

3.10 MINERAL RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The One Valley One Vision (OVOV) Planning Area contains extensive mineral resources. Gold mining and oil production have, historically, been the primary mineral extraction activities in and around the Santa Clarita Valley area. Other minerals mined in the OVOV Planning Area include construction aggregate (sand and gravel), titanium, tuff, and rock. This chapter provides an analysis of the City's proposed General Plan goals, objectives, and policies on the protection of mineral resources within the City's Planning Area. The City's Planning Area consists of its incorporated boundaries and adopted Sphere of Influence (SOI). The County's Planning Area consists of unincorporated land within the OVOV Planning Area boundaries that is outside the City's boundaries and the adopted SOI. The City and the County Planning Areas together comprise the OVOV Planning Area. The analysis indicates that the potential impacts on the City's mineral resources would be less than significant with implementation of the General Plan.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Oil Production Wells

The majority of the existing oil and natural gas fields are located in the western portion of the OVOV Planning Area, as shown in **Figure 3.10-1, Existing Mineral Resources**. A known oil and gas field is located within the southeast portion of the City's Planning Area. As of 2003, approximately 3,180 acres are used for oil and natural gas extraction in the OVOV Planning Area.¹ As shown in **Figure 3.10-1**, there are approximately 712 oil-producing and natural gas wells. An additional 835 wells have been abandoned and 31 wells are idle (currently not abandoned or used for production).²

¹ EIP Associates, GIS Table, March 2003.

² California Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources, Well Locations and Oil/Gas Fields, July 2008.

