

## 1.1 Using The General Plan

One objective in updating the Lake 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 easy to find and use. 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 biological resources that exist in the County today, they can turn to Section 9.4 of the Background Report. If they want to know the County’s policies related to biological resources, they can refer to Section 9.4 in the Goals and Policies Report.

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*The Background Report is the first report to be published for the General Plan. Other documents will be prepared and released for public review throughout the General Plan update process.*

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

**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.

§ **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 Lake County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, County staff, and the public.

§ **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 will use the EIR during the process of considering the draft General Plan in order to understand the potential environmental implications associated with implementation of the General Plan update.

## 1.2 Regional Location

Lake County lies within the Pacific Coastal ranges approximately 100 miles north of San Francisco, 90 mile northwest of Sacramento, and 35 miles east of the Pacific Ocean (See Figure 1-1, Lake County). Lake County is bounded by Mendocino County to the west, Yolo, Colusa, and Glenn Counties to the east, and Sonoma and Napa counties to the south. The major roadways that traverse the County include State Route 20, which joins up with Highway 101 and Interstate 5, and State Routes 29, 53, and 175.

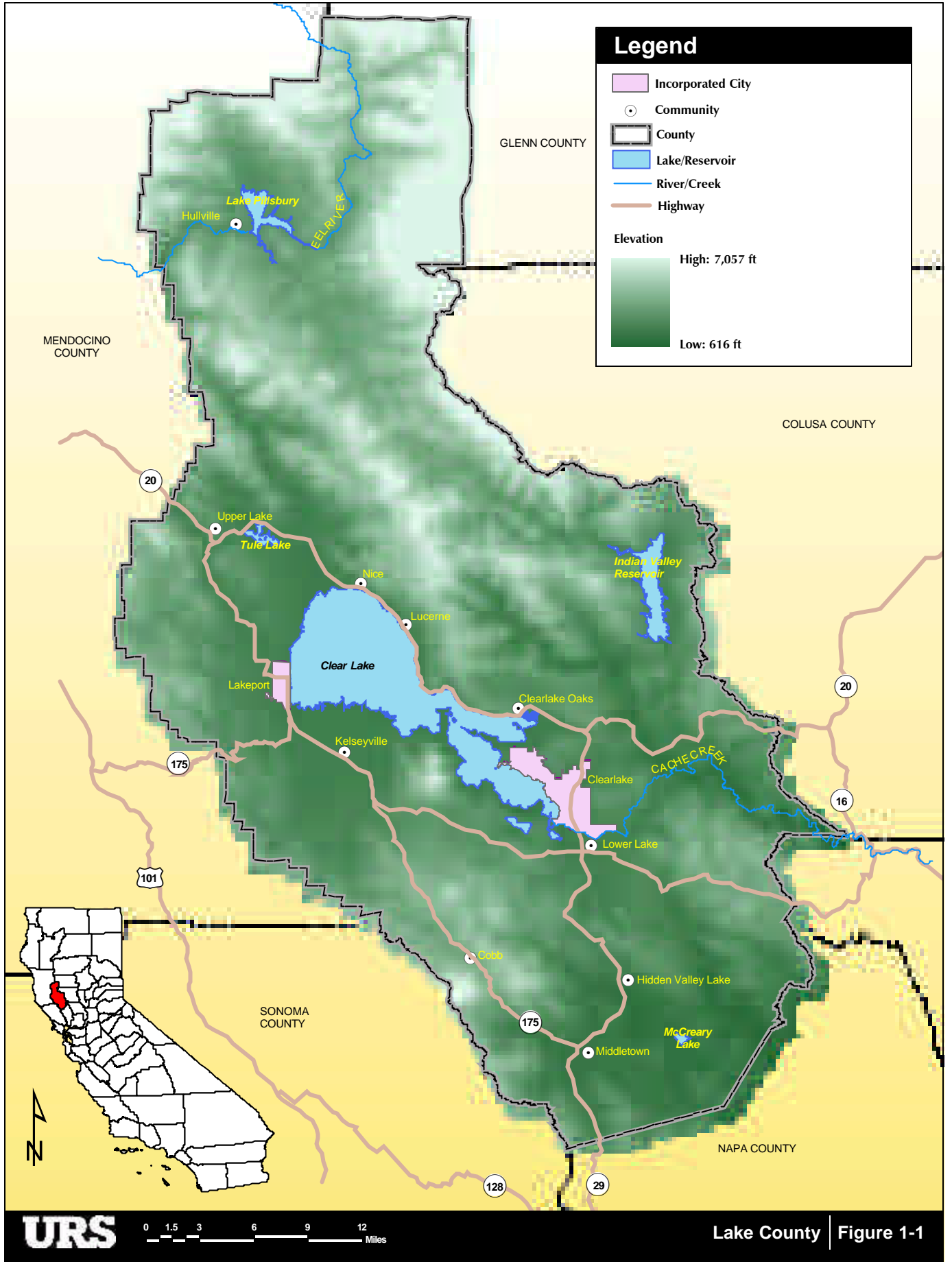
## 1.3 Lake County Overview

### HISTORY

The history of Lake County centers on Clear Lake. Clear Lake may very well be the oldest lake in North America as scientific evidence has proven the lake to be at least 150,000 years old. The entire region in Lake County took shape from volcanic action, and a landslide created Clear Lake's current form thousands of years ago that blocked the broad valley's drainage west into the Russian River. The water rose until it found a new outlet, Cache Creek, which drains eastward into the Sacramento River.

Four thousand years before the rise of the Egyptian civilization, the Pomo Indians were hunting, fishing, and collecting plant foods on the shores of Clear Lake. The lake yielded an abundance of fish, as well as tule reeds from which they made clothing, boats, dwellings, and household items.

In the 1850's, the first European families found their way to Lake County; the first of these settlers lived near what is now the community of Kelseyville. Farming and ranching grew rapidly and toll roads began climbing over the mountains in the 1860's, bringing settlers in increasing numbers. The Pomo were gradually forced from their traditional homes to rancherias.



Lake County | Figure 1-1

*Please see next page*

During the turn-of-the-century, the County's natural mineral springs became immensely popular, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world to reap the health benefits of this natural wonder. Huge resort complexes were built, and enjoying wide fame were Bartlett Springs, Soda Bay Springs, Seigler Springs, Anderson and Adams Springs. Many of these grand resorts were destroyed by fire, and most were not rebuilt. Lacking roads along the perimeter of Clear Lake, steamers plied the waters connecting visitors to resorts across the lake. Steamboats, and then gas-powered boats, became a favored means of transportation and recreation. Eventually, automobiles superseded boats, and it was several decades later that boats regained popularity.



More details on the history of Lake County can be found in Section 9.9, "Cultural Resources."

