

4.15 AGRICULTURE, FOREST & MINERAL RESOURCES

4.15.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

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REGULATORY SETTING

State Regulations

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was established in 1982 by the state of California in response to a critical need for assessing the location, quality, and quantity of agricultural lands and conversion of these lands over time. The goal of the FMMP is to provide consistent and impartial data to decision makers for use in assessing present status, reviewing trends, and planning for the future of California's agricultural land resources (California Department of Conservation, 2007). The program produces "Important Farmland Maps", which are a hybrid of resource quality (soils) and land use information. The maps identify five farmland categories, as well as two non-agricultural categories that are described further below.

The California Land Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, was adopted in 1965. This voluntary program provides a tax incentive to owners of agricultural properties who agree to maintain their land in agricultural preserves for agricultural use. The purpose of the Williamson Act is to encourage participating property owners to continue to farm their land, and to prevent the premature conversion of farmland to urban uses. The Williamson Act applies to both prime and non-prime agricultural lands.

FOREST RESOURCES

In 2010, the state CEQA Guidelines were amended in response to the Legislature's directive requiring the Resources Agency to adopt amendments prepared and developed by the Office of Planning and Research related to impacts and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions (California Natural Resources Agency, December 2009). The amendments added an environmental checklist question regarding forestry primarily due to the direct link with greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as conversion of forest land may result in direct GHG

emissions and removal of potential further carbon sequestration (carbon is stored in vegetation), which is recognized as a key mitigation strategy in the Air Resources Board's Scoping Plan (Ibid.). The Resources Agency staff report on the amendments also found that forest conversions may result in aesthetic, biological resource and water quality impacts (Ibid.). It indicated that the Legislature has declared that "forest resources and timberlands of the state are among the most valuable of the natural resources of the state and that such resources furnish high-quality timber, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic enjoyment while providing watershed protection and maintaining fisheries and wildlife" (Public Resources Code, § 4512(a)-(b)) (Ibid.). Based on the State's reasoning for including of forest resources in the CEQA checklist, the consideration of forest resources (and resulting impact significance) should account for impacts related to greenhouse gas emissions, loss of commercial timberland, value for biological habitat and watershed protection, and aesthetics.

Commercial timber lands are afforded protection through the state's Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976, which mandates the creation of timberland preserve zones (TPZ) to restrict and protect commercial timber resources. A TPZ is a 10-year restriction on the use of land, and will replace the use of agricultural preserves (Williamson Act contracts) on timberland. Land use under a TPZ will be restricted to growing and harvesting timber, and to compatible uses approved by a county (or city). In return, taxation of timberland under a TPZ will be based only on such restrictions in use.

MINERAL RESOURCES

The Mineral Resources and Mineral Hazards Mapping Program (MRMHMP) provides data about California's varied non-fuel mineral resources (such as metals and industrial minerals), naturally occurring mineral hazards (such as asbestos, radon, and mercury), and information about active and historic mining activities throughout the state (California Department of Conservation, 2007).

The California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) of 1975 requires the classification of land into Mineral Resources Zones (MRZs) according to known or inferred mineral potential of that area. The classification process is based on the underlying geology. The primary goal of the mineral land classification is to ensure that the mineral potential of the land is recognized by local government decision makers and is considered before making land use decisions that could preclude mining.

Local Regulations

Section 16.50.095 of the Santa Cruz County Code requires agricultural buffers of 200 feet for non-agricultural uses adjacent to specified agricultural lands within the County. The purpose is to prevent or minimize potential conflicts between either existing or future commercial agricultural and habitable land uses (i.e., residential, recreational, institutional, commercial or industrial). The buffer would be designed to provide a physical barrier to noise, dust, odor, and other effects which may be a result of normal commercial agricultural operations such as: plowing, discing, harvesting, spraying or the application of agricultural chemicals and animal rearing. All habitable uses are required to comply with this provision.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The Important Farmland Maps produced by the state of California under the FMMP identify five farmland categories: Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land, as well as two non-agricultural categories: Urban and Built-Up Land and Other Land. The City of Santa Cruz is largely developed and all lands within City limits and the City's existing Sphere of Influence are designated as Urban and Built-Up Land and Other Land. Some adjacent lands outside City limits, but within the *General Plan 2030* planning area are designated Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Grazing Land. These agricultural lands are identified primarily west of the City, as well as limited small areas along Ocean Street Extension and in the Carbonera area. State-mapped agricultural lands are shown on Figure 4.15-1.¹

FOREST RESOURCES

The City of Santa Cruz is primarily developed with open spaces within parks and City-owned greenbelt lands as shown on Figure 1-2. There are no designated TPZ lands within the City. Areas of mixed evergreen, redwood forest and oak woodlands occur within the City, primarily within the city-owned open space greenbelt lands. (See the BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES [Chapter 4.8] section of this EIR for further discussion.)

