

## 13 REGIONAL TOURISM

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**T**he County of Mariposa’s recreation needs and facilities fall within two categories: regional tourism and local recreation. This Element focuses on regional tourism issues related to the County’s character, regional recreation opportunities, and related environmental issues.

### 13.1 REGIONAL TOURISM ISSUES AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Regional tourism is the heart of the Mariposa County’s economy. It supports the issues of character, economy, and housing upon which the General Plan is founded. The County’s unique natural environment defines the character that attracts many visitors and residents. Millions of tourists visit Mariposa County each year. The County ranks third nationwide as a non-theme-park destination—behind New York City and Los Angeles. Over half of private economic activity and private sector jobs in Mariposa County can be attributed to tourism, primarily from visitors to Yosemite National Park.

Although visitors to Mariposa County have traditionally been tourists attracted to Yosemite, the County has experienced an increase in day visitors who come to Mariposa to enjoy rural scenery, arts and cultural activities, and special events.

People who visit the County, especially during the summer months, are attracted by the plentiful natural and cultural resources. Increasingly, visitors come to Mariposa County to enjoy activities such as fishing, boating, hunting, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, and agri-nature tourism and appreciation of native American cultural traditions and practices. How best to accommodate these visitors while maintaining the quality of local resources is the primary economic development challenge facing the County.

The proximity of Mariposa County to major recreation resources, such as Yosemite, makes it an attractive destination for visitor-oriented events, recreational gatherings, and commerce. Yosemite National Park and other

Federally-managed lands offer a direct benefit to the County providing residents with recreational opportunities that local jurisdictions cannot provide. Mariposa has an opportunity to build upon existing tourist attractions to provide more reasons for visitors to stay, recreate, and spend money locally.

Regional tourism issues related to enhancement of visitor-oriented attractions addressed in this Element are:

- expansion and integration of county regional tourism opportunities, including agri-nature tourism, and
- intergovernmental cooperation.

### **13.1.01 EXPANSION AND INTEGRATION OF COUNTY REGIONAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES**

More than half of Mariposa County is in Federal ownership. The largest portion, over 250,000 acres, is Yosemite National Park. Small portions of the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests are located in Mariposa County sharing nearly 200,000 acres of the County's land area. The Mariposa portion of the Stanislaus National Forest is located west of Yosemite and north of the Merced River, and the Sierra National Forest unit is south of the Merced River and west of Yosemite. The Bureau of Land Management has scattered holdings, primarily located along the Merced River wild and scenic corridor outside of Yosemite National Park, and throughout other portions of the County.

The Federal land managers offer distinct recreation opportunities. Yosemite National Park offers a wilderness and natural experience in a high elevation setting. The National Forests provide areas for active recreation such as camping, hunting, and fishing. The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for lower elevation foothill lands and deep river canyons with opportunities for river rafting, off road vehicle use, as well as camping, hunting, and fishing.

There is a broad spectrum of recreational opportunities provided on Federal public lands such as fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, sightseeing, horseback riding, skiing, bicycling, or off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation. Visitors to these public lands use a mix of federal, public, and private roads to reach destinations. In these rural areas, public access roads shape the recreational experience for most visitors determining where they can go and what they can see. Winter sports such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling frequently take place on unplowed roads.

California State recreation facilities and resources in the County include the Mining and Mineral Museum, the County Fairgrounds, and the historic site monuments located countywide.

The Merced Irrigation District owns and manages lands and water in the Lake McClure and McSwain Reservoirs. The District offers camping, boating, fishing, and other water-related opportunities. The two lakes are close to the Lake Don Pedro and Coulterville Town Planning Areas.

The County has several regional recreation offerings. These include the visitors centers in Coulterville and Mariposa Town, the Mariposa Park with its amphitheatre, the Mariposa Art Park and amphitheatre, the Mariposa Skate Board Park, and the County museums in Coulterville and in Mariposa with its associated rest stop.

Additional recreational tourism opportunities exist with potential plans being developed for Bower Cave, the old stage routes, the Merced River Trail (from Bagby to El Portal), and a mountain bike trail program.

For tourism to thrive, visitors need access to and knowledge of points of interest. The County maintains miles of roads providing access to public lands. Some parts of Mariposa County that have tourist potential are served by state routes or local roads. Some of the most noted are the Old Yosemite Road, Old Coulterville Road, Dogtown Road, and Bull Creek and Bonell Gulch Roads in the Stanislaus National Forest, and Chowchilla Mountain Road from Ponderosa Basin through the Sierra National Forest into the community of Wawona in Yosemite National Park.

### **13.1.02 INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION**

Regional recreational experiences in Mariposa County are woven together from opportunities provided not only by the County, but by other federal, state, regional, and private agencies. Yosemite National Park and other federal land management agencies directly manage the most significant regional resources located in Mariposa County.

Outside of Yosemite National Park, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management offer “multiple use” lands. These are publicly-managed properties on which a wide variety of activities may occur. Plans to diversify the County’s regional tourism resources are affected by this federal multiple use policy.

The County is a significant beneficiary and strong supporter of programs enhancing the visitors’ park experiences. The County has long recognized its important role as the home and host of Yosemite National Park.

The National Forest experience differs greatly from that of the National Parks. The Stanislaus and Sierra National Forests provide access for recreation use as well as for the management of commercially valuable resources such as timber and minerals. From the recreation perspective, the National Forests provide a unique experience of relatively unfettered ability for all types of access activities from hikers and equestrians to four wheel off-road vehicle enthusiasts, mountain bikers, and boaters. The County actively encourages the continued multiple usage of the National Forests within the limits of well-managed stewardship.

The Bureau of Land Management offers access to rugged and not easily reached areas. The Bureau maintains a seasonal visitor and interpretation center as well as managing white water rafting, camping, and off-road vehicle areas.

