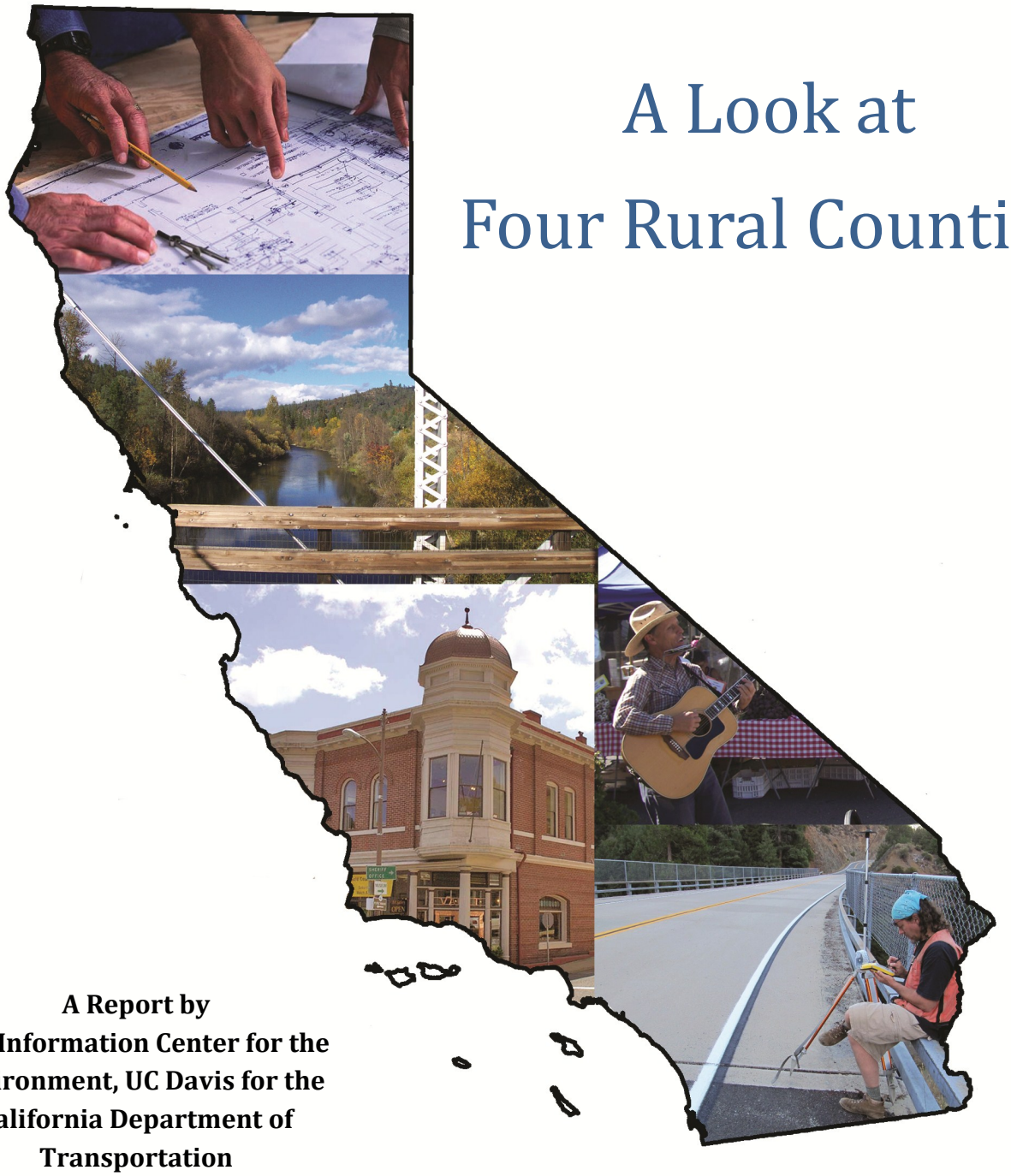
California's Rural Regional Blueprint Program:

A Look at Four Rural Counties



A Report by
The Information Center for the Environment, UC Davis for the California Department of Transportation

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Executive Summary

In 2005, the California Regional Blueprint Program was initiated to help Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and rural Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) collaborate with stakeholders, local agencies, and the public to support transportation and land use planning projects that lead to sustainable regional growth. Since then, Caltrans has awarded roughly $25 million in federal transportation planning funds to support regional Blueprints in 17 urban and 16 rural regions. These regions represent more than 98% of the State's population.

While much of the focus of the Regional Blueprint Program has historically been on the larger MPOs, this report focuses on answering some of the questions that are unique to rural blueprint planning, such as:

- How have rural counties been able to use rural Blueprint funds to transform their long-term planning goals and visions?
- What are some of the unique opportunities and challenges faced by rural counties with regard to coordinated land use and transportation planning in California?
- How can rural counties preserve the character of country living while planning for long-term sustainability and economic prosperity?

This report examines the history of the Regional Blueprint Program and highlights four counties whose RTPAs have been a part of the program: Lake County, Tuolumne County, Trinity County, and Glenn County. Each rural RTPA has had a different set of opportunities and challenges with its transportation planning. The stories of their experiences are outlined in four chapters, one for each county, including the phases and tasks of each Blueprint project, the shared vision and principles for the future, and, in some cases, the building of several Blueprint scenarios. In addition, the four RTPAs faced some common challenges, achievements and opportunities that the program presented. These commonalities are discussed in the "Lessons Learned" section of the report.

Challenges

- Opposition to the preferred scenario
- The national economic downturn
- Scenario planning where growth is slow
- Implementation by others
- Timing in relation to the land use planning cycle
- High percentage of federally owned lands

Successes

- Geographic information system (GIS) data acquisition and updates
- Coordination and collaboration among the public, planning commissions, transportation commissions and others
- General Plan updates with considerations for Blueprint principles
- Updates to Economic Development Plans with input from Blueprint values

Opportunities

- The momentum of the Blueprint process
- The current slow growing economy is a good time to plan for the future
- The ability to incorporate Blueprint principles into other planning areas, like updates to General Plans, Transportation Plans and Housing Elements
- Using GIS data as a visualization tool to communicate planning ideas

