continuity)?

This question addresses whether barriers or restrictions to wildlife movement through oak woodlands would be created or exacerbated on a local level. The intent is to avoid isolation of populations and to allow wildlife to move among different functional habitats (e.g., breeding areas, foraging sites, and water sources).

- Would the proposed land use or loss of oak woodland habitat substantially degrade the overall biological value of large expanses or corridors of oak woodlands (e.g., reduce oak woodland acreages within PCAs, or fragment OWCs as defined in the OWMP)?

This question addresses the loss of ecosystem values through fragmentation, loss of interior habitat, and loss of connectivity on a regional basis. The value of large expanses of contiguous oak woodland for biodiversity and genetic diversity needs to be considered. Maintaining large expanses that have intact biological values and that are connected will help to maintain populations that can exchange individuals as well as recolonize an area in the event of a local extinction. Maintaining intact ecosystem values will help to maintain local watersheds and protect water quality and soil resources.

- Would the proposed project directly or indirectly adversely affect VOW or VRI habitat, which are identified as “sensitive habitats” for El Dorado County?

This question addresses “sensitive habitats” identified in the General Plan EIR and a review of CNDDDB and FRAP land cover data (EDAW, 2003). The acreage of VRI was not quantified in the EIR because it is difficult to distinguish using remote-sensing imagery (EDAW, 2003). Because these oak woodlands are dispersed throughout many parts of the County, evaluation of effects will need to be performed on a local basis.