## **13.2 GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

**Goal 13-1: Preserve, protect and enhance regional tourism opportunities and resources.**

*Policy 13-1a(1):* Plan collaboratively with the public land managers for a broad spectrum of regional tourism opportunities.

*Implementation Measure 13-1a(1):* The County shall collaborate with Federal agencies creating multiple use and public education policies supporting regional tourism and protecting public lands.

Timing: Ongoing  
Responsibility: Board of Supervisors.  
Fiscal Impact: Staff time commitment.  
Consequences: Reinforces collaboration.

*Policy 13-1a(2):* The County shall collaborate with the American Indian Council of Mariposa County creating facilities and opportunities to promote public education of Native American cultural traditions and places.

*Implementation Measure 13-1a(2):* The County shall collaborate with the American Indian Council of Mariposa County creating multiple use and public education policies supporting regional tourism and protecting public lands.

Timing: Ongoing  
Responsibility: Board of Supervisors.  
Fiscal Impact: Staff time commitment.  
Consequences: Reinforces collaboration.

*Policy 13-1b:* Maximize public access to public lands consistent with the protection of sensitive natural resources and habitats.

*Implementation Measure 13-1b(1):* The Board of Supervisors should support programs to maintain and increase multiple- use on public land to increase regional tourism opportunities.

Timing: Ongoing  
Responsibility: Board of Supervisors.  
Fiscal Impact: None.  
Consequences: This reinforces long-standing Board policy.

**Goal 13-2: Increase appreciation of environmental values and lengths of visitor stays through education programs.**

*Policy 13-2a:* Provide easily accessible information about the County’s natural, historic, and scenic attractions.

*Implementation Measure 13-2a(1):* The County should provide ongoing regional tourism programs for residents and visitors defining opportunities for extended side-trips within the County.

Timing: Intermediate-term  
Responsibility: County Administrative Officer.  
Fiscal Impact: Publication and distribution costs.  
Consequences: Creates economic opportunity.

**Goal 13-3: Increase public access to trails and off-road areas to provide greater opportunities for “in-County” visitor experience.**

*Policy 13-3a:* Work with other land management agencies to establish access routes and trailheads while protecting environmentally sensitive areas.

*Implementation Measures 13-3a(1):* The County should collaborate with Federal and State agencies to develop trail-head facilities and other public access points to public lands.

Timing: Ongoing  
Responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department.  
Fiscal Impact: Cost of grant matches and Staff time.  
Consequences: Works to diversify out-of-park experience.

**Goal 13-4: Create visitor access to communities and points of interest.**

*Policy 13-4a:* Assist visitors in finding points of interest in the County.

*Implementation Measure 13-4a(1):* Create a coordinated County information program to identify points and routes of interest for regional tourists.

Timing: Intermediate-term  
Responsibility: County Administrative Officer.  
Fiscal Impact: Cost of graphic development.  
Consequences: Creates out-of-park experience.

*Policy 13-4b:* Enhance visitor center facilities and information for distribution.

*Implementation Measure 13-4b(1):* Maintain a visitor center in the Mariposa Town Area designed to provide information about all County visitor assets.

Timing: Intermediate-term  
Responsibility: Board of Supervisors.  
Fiscal Impact: Substantial capital cost.  
Consequences: Provides a better visitor center to increase customer service to visitors and encourage out-of-park experience.

**Goal 13-5: Provide job growth and sustain County revenues by enhancing and expanding the visitor-serving sectors of the economy.**

*Policy 13-5a:* Implement active programs designed to increase opportunities for a diverse tourism experience.

*Implementation Measure 13-5a(1):* In cooperation with the County's tourism industry, implement a tourism marketing and advertising program using the Mariposa County brand designed to:

1. increase the length of visitor stay within the County,
2. expand the tourist season into shoulder seasons, and
3. incorporate special targeted activities for cultural tourism and agri-nature tourism.

Timing: Short-term  
Responsibility: Economic Development Department.  
Fiscal Impact: Costs for marketing agency and media.  
Consequences: This policy encourages the Board of Supervisors to carry out its economic development plan.

## **13.3 RELATED GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS**

### **13.3.01 LAND USE**

The Land Use Element contains policies for development of resort and commercial recreation uses within sub-classifications of the Rural Commercial land use classification. These types of uses support the goals of the Regional Tourism Element by providing additional tourism destinations, including destination resorts and hotels in appropriate locations, and a wider range of recreational opportunities in the County.

### **13.3.02 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Expansion of the regional tourism sector of the County’s economy is one of the fundamental goals of the Economic Development Element. That Element includes policies and implementation measures to expand the visitor-serving economy through a number of different efforts, including extending the “season” from five to nine months or longer, increasing lengths of stay and room occupancy rates, and making the County a major destination for visitor activities related to cultural tourism and agri-nature tourism.

### **13.3.03 CIRCULATION, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND FACILITIES**

Improvement of visitor accessibility to the County’s tourism assets including its communities and other local points of interest is one of the goals for improving regional tourism. Movement of visitors through the County, including parking, traffic, and transit issues are addressed in the Circulation, Infrastructure and Facilities Element. In addition, the Element addresses the provision of recreational trails and other facilities for bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian use, which provide opportunities for regional tourism.

### **13.3.04 LOCAL RECREATION**

The County’s major tourist attractions, such as Yosemite National Park provide significant opportunities for local residents to enjoy wilderness and other types of recreation not available in the County’s park system. The Regional Tourism Element defines policies and implementation measures for maintaining and enhancing these recreational opportunities. In addition, the County’s park and recreation facilities, which are addressed in the Local Recreation Element, provide recreational opportunities for visitors that complement the County’s major tourism attractions.