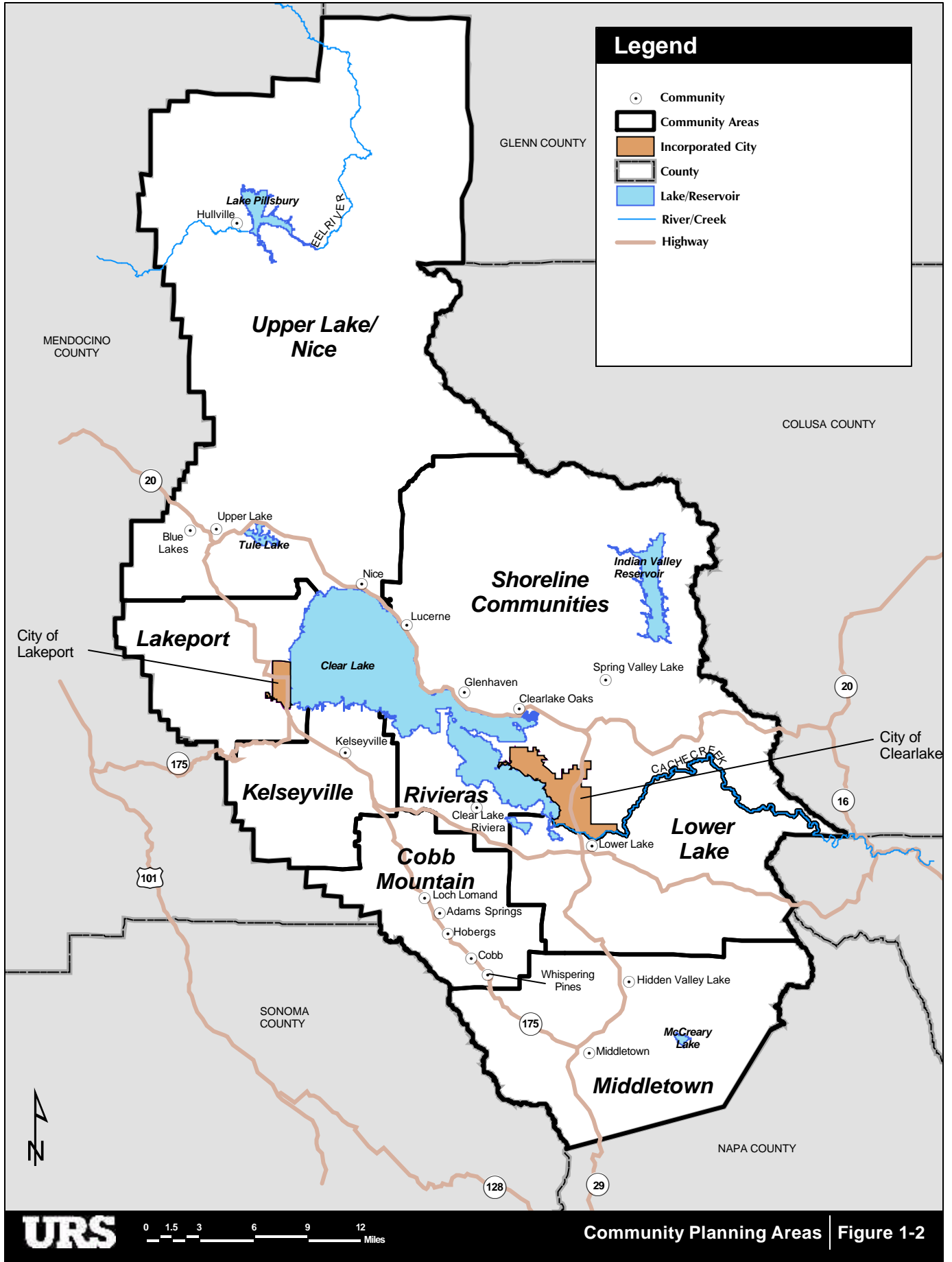
### COMMUNITY PLANNING AREAS

According to state law, the General Plan must address all land within the boundaries of the county as well as "any land outside its boundaries which, in the planning agency's judgment, bears relation to its planning" (Government Code Section 65300). For purposes of the Lake County General Plan, the Planning Area has been defined as the entire unincorporated area of the County. The only incorporated communities in the County are the City of Lakeport (County Seat) and the City of Clearlake. These communities will also be addressed in the context of issues that extend into the unincorporated areas.

As illustrated in Figure 1-2, Community Planning Areas, Lake County is divided into eight sub-regions for planning purposes: Upper Lake/Nice, Lakeport, Kelseyville, Cobb Mountain, Middletown, Lower Lake, Rivas, and Shoreline Communities. The following describes each of these planning areas.

#### Cobb Mountain Planning Area

The Cobb Mountain Planning Area is located in the southwestern part of Lake County and consists of approximately 71 square miles of mountainous terrain, including Cobb Mountain and Mount Hannah. The area contains the mountain resort-residential communities of Cobb, Hobergs, Loch Lomond, and Whispering Pines.



Community Planning Areas | Figure 1-2

### **Kelseyville Planning Area**

The Kelseyville Planning Area, which encompasses approximately 73 square miles, is located in the western part of Lake County just north of the Cobb Mountain Area. The Kelseyville Area encompasses the majority of the Big Valley area, and is bounded by the Mayacama mountain range on the southwest, Mount Konocti on the east and southeast, and by Clear Lake on the north. This planning area contains the town of Kelseyville, and boasts the largest agricultural area of any of the planning areas.