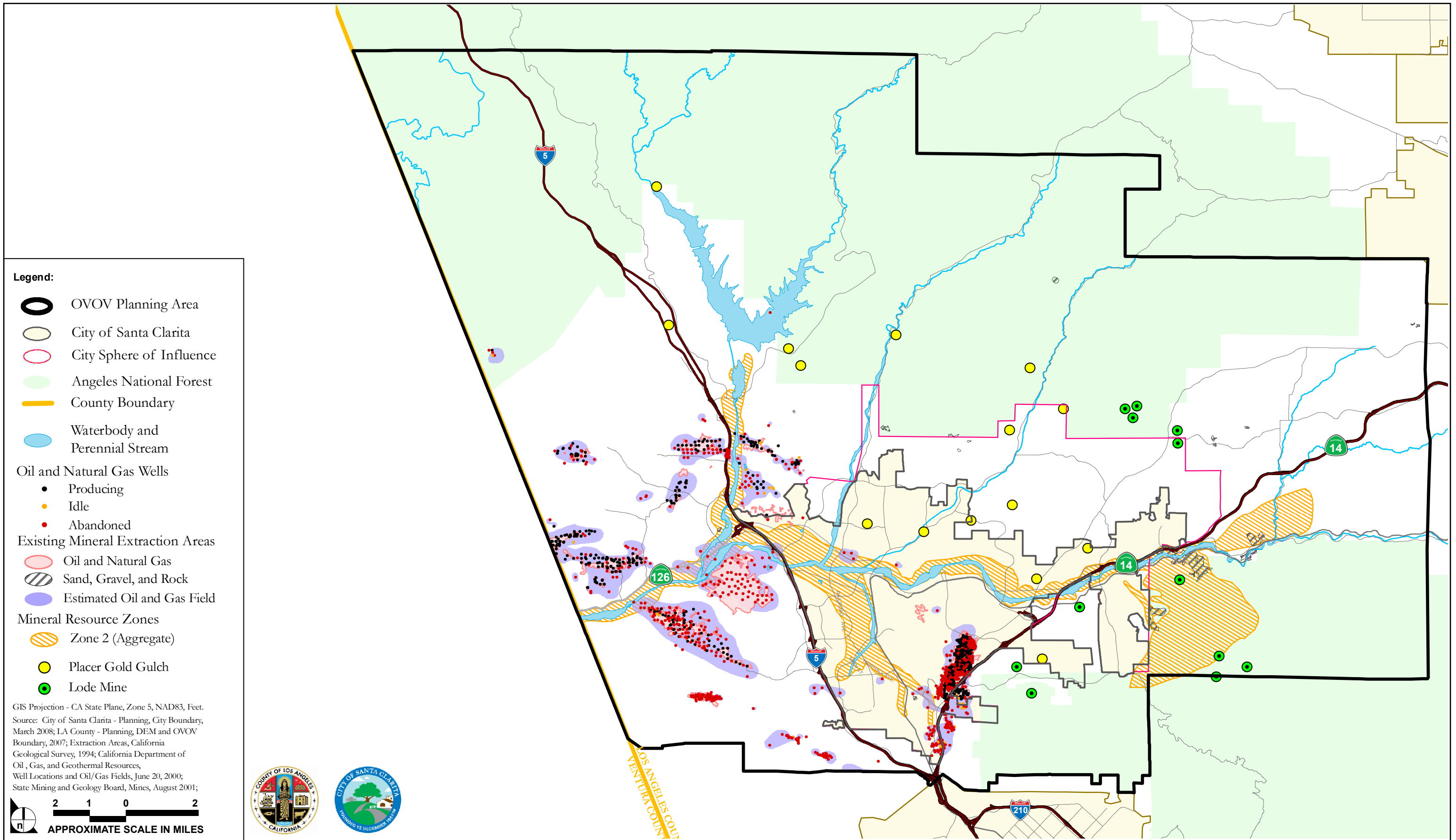
Surface Mining Resources

Mineral Resource Zones

The mineral resources addressed in this section are those resources that are classified under the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) of 1975. SMARA Chapter 9, Division 2 of the Public Resources Code, requires the State Mining and Geology Board to adopt state policy for the reclamation of mined lands and conservation of natural resources.

Geological survey areas known as Mineral Resource Zones (MRZ) are classified according to the presence or absence of significant mineral deposits, as defined below. These classifications indicate the potential for a specific area to contain significant mineral resources.

- MRZ-1: Areas where available geologic information indicates there is little or no likelihood for presence of significant mineral resources.
- MRZ-2a: Areas underlain by mineral deposits where geologic data indicate that significant measured or indicated resources are present. Areas classified MRZ-2a contain discovered mineral deposits as determined by such evidence as drilling records, sample analysis, surface exposure, and mine information. Land included in the MRZ-2a category is of prime importance because it contains known economic mineral deposits.
- MRZ-2b: Areas underlain by mineral deposits where geologic information indicates that significant inferred resources are present. Areas classified MRZ-2b contain discovered mineral deposits that are either inferred reserves as determined by limited sample analysis, exposure, and past mining history or are deposits that presently are sub-economic. Further exploration and/or changes in technology or economics could result in upgrading areas classified MRZ-2b to MRZ-2a.
- MRZ-3a: Areas containing known mineral occurrences of undetermined mineral resource significance. Further exploration within these areas could result in the reclassification of specific localities as MRZ-2a or MRZ-2b.
- MRZ-3b: Areas containing inferred mineral occurrences of undetermined mineral resource significance. Land classified MRZ-3b represents areas in geologic settings that appear to be favorable environments for the occurrence of specific mineral deposits. Further exploration could result in the reclassification of all or part of these areas as MRZ-3a or specific localities as MRZ-2a or MRZ-2b.
- MRZ-4: Areas of no known mineral occurrences where geologic information does not rule out the presence or absence of significant mineral resources.



SOURCE: City of Santa Clarita, County of Los Angeles, Valleywide General Plan - March 2009

FIGURE 3.10-1

Existing Mineral Resources

Presence of Mineral Resource Zones within Planning Area

MRZ-2 areas are concentrated along waterways, such as the Santa Clara River within and outside the City boundaries, as well as State Route 126, Castaic Creek, and east of Sand Canyon Road (**Figure 3.10-1**). As of 2008, there are approximately 18,868 acres designated for mineral extraction of aggregate minerals (sand, gravel, and rock) along the banks of the Santa Clara River and some of its tributaries.³ MRZ-2 areas in the OVOV Planning Area contain construction-grade aggregate within the portion of the Santa Clara River that extends approximately 15 miles from Agua Dulce Creek in the east to the Ventura County boundary in the west. Approximately 6,653 acres of land within the City are designated MRZ-2.⁴ The river flows through the center of the City in an east-to-west direction, transporting aggregate minerals that are derived from erosion of the surrounding mountains and hillsides. The majority of the MRZ-2 area east of Sand Canyon Road lies outside the City boundary in the unincorporated portion of the County and the Angeles National Forest.