In addition to native woodlands, some areas within the City contain non-native tree groves with a dense canopy. The most widespread non-native tree in these stands is blue gum eucalyptus, primarily within DeLaveaga Park. Other dominant, non-native trees include Monterey pine (native to small areas on the coast, including northwestern Santa Cruz County, but naturalized in the vicinity of Santa Cruz), Monterey cypress (native to the Monterey area, but naturalized in the vicinity of Santa Cruz), and acacias. In some canyons in DeLaveaga Park, English elm is the dominant non-native tree species.

MINERAL RESOURCES

The City of Santa Cruz is primarily developed. There are no mines or areas of known mineral resources within the City, although there is a designated aggregate location west of the City within the General Plan planning area (California Department of Conservation, 2006). An approximate 360±-acre sand quarry adjacent to and surrounded by Wilder Ranch State Park. The site is located within the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County and subject to County regulations. According to the County's online GIS mapping, the quarry is designated Mountain Residential (RM) in the County's General Plan and zoned "Special Use". Mining operations are regulated by the County via use permit approval and conditions. The quarry has an approved reclamation plan, and mining operations are expected to be completed within 10± years.

¹ All EIR figures are included in Chapter 7.0 at the end of the EIR (before appendices) for ease of reference as some figures are referenced in several sections.

Construction aggregate, which includes alluvial sand and gravel or crushed stone, is the largest non-fuel mineral commodity produced in California, as well as in the nation, and production plays a major role in the economy of California (California Department of Conservation, 2006). Demand for aggregate is expected to increase as the state's population continues to grow and infrastructure is maintained and improved. For the last 28 years, the California Geologic Survey has conducted on-going studies that identify and evaluate aggregate resources throughout the state (Ibid.).

4.15.2 RELEVANT PROJECT ELEMENTS

PROPOSED GOALS, POLICIES & ACTIONS

The **LAND USE** chapter of the draft *General Plan 2030* includes several policies and actions to prevent loss of prime agricultural lands (LU1.2, LU1.2.1), preserve agricultural land at the City's edge (LU2.3), and support County efforts to protect agricultural lands along the coast north of Santa Cruz (LU3.5). Action HZ4.1.6 seeks to emphasize the City's role as an organic agricultural center and work with appropriate agencies to develop demonstration projects on non-chemical pest control.

The **NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION** chapter also addresses resource conservation and protection. Policy NRC3.4 seeks to conserve agricultural and known mineral resources in the planning area. Two goals address resource conservation and urban forests as set forth below. Goal NRC5 and its accompanying policies and actions seek protection and management of tree resources in the urban environment (NRC5.1) with maintaining and adding to the City's urban tree canopy and diversity (NRC5.2.1).

- **GOAL NRC3** Conservation and stewardship of resources.
- **GOAL NRC5** An enhanced and sustainable urban forest.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

The *General Plan 2030* Land Use Map and land use designations are largely unchanged from the 1990-2005 General Plan / Local Coastal Program, except for three new mixed use land designations that have been developed and applied to the City's major transportation corridors. Land Use actions LU1.1.4 and LU1.1.5 address development and land use for specific sites: the Swenson property and the Golf Club Drive property, respectively. LU2.2.3 also includes addition of a 5.5-acre parcel adjacent to the Dimeo Lane landfill and Resource Recovery Center. Specific uses haven't been identified for the Dimeo Lane site, although it will not be used as part of any expansion of the landfill disposal area. In addition, the proposed *General Plan 2030* supports development of a desalination plant (Policy CC3.1.3), but a specific site is not identified.