### **Lakeport Planning Area**

The Lakeport Planning Area covers approximately 79 square miles. This area is located in the western part of Lake County just north of the Kelseyville Area. The major community in this area is the City of Lakeport, which is also the County seat. The Lakeport Planning Area also covers the southern half of Scotts Valley, which is used heavily for agriculture including pears, walnuts, and grapes. The natural landscape in the Lakeport Planning Area is dominated by both the presence of Clear Lake and a number of creeks, including Scotts Creek and Hendricks Creek.

### **Lower Lake Planning Area**

The Lower Lake Planning Area includes approximately 117 square miles in the southeast part of Lake County. The Lower Lake Planning Area is mountainous with small, interspersed valleys. The area is bordered to the north by Cache Creek, which drains out of Clear Lake in an easterly direction. The economic focal point of this planning area is the community of Lower Lake, which is located south of the City of Clearlake. Agriculture in the form of orchards, vineyards, and livestock grazing is present in this area.

### **Middletown Planning Area**

The Middletown Planning Area, which contains approximately 142 square miles, is located in the southernmost portion of Lake County. This area is just south of the Lower Lake Planning Area and is bounded by Napa County to the south and Sonoma County to the west. The community of Middletown is the main economic hub of this planning area. This planning area contains the geothermal steam fields and the communities of Anderson Springs and Hidden Valley Lake.