These known mineral resources encompass portions of the San Fernando Valley–Saugus–Newhall Production-Consumption (P-C) region and the Palmdale P-C region. A P-C region is one or more aggregate production districts and the market area they serve. The mineral resources in these two P-C regions are considered as either

- Permitted Resources, which are materials believed to be acceptable for commercial use that exist within property owned or leased by an aggregate producing company for which permission allowing extraction and processing has been granted, or
- Resources, which are permitted resources as well as all potentially usable aggregate material that may be mined in the future, but for which no use permit allowing extraction has been granted.⁵

The San Fernando Valley–Saugus–Newhall P-C region contains a total of 88 million tons of permitted aggregate reserves. The Palmdale P-C Region contains 181 million tons of permitted reserves of sand and gravel resources and no crushed stone resources.⁶ No active permits for surface mining activities are filed with the City. The six active permits for surface mining activities filed with the County are generally, located in Canyon Country, Agua Dulce, Mint Canyon, and Soledad Canyon, which are in the County's portion of the OVOV Planning Area. The proposed mining activities for a Soledad Canyon site have been the source of litigation between the City, the County, the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

³ Impact Sciences. GIS-estimated acreages from **Figure 3.10-1** prepared by the City of Santa Clarita. 2008.

⁴ Department of Conservation, California Geological Survey, *Aggregate Availability in California*, Table 1. 2006.

⁵ City of Santa Clarita, *General Plan*, Draft Land Use Element, October 2008.

⁶ Department of Conservation, California Geological Survey, *Aggregate Availability in California*, Table 1. 2006.

That project is a split estate operation that proposes extracting 56.1 million tons of aggregate resources located in Soledad Canyon. The project site is located where a smaller mining operation previously existed. The City currently owns the property where the project would be located, but the BLM owns the mineral rights and has contracted with CEMEX, Inc., to allow CEMEX to mine 56.1 million tons of aggregate resources over a period of 20 years or less. The City opposes mining at the project site above levels of historic mining operations. The City is currently pursuing a cooperative federal legislative effort with CEMEX to resolve the mining dispute. The City sued to challenge the approvals for the project.

Other mineral resources include oil and natural gas, which are primarily located within the southeast portion of the City and the western portion of the OVOV Planning Area, within the unincorporated portion of the Los Angeles County. Historically, other resources such as gold were found in the Placer gold gulches (ravines) that are situated in the western to central portion of the Planning Area. Almost half were located within City limits, and lode mines (rock fissures containing metal ore) that are located primarily in the central portion were actively mined. The nonrenewable characteristic of these mineral deposits necessitates careful and efficient management to prevent waste and careless exploitation.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

State Regulations

Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975

The state Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA), as amended in 2006, mandated the initiation of mineral land classifications to help identify and protect mineral resources in areas within the state that are subject to urban expansion or other irreversible land uses that would preclude mineral extraction. After designation of mineral resource areas, SMARA provided for the classification of designated lands containing mineral deposits of regional or statewide significance. In addition, SMARA was designed to provide guidelines for the proper reclamation of mineral lands.

The purpose of this act is to create and maintain an effective and comprehensive surface mining and reclamation policy with regulation of surface mining operations so as to assure that

- adverse environmental effects are prevented or minimized and that mined lands are reclaimed to a usable condition which is readily adaptable for alternative land uses;
- the production and conservation of minerals are encouraged, while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, wildlife, range and forage, and aesthetic enjoyment; and
- residual hazards to the public health and safety are eliminated.

These goals are achieved through land use planning by allowing a jurisdiction to balance the economic benefits of resource reclamation with the need to provide other land uses.

Local Regulations

Depending on the location, approval and permitting of proposed excavation and mining activities rests with the City or County. However, if the site is owned by the state, jurisdiction is with the State Lands Commission.

City of Santa Clarita

The City of Santa Clarita has an overlay category that is used to designate areas that have significant mineral aggregate resource areas, as determined by SMARA, and/or oil fields. This latter category, the Mineral/Oil Conservation Area (MOCA), is located primarily in the southeastern portion of the City. The purpose of this overlay is to permit the continuation of the mineral/oil usage while providing development of the area if specific requirements are met.

