

4 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Chapter 4 of the DEIR contains a discussion of existing conditions, thresholds above which an impact of constructing and operating the proposed Merced Wal-Mart Regional Distribution Center is considered significant, environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and levels of significance after mitigation. Issues evaluated in these sections consist of a full range of potential environmental topics originally identified for review in the notice of preparation (NOP) prepared for the proposed project. The date of the release of the Notice of Preparation (July 7, 2006) is considered the baseline condition for the environmental setting. Appendix A contains a copy of the NOP and comments received on the NOP. Sections 4.1 through 4.13 of this DEIR are each organized into the following major components:

- ▶ **Environmental Setting:** This subsection presents the existing regional and local environmental conditions relevant to the consideration of project impacts.
- ▶ **Regulatory Setting:** The applicable regulatory framework, including plans and policies under which the proposed project would be implemented, are discussed in this subsection.
- ▶ **Environmental Impacts:** This subsection describes the significance criteria used to evaluate impacts on the environment, issues not requiring further evaluation, and the environmental impacts associated with the project and mitigation measures proposed to reduce the impacts.
 - **Thresholds of Significance:** A discussion that presents the criteria used to define significant effects on the environment. The criteria are expressed as thresholds above which the project would have a significant effect on the environment. Thresholds may be quantitative or qualitative, or they may be based on agency standards or legislative or regulatory requirements as related to the impact analysis.
 - **Impact Analysis:** The discussion of potential significant effects of the proposed project on the environment, based on whether it exceeds expressed thresholds. Project impacts are numbered sequentially in each section. For instance, impacts in Section 4.3, “Biological Resources,” are numbered Impact 4.3-1, Impact 4.3-2, Impact 4.3-3, and so on. An italicized conclusion follows each impact statement and provides the summary of each impact and its level of significance before mitigation. A detailed discussion follows each impact statement and includes information to support the stated conclusion.

This discussion also provides mitigation measures to reduce significant or potentially significant effects of the proposed project to the extent feasible. Section 15370 of the State *CEQA Guidelines* defines mitigation as:

- (a) Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
- (b) Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree of magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- (c) Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- (d) Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operation during the life of the action.
- (e) Compensating for the impacts by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

The mitigation measures are listed numerically, corresponding to the impact being addressed. For example, “Impact 4.3-1” would be mitigated by “Mitigation Measure 4.3-1.”

This discussion also describes the status of all significant impacts following application of mitigation measures. Either the impact would be reduced to a level below the significance threshold (mitigated to a less-than-significant level) or it would be concluded that feasible mitigation is not available or is insufficient to reduce an impact to less than significant. This would be a “significant unavoidable effect on the environment.”