### **Rivieras**

The Rivieras Planning Area, which encompasses approximately 41 square miles, is located in the central part of Lake County alongside the southwestern shore of Clear Lake. The Kelseyville and Cobb Mountain Planning Areas border it to the west and south. This area includes the community of Clear Lake Riviera, the Buckingham Subdivision, and Soda Bay. Konocti Harbor Resort and Spa is also located in this planning area.

### **Shoreline Communities Planning Area**

The Shoreline Communities Planning Area, which encompasses approximately 315 square miles, is located in the northeastern portion of Lake County, and includes the communities of Lucerne, Glenhaven, and Clearlake Oaks, and the Spring Valley Lake Subdivision. This area is bordered by Clear Lake to the southwest and Colusa County to the northeast.

### **Upper Lake-Nice Planning Area**

The Upper Lake-Nice Planning Area, which encompasses approximately 457 square miles, is located in the northernmost portion of the County, and includes the communities of Nice and Upper Lake. This area also covers the northern portion of Scotts Valley and a large area within the Mendocino National Forest. It is bordered to the west by Mendocino County, to the east by Glenn and Colusa Counties, and to the south by Clear Lake.

## **TOPOGRAPHY**

Lake County is characterized by extensive variations in its topography. The Clear Lake basin forms the center of the County and is surrounded by a mix of lowlands and steeply rising hillsides. The foothills occupy the perimeter of the basin and mainly support annual grasslands, oak savannah, and blue oak woodland. As the elevation increases in the more mountainous terrain, vegetation changes to chaparral and coniferous forests.

Elevations in the County range from 1,326 feet in the Clear Lake basin to 7,056 feet at the peak of Snow Mountain, which lies in the Mendocino National Forest north of Clear Lake. Mt. Konocti, a dormant volcano, rises 4,300 feet above the west shore of Clear Lake and is a dominant feature in the viewshed. This mountain is unique from other peaks in the County due to its immediate proximity to Clear Lake and the vast Big Valley basin to the west. Cobb Mountain, which lies south of Clear Lake and adjacent to the geysers geothermal fields, has an elevation of 4,700 feet.

## **CLIMATE**

The climate in Lake County tends to vary widely due to changes in topography. Overall, the County typically experiences warm, dry summers and cool winters with moderate precipitation. Based on weather measurements taken in Lakeport and Clearlake, the Clear Lake basin has an average annual low and high temperature of 41°F and 72°F, respectively. The recorded high temperature is 110°F and the recorded low is 14°F, with temperatures typically ranging from a low of approximately 30 degrees in the winter to a high of over 100 degrees in the summer. Historic rainfall records show an annual average of 28.4 inches in Lakeport and 26.8 inches in

Clearlake ([www.weatherbase.com](http://www.weatherbase.com)). At the base of Cobb Mountain, temperatures range from a low of 17 degrees to a high of 96 degrees with an average rainfall of 64 inches per year.

Although relatively infrequent, snowfall is possible in the winter months, but is typically limited to the higher elevations in the County. If snowfall does occur in the lower elevations, it usually dissipates by midday.

The County tends to experience light winds due to the sheltering effect of the surrounding mountains. During the winter, winds tend to vary more in their direction. Like other coastal areas in California, the County occasionally receives marine air from the Pacific Ocean that helps to temper the climate.

### AGRICULTURE

Despite the fact that urbanization has resulted in a substantial decrease in the acreage of available farmland in the County, both total cropland and the gross agricultural production value have increased steadily since the 1950's. The main crops produced in the County are pears, wine grapes, and walnuts. Although these three crops constituted only 39% of the total cropland in the County in 1997, they were responsible for more than 75% of the County's gross annual agricultural production value, demonstrating their value to the County.

The most substantial trend in agricultural land use in the County in recent years is the dramatic increase in vineyard development. The pear and walnut orchards that once replaced vineyards during the times of prohibition are themselves being replaced by vineyards at a rapid rate as the County's potential for producing premium wine grapes is rediscovered. Grasslands, oak savanna, and oak woodlands are also being converted into vineyards at a significant rate. Much of the development is originating from developers from neighboring wine grape counties, such as Sonoma and Napa, where land is more expensive and the regulations governing vineyard development are more stringent.

### NATURAL RESOURCES

Lake County contains a diversity of biological resources associated with the varied environments found in the County. From the shoreline environments of Clear Lake, to oak studded hillsides, to dense pine forests, Lake County has an abundance of plant and wildlife resources that add to the attractiveness of the County.

At the southern end of Lake County lies the largest geothermal field in the world. The Geysers-Calistoga Known Geothermal Resource Area (KGRA) is the source of both dry steam and hot water that has been harnessed to produce a substantial amount of electric power for Northern California.