County of Los Angeles

In a joint regulatory effort, SMARA authorizes local governments to assist the state in issuing mining permits and monitoring site reclamation efforts. To manage mining resources, the County has incorporated mineral resource policies into the Open Space and Conservation Element of its OVOV Area Plan. In addition to those policies, SMARA requires that applicants of surface mining permits submit a reclamation plan prior to receiving a permit to mine, describing how the excavated site will ultimately be remediated and transformed into another use. Mineral extraction within the County is an allowed use within the agricultural zone. Surface mining permits are required prior to any extraction activities.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

In order to assist in determining whether a project will have a significant effect on the environment, the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines*, Appendix G, identify criteria for conditions that may be deemed to constitute a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in physical conditions.

Significant mineral resource impacts will result if

- there is the loss of availability of mineral resources that would be of value to the region and the residents of the Planning Area; or

- there is a loss of availability of locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

This impact analysis section evaluates the potential effects of the proposed General Plan goals, objectives, and policies on mineral resources within the City's Planning Area using the *State CEQA Guidelines* threshold of significance.

Impact 3.10-1 **There will potentially be a significant impact to the loss of availability of mineral resources that would be of value to the region and the residents of the City's Planning Area.**

The following text discusses the potential impacts on mineral resources per the *State CEQA Guidelines* thresholds of significance criteria. Potential impacts include a loss of available mineral resources that could be of value to the region and the residents of the Planning Area. This impact flows from the need to balance the social and economic needs for mineral resources with the need to protect the natural environment and mitigate potentially adverse environmental impacts caused from extracting mineral resources. Significant mineral resources identified as MRZ-2 areas have been identified within the City's Planning Area within the 100-year floodplain of the Santa Clara River and some of its tributaries. A combined total of 269 million tons of permitted aggregate resources have been identified within the San Fernando Valley–Saugus–Newhall P-C Region and the Palmdale P-C Region.

Significant mineral resources are identified on **Figure 3.10-1**. The mapping of these resources in the Santa Clarita Valley is compatible with the Conservation and Open Space Element (**Goal CO 1, Goal CO 2, Objective CO 2.3, Policy CO 2.3.1**). Identification of mineral resources locations and identification of the estimated amounts of resources available would promote the efficient use of these resources and will help conserve the Valley's hillsides, canyons, ridgelines, soils, and minerals by limiting exploration of additional mineral deposits. The extraction and processing of these mineral resources would be approved by the City on a project-by-project basis, ensuring mitigation of impacts from mining and processing of materials on adjacent uses or the community and ensuring that mineral extraction sites are maintained in a safe and secure manner after cessation of extraction activities (**Policies CO 2.3.3 and CO 2.3.4**). Approval of subsequent mining projects per implementation of the General Plan would also ensure implementation of (**Policy CO 1.3.3**) that information material be available to the public to conserve non-renewable resources and recover materials from the waste stream. The identification and mapping of mineral resources will also avoid loss of their availability from encroachment due to residential and urban development. Proximity to environmentally sensitive areas also reduces the resources' availability.

Proposed General Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goal CO 1: A balance between the social and economic needs of Santa Clarita Valley residents and protection of the natural environment, so that these needs can be met in the present and in the future.

Policy CO 1.3.3: Provide informational material to the public about programs to conserve non-renewable resources and recover materials from the waste stream.

Goal CO 2: Conserve the Santa Clarita Valley’s hillsides, canyons, ridgelines, soils, and minerals, which provide the physical setting for the natural and built environments.

Objective CO 2.3: Conserve areas with significant mineral resources, and provide for extraction and processing of such resources in accordance with applicable laws and land use policies.

Policy CO 2.3.1: Identify areas with significant mineral resources that are available for extraction through appropriate zoning or overlay designations.

Policy CO 2.3.3: Through the review process for any mining or mineral extraction proposal, ensure mitigation of impacts from mining and processing of materials on adjacent uses or on the community, including but not limited to air and water pollution, traffic and circulation, noise, and land use incompatibility.

Policy CO 2.3.4: Ensure that mineral extraction sites are maintained in a safe and secure manner after cessation of extraction activities, which may include the regulated decommissioning of wells, clean-up of any contaminated soils or materials, closing of mine openings, or other measures as deemed appropriate by the agencies having jurisdiction.