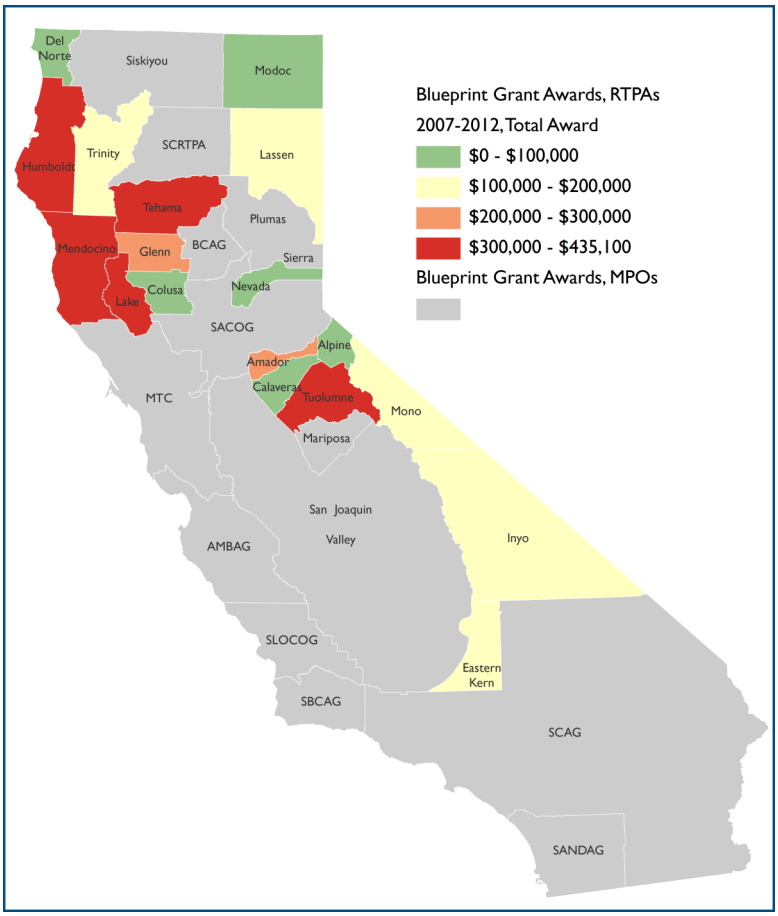
Introduction

The California Regional Blueprint Planning Program was launched in 2005 by the State of California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, to assist counties, local Councils of Governments (COGs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in their long-term land use planning efforts. Grants are provided by federal transportation planning funds. Participating grantees receive support in conducting scenario planning, to help local and regional leaders along with the community to develop a shared vision, or "Blueprint" for their future.

Why Blueprint Planning?

The purpose of the California Regional Blueprint Planning Program is to support transportation agencies with their collaborative regional planning efforts across California through grants, support services, and interagency coordination. The Regional Blueprint Program efforts are focused on helping agencies produce a long-term plan that engages residents of a region in articulating a vision for the future of their region that incorporates into the landscape:

- Community-preferred growth scenarios
- Land use patterns that promote environmental sustainability and reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- More housing and transportation choices for all incomes
- An improvement to economic competitiveness and quality of life
- A reduction in impacts to ecological habitats, prime agricultural lands and air quality



California counties showing total Blueprint Grant awards between 2007 and 2012

The California Regional Blueprint Program supports regional planning efforts through grants which fund assistance to counties as they strive to select a community-preferred growth scenario for the future. These grants have been used for tasks such as:

- Technical support for the collection, organization and processing of demographic and geospatial data
- Promoting, organizing and engaging public participation in the visioning process, including workshops and surveys
- Consulting on specific performance measures, such as travel demand and economic development

Coordinated Planning in Rural California

In 2007, Caltrans began awarding grants to single, rural Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) for the development of a Rural Blueprint Program. To date, 16 rural RTPAs in California have participated in the program at some level. The overall goal of the Rural Blueprint Program has been to help RTPAs encourage local governments, residents and business leaders to articulate a shared vision for the long-term growth of their county. With this vision in mind, an RTPA can assemble the necessary geographic and demographic data to create several visual maps of different future scenarios, including a "business-as-usual" or "recent trends" scenario, which shows the future if planning policies remain unchanged. With input from the public, the pros and cons for each scenario can be weighed and, ideally, one alternative scenario will be selected as the preferred growth scenario. Some RTPAs have embarked on a complete journey to create a community-preferred growth scenario, including multiple public workshops to incorporate the ideas and visions of local residents. Other RTPAs have had more focused goals, with emphasis on gathering and creating county-specific spatial data that will help them with future planning objectives.

The following pages chronicle four different rural RTPAs in their Rural Blueprint process, highlighting the different visions, principles and phases of each project. Following these case studies is a summary of the Rural Blueprint Program, focusing on the commonalities of participating counties. It will show the characteristics, for example, that tended to make for a successful Blueprint experience.

Lake County

Lake County is located in northern California and home to Clear Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake in California. Residents and visitors come to Lake County for the natural and rural beauty of the lakes, mountains, hot springs, orchards and vineyards, and historic towns. Lake County has seen a greater-than-average growth over the last 12 years, with approximately 11% since 2000. Much of this growth is occurring outside of the County's two incorporated cities, Lakeport and Clearlake. In addition, the sector of the population growing the fastest appears to be California residents looking to retire, which presents a special concern when planning for Lake County's future.

The *Lake County 2030 Regional Blueprint* process was launched in 2008 by the Lake County/City Area Planning Council (APC), which is the RTPA for Lake County. Some of the initial questions formed during the Blueprint process include:

- How and where will the County grow?
- How much growth is desirable?
- How will people travel around the region?
- What services will be needed?
- How will growth affect the surrounding environment?
- How will growth impact the quality of life?

View from Lake County vineyard. Photo by Dorn Vineyards

The *Lake County 2030 Regional Blueprint* was set up as a framework to help guide local planning decisions. The implementation of the plan has been and continues to be fulfilled by local planners and other stakeholders from the public and private sectors. To date there are five **project phases** of the plan:

Project phases

Phase I, 2008

- Develop GIS layers and land use classification data
- Use UPlan model training for scenario building

Phase II, Fall, 2008

- Conduct community workshops on a Blueprint vision and principles
- Form BPAC (Blueprint Project Advisory Committee), composed of a diversity of stakeholders

Phase III, 2009

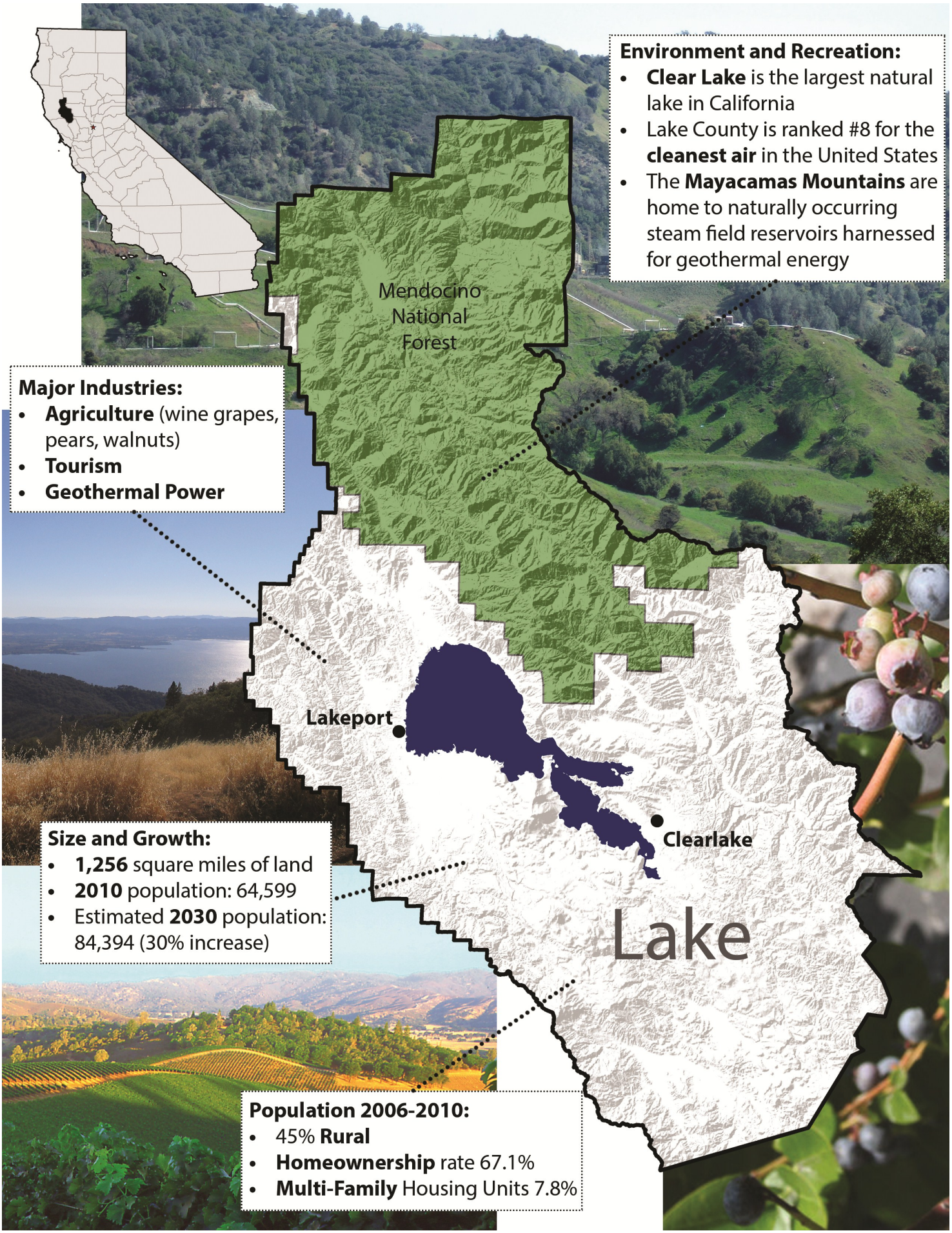
- Develop four alternative growth scenarios
- Conduct five community workshops to develop a preferred growth scenario