In addition to its geothermal resources, the County has abundant aggregate resources. Sand and gravel extraction constitute the major portion of the County's mining activity, both in terms of quantity of material produced and value of extracted resource. The County's Aggregate Resources Management Plan identified 12 Quarry Resource Areas and 23 mining sites. Major operations occur along segments of six creeks: Scotts, Middle, Kelsey, Putah, North Fork of the Cache, and Clover Creeks.

## **TOURISM AND RECREATION**

Tourism remains one of the major contributors to the County's economy, with Clear Lake serving as the County's largest attraction. Lake County's principal recreational activities include boating, fishing, water skiing, and picnicking. Other lakes abound throughout the County providing similar recreational activities. There are also abundant open space areas that offer hiking and camping opportunities. Hiking trails range from short, flat trails (such as those along Clear Lake) to multi-day backpacking trails in the Mendocino National Forest that extend to points outside the County.

In addition to its natural amenities, countless residents and visitors enjoy sightseeing the cultural attractions of Lake County. There are an increasing number of casinos, wineries, museums, and historic points of interests. Events such as concerts, fishing and golf tournaments, festivals, and craft fairs draw additional visitors. The Konocti Harbor Resort, numerous bed and breakfast inns, and other lodging facilities spread throughout the County support multi-day visitation to the County.

## **1.4 Organization of Background Report**

This report is organized into nine chapters, as follows:

**Chapter 1, Introduction.** This chapter provides an introduction to the General Plan with a description of how to use the General Plan documents, and an overview of the Lake County setting.

**Chapter 2, Demographics and Fiscal Conditions.** This chapter provides an overview of the existing demographics in Lake County and includes the following discussions:

- Demographics (Section 2.2)
- Fiscal (Section 2.3)

**Chapter 3, Land Use.** This chapter provides an overview of the existing land uses and land use regulations in Lake County. This chapter provides an overview of the existing Lake County General Plan and land use diagrams,

zoning regulations, and existing land use. It also summarizes area community plans, the Commercial Land Use Study, and the Airport Land Use Plan.

**Chapter 4, Housing.** This chapter discusses the conditions as they relate to housing in the community. This chapter includes the following discussions:

- Housing Needs Assessment (Section 4.2)
- Resource Inventory (Section 4.3)
- Potential Housing Constraints (Section 4.4)
- Status and Evaluation of Existing Programs/Element (Section 4.5)

**Chapter 5, Public Facilities and Services.** This chapter covers the existing infrastructure capabilities and services offered in Lake County, and provides a discussion on the ability of these facilities/services to serve the future needs of the County. This chapter includes the following discussions:

- Water Supply (Section 5.2)
- Wastewater (Section 5.3)
- Storm Drainage (Section 5.4)
- Solid Waste (Section 5.5)
- Gas and Electric Service (Section 5.6)
- Law Enforcement (Section 5.7)
- Fire Protection (Section 5.8)
- School Facilities (Section 5.9)
- Communication Systems (Section 5.10)
- Libraries (Section 5.11)

**Chapter 6, Transportation and Circulation.** Included in this chapter is a discussion of existing circulation conditions and regulations. This chapter includes the following discussions:

- Streets and Highways (Section 6.2)
- Public Transportation (Section 6.3)
- Bikeways (Section 6.4)
- Aviation (Section 6.5)
- Railroads (Section 6.6)
- Travel Forecast Model (Section 6.7)

**Chapter 7, Health and Safety.** This chapter discusses the conditions as they relate to the health and safety of the community. The topics discussed include both natural and man-made hazards and are divided into the following sections:

- Geologic and Seismic Hazards (Section 7.2)
- Air Quality (Section 7.3)
- Man-Made Hazards (Section 7.4)
- Flooding (Section 7.5)
- Urban and Wildland Fires (Section 7.6)
- Emergency Response (Section 7.7)

**Chapter 8, Noise.** This chapter discusses the existing noise conditions in the County, including the presence of sensitive noise receptors. This chapter also discusses items such as federal and state noise regulations.

**Chapter 9, Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation.** This chapter discusses the natural and man-made resources found in the Planning Area, and is divide up into the following discussions:

- Water Resources (Section 9.2)
- Soil Resources (Section 9.3)
- Biological Resources (Section 9.4)
- Scenic Resources (Section 9.5)
- Agricultural Resources (Section 9.6)
- Mineral and Energy Resources (Section 9.7)
- Recreation Resources (Section 9.8)
- Cultural Resources (Section 9.9)