Effectiveness of the Proposed General Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies

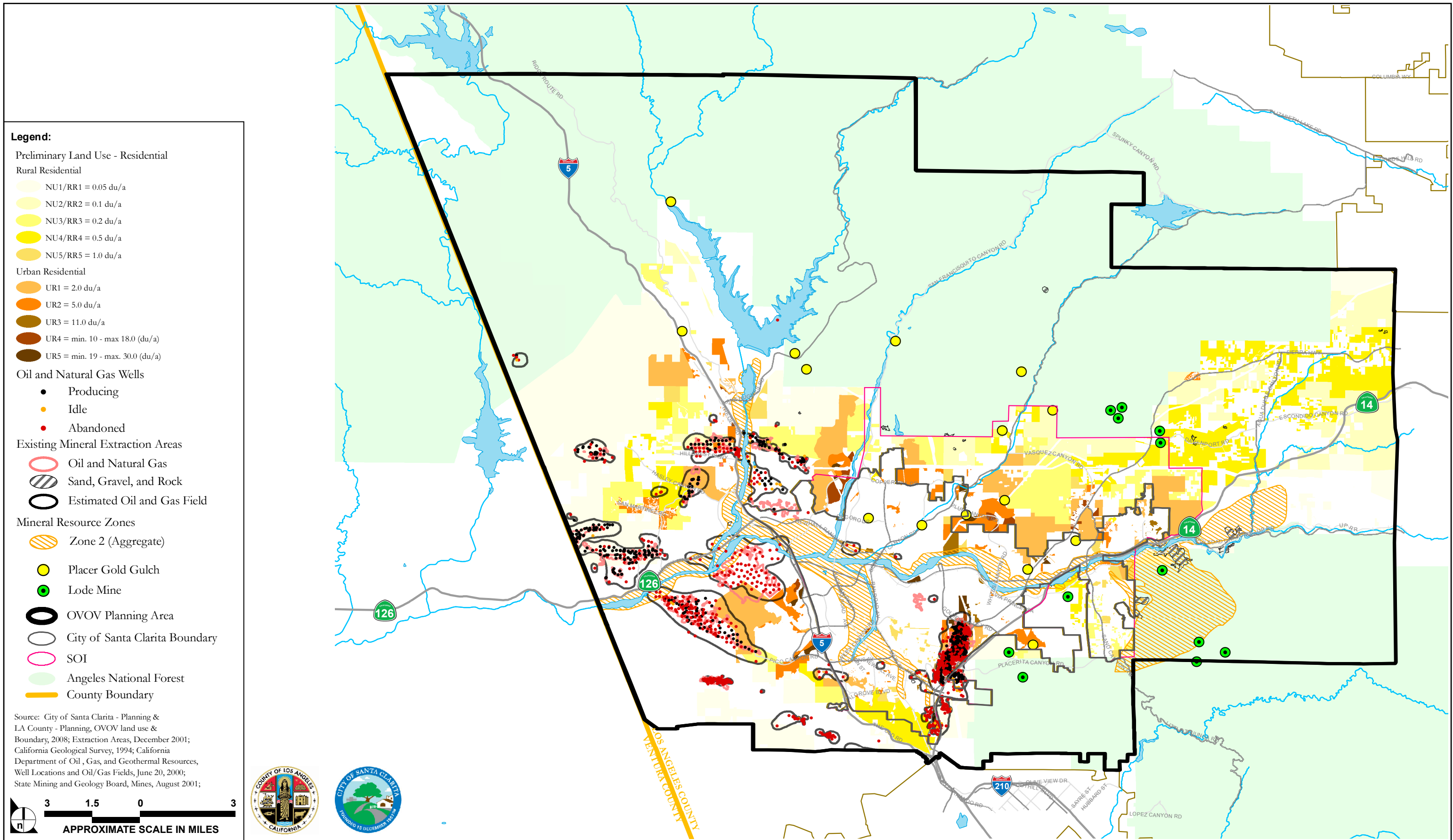
Implementation of the proposed General Plan goals, objectives, and policies related to mineral resources ensure that future development in the City would not have significant adverse impacts on availability of mineral resources nor would future mineral resource extraction create potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment or on future development. Avoiding adverse impacts would be achieved by adhering to these policies, reviewing all development proposals adjacent to MRZ-2 designated land or mining activity to safeguard against incompatible land uses, providing buffer zones between urban development and mining activity, and requiring that development to adhere to state mining policies and regulations.