Phase IV, 2011

- Form a Blueprint Implementation Team (BIT) and Implementation "tool box" of tools and resources to carry out the *Lake County 2030 Regional Blueprint*
- Convene workshops and trainings for local agency staff and decision makers

Phase V, 2011-2012

- Utilize Blueprint "tool box" tools to review local existing and proposed projects, plans and ordinances
- Conduct hands-on workshops using Blueprint "tool box" resources


Environment and Recreation:
• Clear Lake is the largest natural lake in California
• Lake County is ranked #8 for the cleanest air in the United States
• The Mayacamas Mountains are home to naturally occurring steam field reservoirs harnessed for geothermal energy
Mendocino National Forest
Major Industries:
• Agriculture (wine grapes, pears, walnuts)
• Tourism
• Geothermal Power
Lakeport
Clearlake
Lake
Size and Growth:
• 1,256 square miles of land
• 2010 population: 64,599
• Estimated 2030 population: 84,394 (30% increase)
Population 2006-2010:
• 45% Rural
• Homeownership rate 67.1%
• Multi-Family Housing Units 7.8%

Blueprint Vision

The **Blueprint Vision** was formed from integrating responses from several public workshops in 2009.

Upper Lake, showing improvements to sidewalks, lighting, undergrounding of utilities and sheltered bus stops; Photo courtesy of Lake County

- **Preserve…**

A beautiful natural environment and open space, clean air, cultural diversity, the sense of community, agricultural heritage and rural lifestyle

- **Improve…**

Economic vitality, the retention of young members of community, vocational and higher education opportunities, physical infrastructure, healthy living and healthcare services, activities designed for all ages, public safety, housing for all incomes

- **Sustain…**

Development practices so they are efficient and balanced, growth within existing communities, by driving less and biking and walking more, protect the water system, and secure independence by reducing the importation of outside resources, such as energy, food and jobs

Blueprint Principles

Main Street, Lakeport. Photo by Arnaudh

Along with the **Blueprint Vision**, Lake County residents and stakeholders identified seven **Blueprint Principles**, or areas that were given high priority for protection and enrichment:

1. Environment
2. Agriculture
3. Growth and Development
4. Economy
5. Public Infrastructure
6. Public Services
7. Recreational and Cultural Resources

"I would say the Blueprint process helped develop and strengthen coordination and cooperation between local agency staff, elected officials, community groups, organizations and community members. It helped build and improve communication and establish ongoing professional relationships that foster other collaboration beyond Blueprint efforts."

-Terri Persons, Senior Transportation Planner
Lake County/City Area Planning Council (APC)

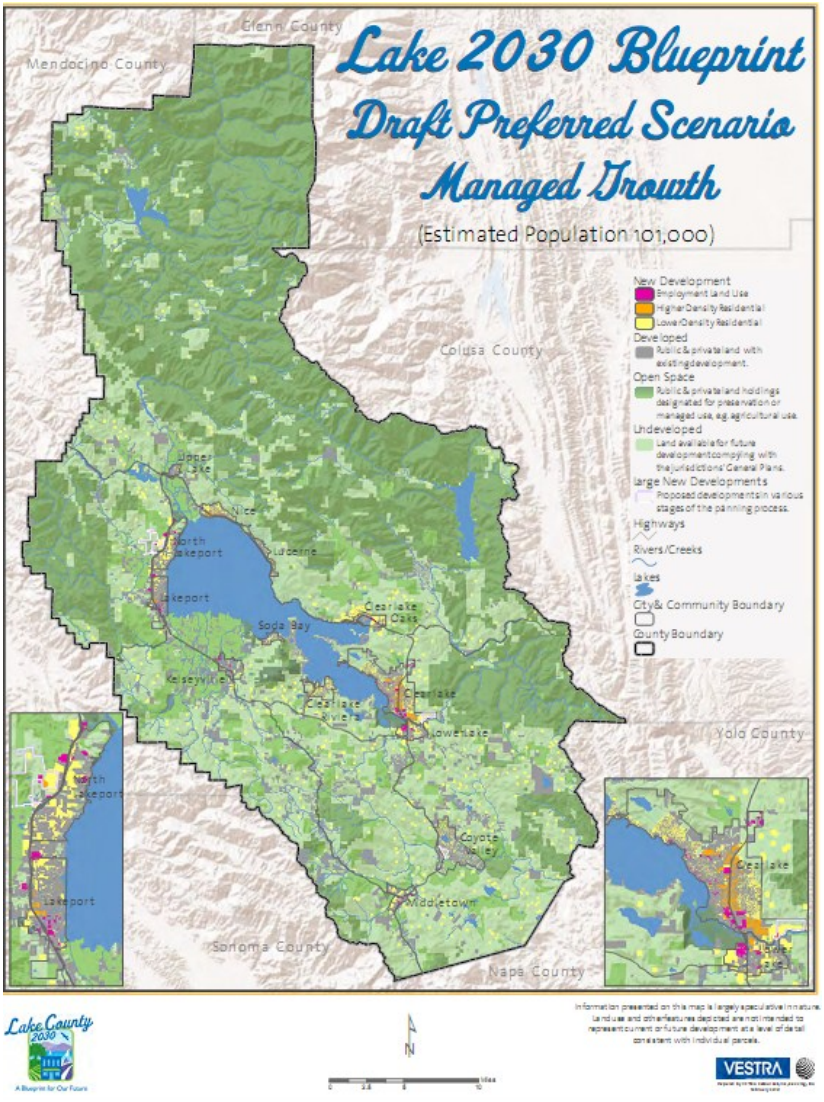
As a result of the workshops in Phase III, a hybrid of two of the UPlan scenarios was formed, called the **Balanced Growth Scenario**, where the future of Lake County showed:

- *Balance* between **rural** and **community** development
- *Balance* between **infill** and **new** development
- *Balance* between **jobs** and **housing** growth
- *Balance* in **housing types**
- *Balance* in **modes of transportation**

The **Balanced Growth Scenario** was adopted by the Lake County APC in October, 2010.