4.15.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), State CEQA Guidelines (including Appendix G), City of Santa Cruz plans, policies and/or guidelines, and agency and professional standards, a project impact would be considered significant if the project would:

- 15a Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance Farmland as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- 15b Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;
- 15c Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use;
- 15d Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)) or timberland (as defined in Public Resources Code section 4526);
- 15e Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use;
- 15f Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of forest land to nonforest use; or
- 15g Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state or loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan.

In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in the Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

The City is primarily developed, and future development accommodated by the proposed *General Plan 2030* would be considered infill development.

Forest Resources

There are no areas of protected timberland land within the City or its existing Sphere of Influence, and there are no protected timberlands within the *General Plan 2030* planning area. Thus, there would be no conflicts with zoning of forest lands (15d) or the conversion of timberland (15e-f). Furthermore, the proposed plan includes goals, policies and actions that seek maintenance and expansion of the City's urban forest as summarized in Table 4.15-1.

Mineral Resources

There are no designated mineral resources within the City, its existing Sphere of Influence or the *General Plan 2030* planning area, and therefore, the proposed General Plan would have no impact to mineral resources (15g). An existing quarry is located west of the City within the General Plan planning area. The site is located within the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County and subject to County regulations. According to the County's online GIS mapping, the quarry is designated Mountain Residential (RM) in the County's General Plan and zoned "Special Use". Mining operations are regulated by the County via use permit approval and conditions, and the proposed *General Plan 2030* would not result in the loss of availability of this resource. Furthermore, the proposed plan includes policies that seek protection of any known mineral resources in the planning area as summarized in Table 4.15-1. The site is designated "Parks" in the proposed General Plan, but the completion of mining and reclamation of the site as well as future uses would be governed by the County.

Agricultural Resources

There are no designated agricultural lands within City limits or the City's existing Sphere of Influence. Thus, future development accommodated by the plan would not result in conversion of agricultural lands (15a) or conflict with existing agricultural zoning or Williamson Act contracts (15b). The lands adjacent to City boundaries on the west are identified agricultural lands in the State Farmland Mapping Program, and are also designated "Agriculture/Grazing" in the City's existing General Plan and in the proposed *General Plan 2030*. The only other identified agricultural property is outside city limits and Sphere of Influence on the west side of Ocean Street Extension. This property is identified as Prime Farmland in the state mapping program, but is designated as Very Low Density Residential in both the City's existing General Plan and in the proposed *General Plan 2030* based on County General Plan land use designations for this area. The property is not within city limits or the City's adopted Sphere of Influence, and any future proposed development would be subject to County land use plans and designations. Thus, the proposed *General Plan 2030* would not result conversion of farmland.

The following impact analyses address potential conflicts that may occur between future development under the proposed General Plan and adjacent agricultural lands (15c).

Impact 4.15-1: Conflicts with Agricultural Uses

Adoption and Implementation of the proposed *General Plan 2030* would accommodate future development which would not result in conflicts with agricultural uses of that could lead to conversion of farmlands to non-agricultural uses with implementation of proposed policies and actions. Therefore, there is a *less-than-significant impact*.

Adoption and implementation of the proposed *General Plan 2030* would not directly result in increased new development. However, the draft General Plan includes policies and a land use map that support additional development as summarized in subsection 4.15.2 above. The proposed plan includes lands to the west of the City within the General Plan planning area. These lands, located within the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County, are designated

“Farmland of Statewide Importance” in the State Farmland Mapping Program, and lands designated “Prime Farmland” are found just east and south of this area. They are also designated as Agriculture/Grazing in the proposed General Plan.

Land use conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses typically include noise, dust, odors and potential “drift” of pesticide application associated with agricultural operations. As development occurs near agricultural areas, farmers also are confronted with issues of theft, vandalism, and urban pest control in landscaped areas associated with urban development.

Establishment of buffers can help minimize conflicts between agricultural and urban land uses. The buffer setback is intended to minimize potential conflicts through the provision of distance as a physical barrier to noise, dust, odor and other effects of normal commercial agricultural operations such as plowing, discing, harvesting, application of agricultural chemicals or rearing of animals. The Santa Cruz County Code (section 16.50.095) requires a 200-foot buffer between commercial agricultural lands and habitable spaces within the unincorporated area of the County. For industrial uses, County regulations specify the setback be measured from structures and outdoor areas designed for public parking and intensive human use (i.e., outdoor patios). The County regulations require incorporation of vegetative or other physical barriers within the setback as necessary to minimize potential land use conflicts. A setback with a fence and densely planted row of evergreen trees at the edge of the setback provides further physical separation between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.