Plan to Plan Analysis

Both the existing and proposed General Plans contain policies intended to minimize impacts to the availability of mineral resources. Impacts would be similar under both Plans.

Impact 3.10-2 **There will potentially be a significant impact to a loss of availability of locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan.**

Proximity of housing units to extraction sites would require the determination of a transition area and buffer zones from the proposed mining area to the housing area (**Figure 3.10-2, Residential Land Uses/Mineral Resources Overlay**). Future development would be reviewed to ascertain project-specific impacts on mineral resources and to meet **Goal CO 1** and **Objective CO 1.3**. **Policy CO 2.3.1** serves to help reserve valuable mineral and aggregate resources by depicting their location within the OVOV Planning Area. **Policy 2.3.2** will ensure that the City considers appropriate buffers near mineral resource areas that are planned for extraction to provide land use compatibility and prevent the encroachment of incompatible land uses. Land Use **Policy 7.7.1** also requires maintenance of a suitable distance and/or buffering to separate aggregate mining and processing activities from nearby residential uses and other uses with sensitive receptors to noise and airborne emissions. Within the City's Planning Area the MRZ-2 areas occur within the 100-year flood plain of the Santa Clara River.



SOURCE: City of Santa Clarita, County of Los Angeles, Valleywide General Plan - March 2009

FIGURE 3.10-2

Residential Land Uses / Mineral Land Uses Overlay

Management of mineral resources will help protect and guide the use of mineral deposits within the City's Planning Area. Management strategies, contained in the discussed General Plan's goals, objectives, and policies, are directed towards mineral resources and their conservation and extraction. Implementation of the policies (CO 1.3.3, CO 2.3.3, and CO 2.3.4) would meet objective CO 2.3 and would reduce or eliminate adverse impacts caused by mineral extraction. Ancillary structures or uses that assist in the extraction, processing, or preservation of minerals may be permitted. Actual building or structure size, siting, and design will be determined on a project-by-project basis (Goal LU 7).

Potential impacts on mineral resources would be less than significant impact because the policies within the proposed General Plan state to identify, preserve from encroachment, conserve, and maintain the significant MRZ-2 lands.

Proposed General Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Objective CO 1.3: Conserve and make more efficient use of non-renewable resource systems, such as fossil fuels, minerals, and materials.

Policy CO 2.3.2: Consider appropriate buffers near mineral resource areas that are planned for extraction, to provide for land use compatibility and prevent the encroachment of incompatible land uses.

Goal LU 7: Environmentally responsible development through site planning, building design, waste reduction, and responsible stewardship of resources.

Policy LU 7.7.1: Maintain a suitable distance and/or provide buffering to separate aggregate mining and processing activities from nearby residential uses and other uses with sensitive receptors to noise and airborne emissions.

Effectiveness of the Proposed General Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Potential adverse impacts on mineral resources would be less than significant because the goals, objectives, and policies within the proposed General Plan state to identify preserve from encroachment, conserve, and maintain the significant MRZ-2 lands. Implementation of the proposed General Plan policies related to mineral resources ensure that future development in the City would not have any significant adverse impacts on mineral resources nor would future limited reasonable mineral resource extraction have any significant adverse impacts on future development.

Plan to Plan Analysis

Both the existing and proposed General Plans contain policies intended to minimize impacts lands designated as mineral resources. Impacts would be similar under both Plans.

MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

No mitigation measures are required for mineral resources because implementation of the City's General Plan policies would limit potentially significant impacts on mineral resources to a less than significant level. No mitigation measures would be required because the General Plan's policies related to mineral resources would ensure that future development in the City's Planning Area follow the codes and regulations set. These goals, objectives, and policies would ensure that the future potential significant impacts on mineral resources—through the restricted development in land designated as MRZ-2, review of future projects on a case-by-case basis to safeguard against incompatible land uses, and provision of buffer zones between urban development and mining activity—would be less than significant.

SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT WITH MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

Impacts on mineral resources would be less than significant and no mitigation measures are required.