Next Steps

Since the adoption of the **Balanced Growth Scenario** in 2010, Lake County has received two additional grants (supporting Phase IV and Phase V) from Caltrans to carry out the plans envisioned by the Blueprint.



- Phase IV focuses on developing a Blueprint Implementation Team (BIT) and Blueprint "tool box" of tools and resources.
- Phase V focuses on utilizing the tools and resources developed during Phase IV, by implementing hands-on training for local agency staff, decision makers, and stakeholders.
- Training for the use of Blueprint tools will support other planning projects, such as the Safe Routes to School Plan, Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), Transit Development Plan, and the Highway 20 Traffic Calming and Beautification Plan.
- The Regional Blueprint Toolbox will also reduce costs for infrastructure improvements and identify ways to construct projects within the limited funding available.
- SR 29 South Corridor Engineered Feasibility Study (EFS) and Middletown Community Action Plan (CAP) Project are underway to make intra– and interregional travel safer and more convenient, reduce congestion, and address local community needs.
- In the *Lake County 2030 Regional Blueprint,* the Lakeshore Drive Corridor was identified as an area in the City of Clearlake that the community had expressed an interest in revitalizing. The Lakeshore Drive Downtown Corridor Plan, funded with a Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grant, began in 2012 with the establishment of a Community Advisory Group and a Technical Advisory Committee, as well as a series of community workshops, or charettes, to discuss the project. It involves interactive community engagement to identify options for transportation-related improvements along the corridor for all modes to improve mobility, parking options, access and safety, and develop conceptual designs.

Tuolumne County

Located in the central Sierra Nevada, Tuolumne County has a diverse natural landscape which includes part of Yosemite National Park, Stanislaus National Forest and the Emigrant Wilderness Area. The County was originally home to the Me-Wuk Indians and was later home to a flood of gold miners and prospectors. The rich history of Tuolumne County is still evident today in the restored historic buildings in downtown Sonora and Jamestown, as well as the preserved setting at Columbia State Historic Park.

In 2007, Tuolumne County created *Tuolumne Tomorrow,* the name for their Rural Blueprint Planning process. With an expected increase in population of 21,000 over the next 40 years, Tuolumne County, along with its residents, the City of Sonora, and the Tuolumne County Transportation Council (TCTC), developed a long-range vision for growth and development that would coordinate land use, transportation, housing economic development and environmental protection. This vision seeks to answer such questions as:

- How and where will transportation grow to accommodate the new population?
- What types of housing will be built, and where?
- How will this growth affect our natural environment?
- Can impacts created by development be minimized?
- How can we maximize efficiency in providing public services, such as fire protection?
- How can we maximize use of existing infrastructure, such as public water and sewer systems?

Guiding Principles

The **Guiding Principles** are basic values that represent what is desirable for Tuolumne County. These are used to guide the development of each alternative growth scenario, and help determine the advantages and disadvantages for each scenario. **The Guiding Principles** aim to steer Tuolumne County toward a future that:

- Provides an adequate supply of housing opportunities and choices
- Creates safe, healthy, walkable and vibrant communities
- Promotes distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Increases the quantity of mixed land uses
- Minimizes the impacts to natural resources
- Provides a variety of transportation choices
- Reduces the region's greenhouse gas emissions
- Makes development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective
- Provides an adequate supply of commercial, industrial, recreational and tourism uses

Historic downtown Sonora. Photo by Sandy Gordon


Size and Growth:
• 2,221 square miles
• 2010 population: 55,144
• Estimated 2030 population: 57,982 (5% increase)
Major Industries:
• Service (casinos, outdoor recreation and resorts)
• Lumber Manufacturers
• Government, federal, state and local
Stanislaus National Forest
Tuolumne
Sonora
Yosemite National Park
Population 2006-2010:
• 46.6% Rural
• Home Ownership rate 70.2%
• Multi-Family Housing Units 8.6%
Environment and Recreation:
• Tuolumne County is the largest county in the Mother Lode, the zone of gold deposits in California
• Yosemite National Park has over 800 miles of hiking trails
• The Twain Harte region of Tuolumne County was named after two famous area authors, Mark Twain and Bret Harte

Two **Alternative Growth Scenarios** were formed after holding several community workshops where local residents were able to input their ideas, and offer suggestions and comments to the TCTC and County staff.

Jamestown Art in the Park. Photo by Sandy Gordon

The **Alternative Growth Scenarios** are visual models of how Tuolumne County could look in the future, depending on how elements of the **Guiding Principles** are weighed in the development process. These scenarios are visual tools, used in conjunction with public outreach workshops, to facilitate agreement about how growth should be concentrated and distributed at the regional level.

The different scenarios can also be compared by different **Performance Measures**, which provide a set of tangible numbers to evaluate how capable each scenario is at attaining the goals described by the **Guiding Principles**. For example, each **Alternative Growth Scenario** can be compared by the amount of Greenhouse Gas emissions, or number of acres of wildlife habitat impacted by residential development.

In addition to the **Recent Trends Scenario**, two other scenarios were offered as alternatives: the **Public Services Scenario** and the **Distinctive Communities Scenario**.

Performance Measure	Recent Trends Results	Public Services Results	Distinctive Communities Results
Proximity of Growth to Infrastructure	4,667 Dwelling Units	7,253 Dwelling Units	6,240 Dwelling Units
Growth within Defined Communities	7,384 Dwelling Units	9,798 Dwelling Units	10,472 Dwelling Units
Proximity to Workplaces and Shopping	2,572 Dwelling Units w/in 1/4 mi	4,177 Dwelling Units w/in 1/4 mi	4,322 Dwelling Units w/in 1/4 mi
Miles Driven	37.02 VMT Per Capita	36.93 VMT Per Capita	36.99 VMT Per Capita
GHG Emissions	4.9% increase by 2040	4.8% increase by 2040	4.9% increase by 2040

Comparison of Recent Trends, Public Services, and Distinctive Communities Scenarios at end of Model Period (population increased to 80,000)

The **Public Services Scenario** concentrates new growth where multiple services, such as major transportation corridors, transit lines and public water and sewer are located. This would encourage development near defined communities, but radiate along existing infrastructure lines.

The **Distinctive Communities Scenario** is characterized by a set of well-defined, cohesive, and compact communities, each surrounding an urban core. These compact communities promote mixed use and infill, allowing for higher density residential and commercial development and economic self-sufficiency. Residents can live, work and shop in the same locale, which makes other forms of transportation, such as walking, bicycling and public transit, more convenient, and reduces the need for automobiles. Communities that are more compact also take advantage of existing infrastructure and services, and reduce the impacts to open space, agriculture and wildlife corridors.

Surrounding rural development for the **Distinctive Communities Scenario** will occur on the outskirts of these community cores, and be clustered together to make efficient use of roads, sewer and water facilities, and other resources. Transportation planning would then focus on linking the distinct communities and giving a wide range of mobility choices within individual communities.

On August 21, 2012, the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors voted 3 to 2 in favor of accepting the *Tuolumne Tomorrow* and adopting the resolution establishing the **Distinctive Communities Scenario** as the preferred growth scenario for the county.