The potential for future development adjacent to agricultural lands is very limited. For agricultural lands to the west of the City, most lands bordering this area are either within the City’s protected greenbelt (Moore Creek Preserve) in which no development would be permitted or within lands owned by the University of California, which are not subject to City land use regulations. A couple of private properties along the short segment of Shaffer Road south of Highway 1 are already developed or have approved permits. Agricultural buffers in this area range from approximately 10-20 feet to 200-300 feet for two existing and one approved industrial buildings in this area. Similarly, residential uses are located across the street from lands in agricultural production along Ocean Street Extension within unincorporated County areas. Lands within City limits do not directly abut these agricultural lands. Nonetheless, even if expanded development were proposed in the future, the proposed General Plan policies and actions outlined in Table 4.15-1 would serve to reduce potential conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses with support of County agricultural policies on the North Coast (LU2.3.5) and requiring or maintaining buffers for development adjacent to agricultural lands (CD1.4.3).

It is noted that landscaped buffers do not totally eliminate odors and noise. To minimize potential complaints from non-agricultural uses adjacent to agricultural uses, the County of Santa Cruz and other agencies require that buyers of properties adjacent to agricultural operations be advised of existing adjacent agricultural uses and operations during the real estate transaction process. Recordation of an acknowledgement of adjacent agricultural uses as part of the parcel deed is required at the time of property purchase or issuance of building permit. This “Buyer Beware” program, which has been in effect since 1979 within the county, requires landowners adjacent to designated agricultural lands to acknowledge through deed recordation that they are aware of adjacent agricultural uses, and are prepared to accept

potential occasional inconveniences and discomfort associated with adjacency to normal agricultural operations.

Conclusion. Adoption and implementation of the proposed *General Plan 2030* would not directly result in new development, but new development accommodated by the plan could be sited adjacent to agricultural lands. However, the land potentially affected by adjacent agricultural lands includes only a very limited area along Shaffer Road at the western end of the City, as other lands adjacent to agricultural lands are in open space or state-owned. Furthermore, with implementation of the proposed *General Plan 2030* goals, policies and actions aimed at preventing conversion of agricultural lands and the maintenance and establishment of adequate buffers between adjacent land uses, there would be no conflicts between future development and agricultural uses.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required as a significant impact has not been identified.

TABLE 4.15-1
Proposed General Plan Policies & Actions that Avoid or Minimize
Impacts to Agricultural Lands

Type of Measure / Action	Policies / Actions
PREVENT CONVERSION OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS	♦ Prevent loss of prime ag land through environmental review: LU1.2, LU1.2.1 ♦ Preserve and conserve ag lands at City's edge: LU2.3, NRC3.4 ♦ Support County ag policies on North Coast: LU2.3.5 ♦ Conserve agricultural resources in planning area: NRC3.4
PREVENT OTHER CHANGES THAT COULD RESULT IN CONVERSION OF AG LANDS	♦ Require or maintain agricultural buffers: CD1.4.3
TREE PROTECTION	♦ Protect tree resources & heritage trees: NRC5.1 ♦ Maintain & increase urban tree canopy & tree diversity: NRC5.1.2, NRC5.2 ♦ Promote street tree planting: NRC5.2.1 ♦ Educational programs to promote urban forest: NRC5.1.1
MINERAL RESOURCE PROTECTION	♦ Conserve known mineral resources in planning area: NRC3.4

REFERENCES

California Department of Conservation.

- 2007. "Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program" Online at: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/Index.aspx>. Santa Cruz mapping (August 2010 - "Santa Cruz County Important Farmland 2008) online at: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/Index.aspx>
- 2007. "Mineral Resources" website; online at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/mineral_resource/Pages/Index.aspx
- 2006. "Aggregate Availability in California." California Geological Survey. Map Sheet 52 (Updated 2006).

California Natural Resources Agency. December 2009. "Final Statement of Reasons for Regulatory Action – Amendments to the State CEQA Guidelines Addressing Analysis and Mitigation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Pursuant to SB97."