8.0 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 15126.2(c) of the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines* states that use of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of a proposed project may be irreversible if a large commitment of these resources makes their removal, indirect removal, or non-use thereafter unlikely. This section of the environmental impact report (EIR) evaluates whether the proposed project would result in the irretrievable commitment of resources or cause irreversible changes in the environment. Also, in accordance with Section 15126.2 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, this section identifies any irreversible damage that could result from environmental accidents associated with the proposed General Plan. The following resource areas were found to have a significant and irreversible environmental change: the depletion of nonrenewable resources, change in the visual character of the region, and a small increase in local and regional vehicular traffic and the resultant increase in air pollutant emissions and noise generated by this traffic.

IRREVERSIBLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

Buildout of the proposed General Plan would contribute to the incremental depletion of resources, including renewable and nonrenewable resources. Resources such as lumber and other forest/agricultural products, as well as water, are generally considered renewable resources. Such resources would be replenished over the lifetime of the proposed General Plan. For example, lumber supplies are increased as seedlings mature into trees, while water supplies are replenished as water is redistributed through the action of the hydrologic cycle. As such, the implementation of the General Plan would not result in the irreversible commitment of renewable resources. Nevertheless, there would be an incremental increase in the demand for these resources over the life of the proposed General Plan.

Nonrenewable resources, such as natural gas, petroleum products, asphalt, petrochemical construction materials, steel and other metals, and sand and gravel, are considered to be commodities, which are available in a finite supply. The processes that created these resources occur over a long period. Therefore, the replacement of these resources would not occur over the life of the General Plan buildout. To varying degrees, the aforementioned materials are all readily available and some materials, such as asphalt or sand and gravel, are abundant. Other commodities such as metals, natural gas, and petroleum products are also readily available but are finite in supply given the length of time required by the natural process to create them.

The demand for all such resources, both renewable and nonrenewable, is expected to increase regardless of whether the proposed General Plan is implemented. According to the Southern California Association of Government's *Regional Growth Forecast 2005–2035,* the population of the City of Santa Clarita would increase from 167,185 to 239,923 over the 30-year period between 2005 and 2035, or by about 44 percent. This increase in population will directly result in the need for more retail and commercial facilities in order to provide the needed services associated with this growth. If not consumed by future projects, these resources would likely be committed to other residential, commercial, public service, or industrial projects in the region intended to meet this anticipated growth. Furthermore, the investment of resources in the future projects would be typical of the level of investment normally required for retail and commercial uses of this scale. Provided that all standard building codes, including energy conservation standards, are followed, no wasteful use of energy or construction resources is anticipated.

IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Irreversible long-term environmental changes associated with the proposed General Plan would include a change in the visual character of the region, as a result of the conversion of undeveloped land to primarily residential and commercial land uses. Additional irreversible environmental changes would include a small increase in local and regional vehicular traffic, a resultant increase in air pollutant emissions, and noise generated by traffic and future development among other impacts. However, goals, objectives, and policies have been incorporated into the proposed General Plan and mitigation measures are proposed in this EIR that would minimize or avoid potential significant effects of the environmental changes associated with the development of the City's Planning Area to the greatest degree feasible. The loss of Important Farmlands to urban-based land use would remain a significant and unavoidable impact.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE FROM ACCIDENTS

The City's Planning Area is located within a seismically active region and would be exposed to ground shaking during a seismic event. Conformance with the regulatory provisions of the City of Santa Clarita and the Uniform Building Code criteria pertaining to construction standards would minimize damage to the extent feasible in the event of such an occurrence.