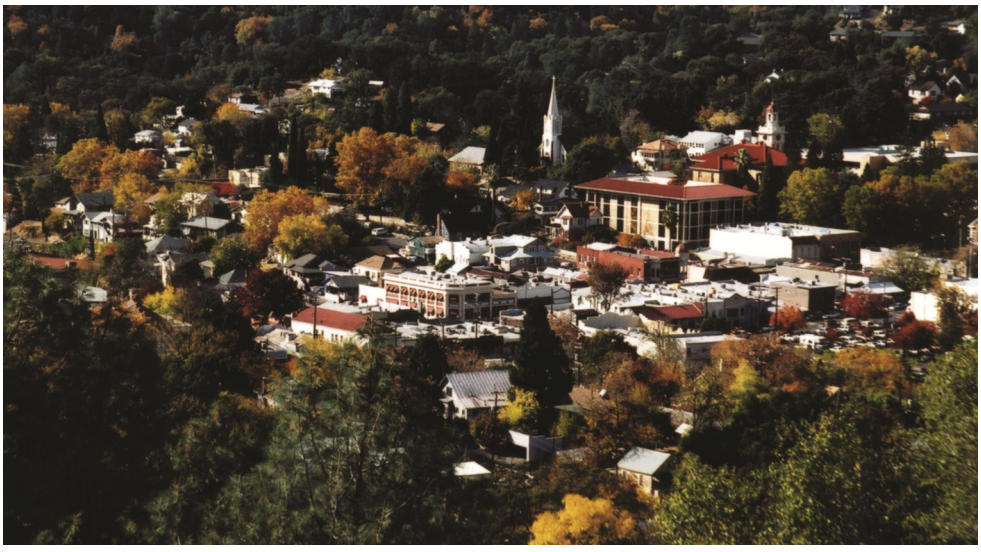
"Without the opportunity provided in the Blueprint process for the public to voice its desires regarding healthy communities by design, it's unlikely the elected officials would have fully realized the public support for such initiatives."

-Darin Grossi, Executive Director,
Tuolumne County Transportation Council (TCTC)

Next Steps:

The **Distinctive Communities Scenario** will help when planning for current and future projects.

- The CA4Health initiative, funded by the Community Transformation Grant (CTG), aims to improve the health of county residents by implementing smoke-free policies in multi-unit housing, encouraging healthy eating, and promoting safe routes to school. The recommendations that have emerged from this initiative will be considered by the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors in the Spring of 2013.
- Recommendations by the Tuolumne County Economic Development Authority, including advocating for upgrades to the telecommunications network, such as broadband and fiber optics, complement the goals of the Distinctive Communities Scenario.
- As part of the upcoming RTP update, Tuolumne County will use long-range traffic volume forecasts based on the Distinctive Communities Scenario.
- The County General Plan will be updated, and any changes proposed will be consistent with the Distinctive Communities Scenario.



View of Historic Downtown Sonora. Photo courtesy of Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau

Trinity County

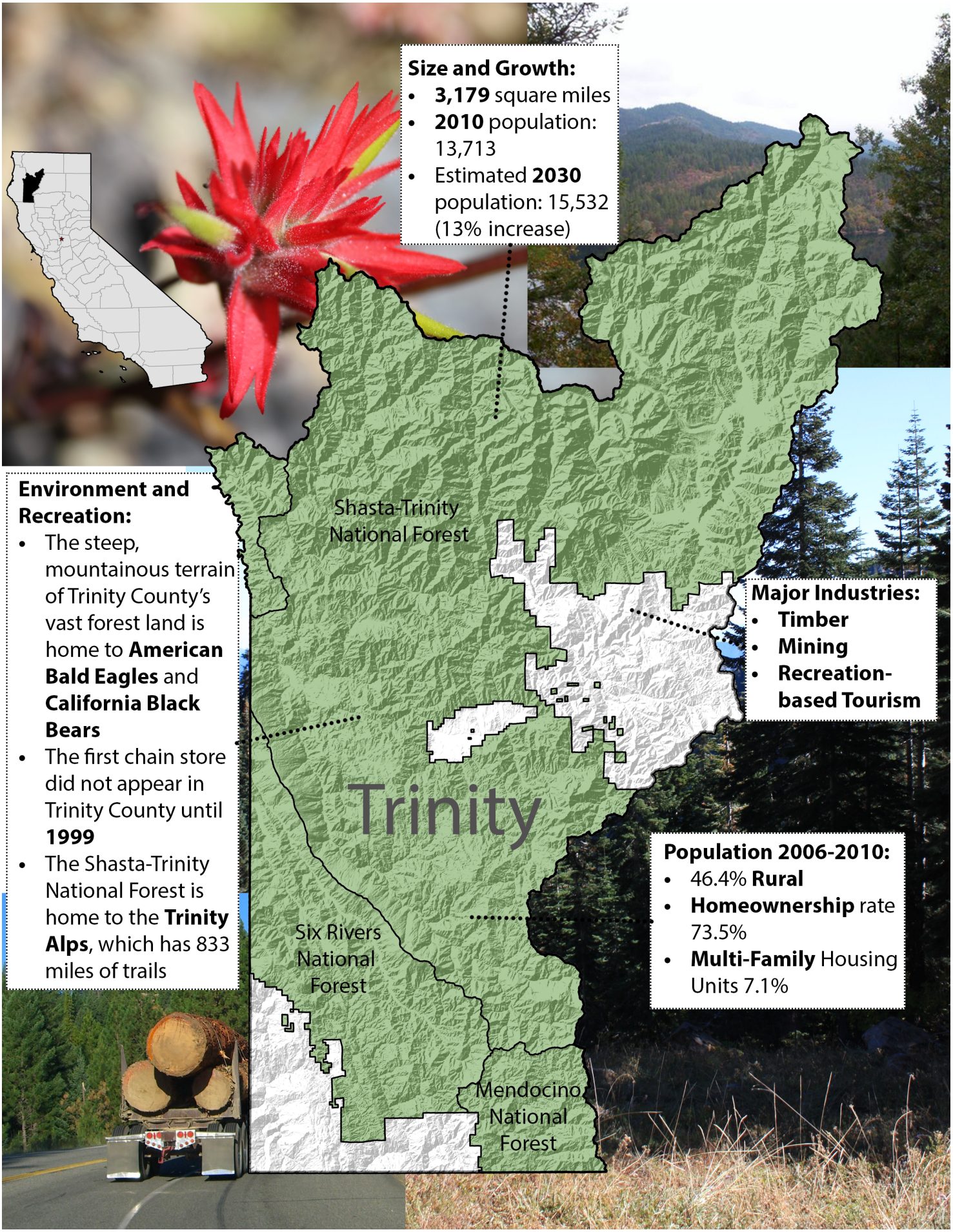
Trinity County is a large, scenic and sparsely-populated county in northern California, with no incorporated cities, no freeways and 3/4 of its land as protected park and open space. Trinity County has seen a population increase of 5.87% between 2000 and 2010. In addition, housing costs are considerably lower than the rest of the state, making Trinity County a more desirable place to live, especially for retirees. The dispersed population also means the accessibility of housing to jobs and services can be challenging, especially as most people depend on a transportation system made up of hundreds of miles of County maintained roads.

These characteristics make Trinity County unlike many other counties in California, and thus require a unique assessment of how the County will change and grow in the future.

The Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness area. Photo by Joshua Smith

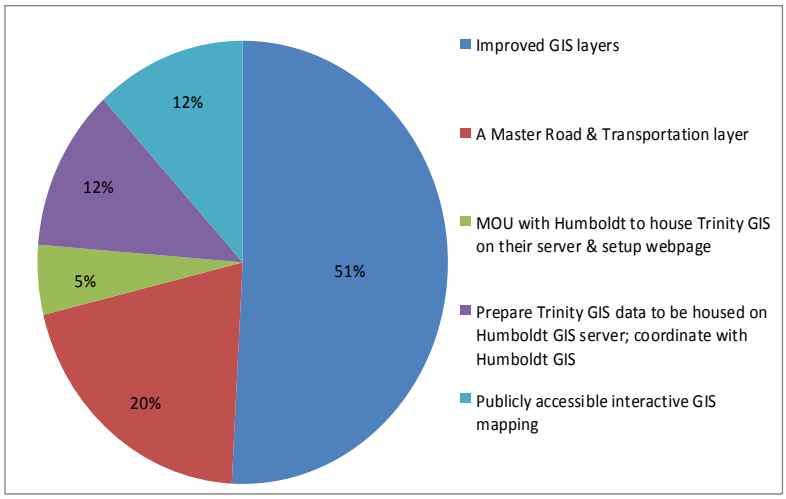
"Thanks to the Blueprint Planning endeavor, Trinity County has, for the first time, been able to compile a comprehensive GIS mapping system of the County, including information that was previously unavailable to the public or other agencies. We have formed closer regional partnerships for sharing information that can assist with transportation planning efforts and other programs, including interagency fire safe activities and closer coordination with federally recognized and non-recognized Native American groups. This represents a major stepping stone toward interactive engagement with stakeholders and the public."

- Polly Chapman, Senior Transportation Planner
Trinity County Department of Transportation


Size and Growth:
• 3,179 square miles
• 2010 population: 13,713
• Estimated 2030 population: 15,532 (13% increase)
Environment and Recreation:
• The steep, mountainous terrain of Trinity County's vast forest land is home to American Bald Eagles and California Black Bears
• The first chain store did not appear in Trinity County until 1999
• The Shasta-Trinity National Forest is home to the Trinity Alps, which has 833 miles of trails
Shasta-Trinity National Forest
Trinity
Six Rivers National Forest
Mendocino National Forest
Major Industries:
• Timber
• Mining
• Recreation-based Tourism
Population 2006-2010:
• 46.4% Rural
• Homeownership rate 73.5%
• Multi-Family Housing Units 7.1%

The Trinity County Transportation Commission (TCTC) has approached the Rural Blueprint effort in a logical and pragmatic way. By establishing a baseline of spatial and geographic data, the county can assess the current conditions and existing footprint of development. With a strong foundation, the County intends to build upon it each successive year, toward regional and public involvement in future scenario planning.

This pie chart shows the 2011-2012 spending distribution for Trinity County. While some rural counties use the grants for areas like community workshops or surveys, Trinity has focused on data creation, maintenance and display. These improvements to the GIS library will build the foundation for future work with scenario building and public participation. An efficient and accurate GIS database will also improve other transportation and land use planning endeavors such as a General Plan update.



Each **project phase** for Trinity's Blueprint represents a small grant funded and GIS-focused set of tasks to ensure the County could complete each project in the allowed time frame. Multiple local agencies collaborated on building the GIS database along with the County.

Project Phases

Phase I, 2009-2010

- Spatially correct County road layer to align with 2009 National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) digital aerial photography
- Convert existing parcel, zoning, general plan and other GIS data to the current ESRI geodatabase format
- Spatially correct existing zoning layer features affected by the new digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) flood hazard layer produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Identify local Native American Tribal areas within Trinity County

Phase II, 2010-2011

- Update the parcel layer to account for new parcel splits and subdivisions
- Collect data to map the emergency response areas throughout Trinity County
- Create GIS layer of known hazards such as flood and dam inundation
- Generate a list of contact information for Special Districts within Trinity County
- Identify and map mutual water and sewer companies throughout Trinity County

Phase III, 2011-2012

- Gather Ground Control Points (GCPs) for updates to the NAIP aerial photography collection
- Identify and attribute all named and addressed roads with private development in the countywide transportation layer, including bike routes
- Implement web-based interactive GIS mapping applications to be available for County departmental personnel and general public use
- Develop GIS data of transit connections to ensure consistency with established County addressing methodology

One major accomplishment of the TCTC Blueprint grant was to improve the base imagery used as a reference for other GIS layers. The National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) collects aerial imagery during the agricultural growing seasons in the continental United States, and is used as a base layer for GIS programs by government agencies as well as the public. The photograph to the right shows Erik Flickwir, a GIS technician at the Trinity County Resource Conservation District, collecting ground control points to improve the accuracy of the NAIP layer in Trinity County. Once completed, the updated NAIP imagery can be used for the precise alignment of existing county road layers, parcel boundaries, and other related spatial layers.

Erik Flickwir of the Trinity County Resource Conservation District is collecting ground control points for increased accuracy of aerial imagery. Photo by Kelly Sheen

Taking advantage of the newest GIS technology and utilizing the Blueprint Planning program, TCTC has created a County-wide geodatabase, which is a more efficient way to manage land records, such as parcels, zoning areas and tax rate areas, for which government agencies are responsible. The geodatabase houses all of the related spatial data for the County, and allows for global updates or changes to be made to all of the spatial layers within the geodatabase. This helps with maintaining the accuracy and consistency of the data.

From the beginning, the TCTC's Blueprint Planning effort has been focused on building a solid foundation of accurate data maintained in an accessible and easily-updated library. The aim of the Blueprint Planning effort for TCTC has been to combine this data framework with longstanding local and regional partnerships to maximize the benefits of current transportation projects, as well as to secure funding for and execute future transportation projects.

Trinity County Blueprint Success Points

- Small, manageable projects can be completed within a short funding cycle.
- Gathering and updating GIS data is useful for a multitude of planning projects, in addition to the Blueprint project, and can be built upon for future projects.
- An existing, working-relationship with a skilled GIS employee is extremely valuable.

Next Steps

Acquiring new GIS data layers and enhancing and correcting existing layers will allow Trinity County to embark on additional projects that will add to the sustainability of the region, and improve the quality of life for its residents.

- Regional technical coordination with neighboring counties such as Shasta and Humboldt is critical for future planning efforts, especially to assess the impacts along State Route 299 and possible improvements that can be made.
- Once GIS data have been corrected and secured, a collaborative effort toward other projects will move forward with public participation, including setting up an interactive website displaying parcel, land use and zoning information.
- Further planning efforts such as a County General Plan update, scenario building, analysis and decision making will be possible with accurate and appropriate GIS data.

Glenn County

Located in the Sacramento River Valley, Glenn County is favored with rich and fertile farmland on the East and the Northern Coast Mountain Range on the West. The Mendocino National Forest is a wilderness area and home to Black Butte, the highest point in Glenn County at 7,455 feet. Agriculture is the primary industry in Glenn County, with major commodities including rice, almonds, dairy products, prunes, and livestock.

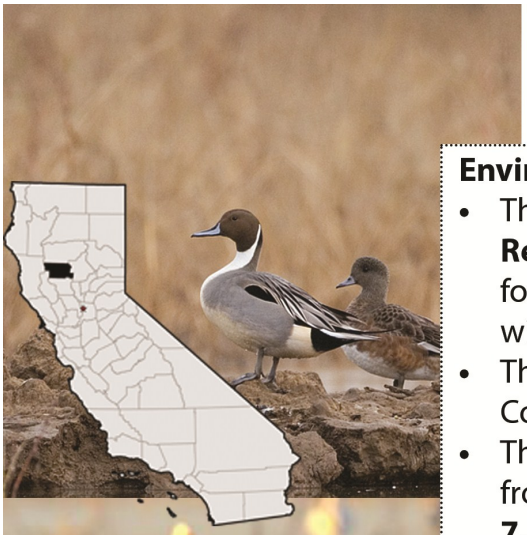
Balis Balloon Rally. Photo by Ed Schnurbusch

Interstate 5 is the major thoroughfare in Glenn County, taking passengers to the two incorporated cities, Willows and Orland. These two cities, along with the rest of the County, are expected to see an increase of almost 10,000 new residents by the year 2050. There is also an expected growth of residents who work in Chico, which is located in neighboring Butte County.

The Rural Blueprint effort for the Glenn County Transportation Commission (GCTC) began in 2007, with a goal of fostering greater collaboration and communication with neighboring rural RTPAs and MPOs. Initial efforts included a public survey that revealed the public was not prepared to make large changes in land use and transportation planning. A combination of GCTC staff turnover and an economic recession temporarily put Blueprint efforts on hold. In 2011, the Blueprint scope for Glenn County was revised to focus on data development for the region through GIS technology, leaning on the existing GIS investment made by the Glenn County Planning and Public Works Agency (PPWA). Once the GIS datasets were updated, accurate and accessible, the GCTC could revisit the development of a shared vision for the region and projected growth scenarios.

"This process, while far from complete, has helped local government officials, elected officials and the public in general begin to more broadly visualize the different interactions between land use, transportation and resource management."

- Mardy Thomas, Senior Planner
Glenn County Planning & Public Works Agency

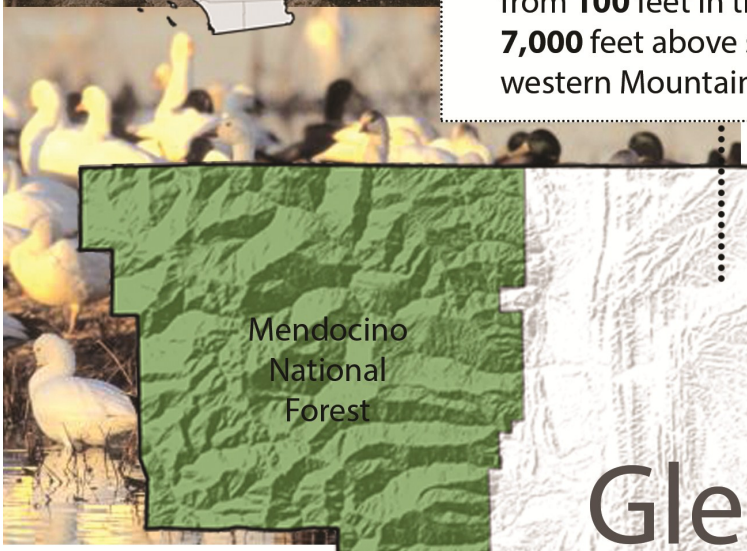


Environment and Recreation:

- The **Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex** provides habitat for over 40% of the Pacific Flyway's wintering waterfowl
- There are over **1,188** farms in Glenn County
- The elevation of Glenn County varies from **100** feet in the East, to over **7,000** feet above sea level in the western Mountains

Size and Growth:

- **1,314** square miles
- **2010** population: 28,143
- Estimated **2030** population: 33,552 (19% increase)



Mendocino National Forest

Glenn

Orland

Willows

Population 2006-2010:

- 43.4% **Rural**
- **Home Ownership** rate 67.5%
- **Multi-Family** Housing Units 11.4%

Major Industries

- **Farming** (rice, almonds and walnuts)
- **Retail** and **Trade**
- **Government**, federal, state and local

The revised plan, called the *Glenn 2020 Project,* focuses on building and managing a GIS that conforms to state GIS guidelines and meets the needs of the GCTC, other county departments, local municipalities, neighboring counties and the public. There is a Three **Year Implementation Plan**, which includes three **project phases**.

Black Butte Reservoir. Photo by Nicole J. Huber

Project Phases

Phase I: System Architecture and Database Development

- Define and enact data and design standards
- Complete geodatabase development
- Establish a GIS Advisory Committee

Phase II: Enterprise Deployment and Advanced Development

- Initiate a GIS Plan and oversight process
- Implement a GIS training program
- Execute intranet and public use deployment

Phase III: Regional Data access and Sharing Phase

- Deploy mobile capabilities and GPS
- Adopt formal data transfer mechanisms and protocol.

Blueprint Vision

The *Glenn 2020 Project* vision is GIS-focused, and aims to manage, maintain and effectively utilize accurate, reliable and consistent geo-spatial data in six functional areas:

Sacramento River. Photo courtesy of Glenn County

I. Coordination

- Assess the overall public service needs, support other departments, and maintain spatial data handling

II. Data Standards

- Assure, document and archive accurate geospatial data and implement metadata standards

III. GIS Functionality

- Empower the effective use of GIS, enable multi-tiered GIS functionality, and deliver internal (County) and external (public) access

IV. Data Creation, Conversion and Maintenance

- Acquire, process, store and distribute GIS geospatial data

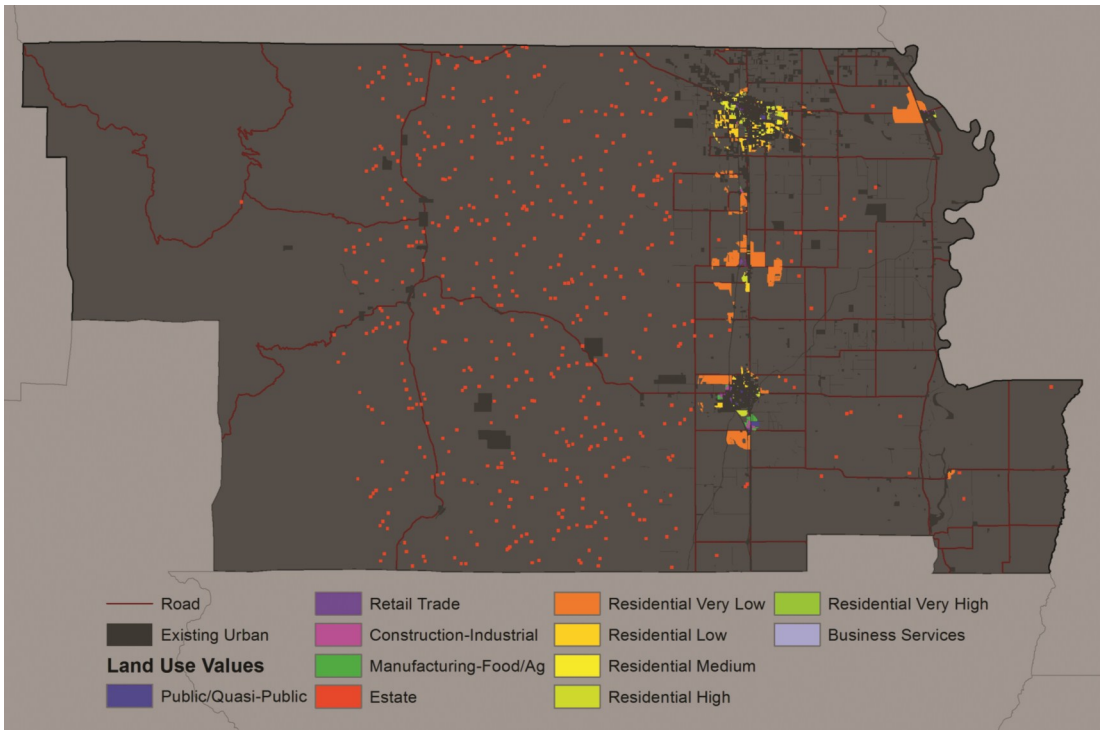
V. GIS Implementation

- Account for knowledge (training, documentation and GIS user groups) and process (methodologies, procedures, and protocols)

VI. Public Service and Customer Relations

- Expand and improve public access to GIS, and support ongoing public feedback and accountability

In May, 2012, the GCTC, University of California, Davis, and the consulting group Matson & Isom began collaborating on the assembly of a UPlan Model **Base Case Scenario** and two alternative scenarios.



Glenn County Base Case Scenario

In addition to the **Base Case Scenario**, the GCTC is also planning several alternative scenarios. The **Farmland Preservation Scenario** uses two data classifications from the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance, to discourage new growth from developing on valuable agricultural lands. The **Compact Growth Scenario** increases residential density by adding 20% of each class to the next highest density class. The resulting output could save almost as much agricultural land as the **Farmland Preservation Scenario**, as well as increase the number of households within the city and town spheres of influence.

One of the outcomes of the **Three Year Implementation Plan** has been the ability to collaborate with neighboring counties to improve the transportation and land use planning seamlessly across county lines. In August, 2012, the GCTC launched an online GIS maps site, which allows other jurisdictions and the public to access to geospatial data and applications. The response has been quite positive, overcoming initial skepticism that a consolidated, countywide GIS library would be very valuable.

Next Steps

The online GIS Maps Site, GIS library and infrastructure will allow GCTC to move forward in the development of a preferred growth scenario as well as strengthen regional cooperation with neighboring counties.

- An additional scenario is currently underway that will test changes to the existing County and City General Plans.
- As a result of the GIS Implementation Plan, the GCTC foresees becoming the regional clearinghouse for GIS data and services.
- The gains in GIS organization and maintenance will be a significant benefit to the regional development of a Hazard Mitigation Plan, which will address long-term planning issues within the cross-county (Glenn and Colusa Counties) transportation corridors and adjoining public and private lands.

Lessons Learned

Many of the rural RTPAs in California face similar circumstances with respect to their population demographics, transportation and housing needs, and the importance of the environment for economic ends. Likewise, some common themes surfaced as each RTPA confronted its Blueprint process. For example, the economic downturn beginning in 2008 especially strained efforts to convey the value of Blueprint planning, as the economy became a much greater priority.

Challenges

- A community's preferred alternative can be an ambitious goal that may meet opposition.
- The economic downturn makes planning for growth a lower priority.
- The potential benefits of scenario planning are harder to demonstrate where growth is slow.
- An RTPA does not have authority to implement the community's preferred alternative. Implementation can require others to take action, which introduces new factors specific to each situation.
- Timing matters. If a city's or county's planning cycle will start up soon, that can increase interest in an RTPA's scenario planning. If a planning cycle recently completed, interest in scenario planning will be lower.
- Many rural areas of California include high percentages of federally owned lands, which constrain rural scenario planning activities.

While the goal of the Rural Blueprint Program is for rural communities to work together to discuss a shared vision of the future and ultimately to select a preferred growth scenario for their region, there are many other successes that are achieved along the way. All four of the County RTPAs reported significant gains in the acquisition and improvement of GIS layers as well as enhanced coordination and cooperation of staff between different county agencies. These achievements will likely continue to benefit the counties beyond the life of the Blueprint grant, into successive projects.

Downtown Groveland. Photo by Terri Metz

Successes

- GIS data have been gathered and updated for all four counties, which will contribute to other planning projects in addition to the Blueprint Project.
- The Blueprint Program has fostered coordination and collaboration among residents, planning commissions, transportation commissions and others.
- General Plans incorporating many of the Blueprint principles were recently adopted for Lake County and Tuolumne County.
- Lake County will update its 5-year Economic Development Plan with redevelopment, infill, and countywide economic development.
- Successful Blueprint projects and strengthened partnerships between state and local agencies have made counties more competitive for funding of other transportation planning projects.

The Blueprint effort also offers RTPAs the opportunity to take advantage of the impetus of smart growth planning in California. The State of California has long provided an atmosphere of supporting land use planning to improve the lives of its residents by encouraging vibrant town centers with both businesses and housing, increasing walkability and reducing vehicle miles traveled.

This holds true for rural areas as well as major metropolitan areas, although the goals and extent of the planning efforts may be different. One of the common goals for rural regions in California is to maintain the rural atmosphere that initially drew many of its residents to live in the area. The Rural Blueprint Program has allowed these areas to focus on planning for the future, while still upholding the great features that make their counties special.

Kennedy Meadow Resort and Pack Station. Photo courtesy of United States Forest Service

Opportunities

- Coordinated planning has momentum and support in the current political environment.
- The current slow growing economy is a good time to plan for the future.
- Counties can incorporate Blueprint principles when updating General Plans, Transportation Plans and Housing Elements.
- GIS is a quickly growing field, with new applications and tools being created continuously. Sharing new maps and models is an excellent way to communicate the information and captivate the public.

Conclusion

The Rural Blueprint Program has been beneficial to rural RTPAs in many different ways. The program has allowed RTPAs to assemble new data, including GIS data; to encourage the cooperation between different county agencies, stakeholders and residents; to engage the public in participating in a "bottom up" approach to planning; and to reflect and prioritize some of the common goals and visions for the future. The enhanced GIS library will allow each county to proceed with additional long-term planning goals, beyond the life of the Blueprint grants. The increased collaboration between agencies has been repeatedly cited by senior planners as one of the biggest benefits of being part of the Rural Blueprint Program. The partnerships that are formed during the Blueprint process will remain valuable for other regional projects as well. The support of the public has proven to be imperative to the longevity and sustainability of the selected scenarios. The responses from residents through surveys and community meetings have brought both perspective and fresh ideas to the table. Finally, a shared, long-term vision is important in working toward a future that is both sustainable and comfortable for residents who want to keep living in a rural environment.

Credits

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Lake Facts

- Calpine Geothermal Plant, Bill Bushnell
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- Blueberries, Lake County Farm Bureau

Tuolumne Facts

- Pinecrest Lake Kayaks, Lynn Ferrin
- Yosemite Valley Walk, Terri Metz
- Emigrant Lake, United States Forest Service

Trinity Facts

- Giant Red Indian Paintbrush, Polly Chapman
- Lewis Lake, Chandler Greene
- Logging Truck, Trinity County Chamber of Commerce
- Trinity Mountain, Polly Chapman

Glenn Facts

- Northern Pintails, Bill Walker
- Orland Arch, City of Orland
- Waterfowl on the Sacramento NWR Complex, Mike Peters
- Thunderhill Raceway, City of Willows
- Western View, Ed Schnurbusch

Maps

- California Blueprint Awards Map, Jacquelyn Bjorkman
- Lake 2030 Scenario, Vestra Resources, Inc.
- Glenn County Base Case Scenario, Jacquelyn Bjorkman

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Data Sources

County Facts Sheets

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Lake County

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Glenn County

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