4.19 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

1. SUMMARY

Prior to 1994, the 185-acre project site periodically was utilized for agricultural purposes, and portions of the site likely were irrigated depending on the crop. However, for the last 15 years (since 1994), the project site has not been irrigated. According to the California Department of Conservation (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), the project site is currently designated as Other Land, and is not designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not convert any land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural uses.

The project site is currently within the unincorporated area of the County of Los Angeles, adjacent to the City of Santa Clarita boundaries. The project site's current zoning, under the County of Los Angeles General Plan as M-1.5, A-1-1, R-A-8,000, and A-1-10,000, allows some light agricultural activities to take place on the project site. However, the project site is not currently utilized for active agriculture uses, nor has it been used for such in the recent past. Additionally, prior to implementation of the proposed project, the project site would be annexed into the City of Santa Clarita and zoned for Specific Plan uses, including residential and commercial land uses. Additionally, the proposed project is not part of any Williamson Act contract lands. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

With respect to forest resources, development of the project site would not conflict with forestland or timberland zoning. Presently, the project site is zoned for industrial and light agricultural uses; further, the project site has never been zoned as forestland. Therefore, development of the project site would not require a zone change from an existing forestland/timberland zone to a non-forestland/timberland zone, and there would be no related impacts.

The project site contains approximately 3.86 acres (2.1 percent of the 185-acre project site) of native trees; specifically, the site contains 2.83 acres of coast live oak and 1.03 acres of cottonwood trees, which are considered "Forestland," as defined by Public Resource Code section 12220(g). Of the 3.86 acres of on-site native trees, 0.81 acre would be permanently disturbed (i.e., removed) by the project; the remaining 3.05 acres would not be impacted by the project. The proposed project would be required to mitigate the removal of oak trees through the planting of oak trees within the project site, resulting in an increase in on-site oak trees. As such, the proposed project would not result in the permanent loss or conversion of forest land.

The project site is surrounded on its western, southern, and eastern boundaries by urbanized land, and the northern boundary is adjacent to State Route 14 (SR-14) and, beyond that, more urbanized land uses. Accordingly, there are no agricultural land uses or forestland uses adjacent to or near the proposed project that could be converted to nonagricultural land or non-forestland uses if the proposed project were implemented.

2. INTRODUCTION

a. Farmland Classifications

There are two systems used by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to determine a soil's agricultural productivity: (1) the Soil Capability Classification System; and (2) Storie Index Rating System. The "prime" soil classifications of both systems indicate the absence of soil limitations that, if present, would require the application of management techniques (e.g., drainage, leveling, special fertilizing practices) to enhance production.

(1) Soil Capability Classification System

The Soil Capability Classification System takes into consideration soil limitations, the risk of damage when the soils are used, and the way in which soils respond to treatment. Capability classes range from Class I soils, which have few limitations for agriculture, to Class VIII soils, which are unsuitable for agriculture. Generally, as the ratings of the capability classification system increase, the yields and profits are more difficult to obtain. A general description of soil classification, as defined by the NRCS, is provided in **Table 4.19-1, Soil Capability Classification System**.

Table 4.19-1
Soil Capability Classification System

Class	Definition
I	The soil has few limitations that restrict its use.
II	The soil has moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require special conservation practices.
III	The soil has severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require conservation practices, or both.
IV	The soil has very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require very careful management, or both.
V	The soil is not likely to erode but has other limitations that are impractical to remove; therefore, the soil's use largely is limited to pasture, range, woodland, or wildlife habitat.
VI	The soil has severe limitations that make it generally unsuited to cultivation and limit its use largely to pasture, range, woodland, or wildlife habitat.
VII	The soil has very severe limitations that make it unsuited to cultivation and restrict its use largely to pasture, range, woodland, or wildlife habitat.
VIII	The soil and landform have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plant production and restrict their use to recreation, wildlife habitat, water supply, or to aesthetic purposes.

Source: USDA Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey of Antelope Valley Area (January 1970).

(2) Storie Index Rating System

The Storie Index Rating System ranks soil characteristics according to their suitability for agriculture from Grade 1 soils (80 to 100 rating), which have few or no limitations for agricultural production, to Grade 6 soils (less than 10), which are not suitable for agriculture. Under this system, soils deemed less than prime can function as prime soils when limitations such as poor drainage, slopes, or soil nutrient deficiencies are partially or entirely removed. The six grades, ranges in index rating, and definition of the grades, as defined by the NRCS, are provided below in **Table 4.19-2, Storie Index Rating System**.

Table 4.19-2
Storie Index Rating System

Grade	Index Rating	Definition
1 – Excellent	80 through 100	The soil is well-suited for an intensive use for growing irrigated crops that are climatically suited to the region.
2 – Good	60 through 79	The soil is good agricultural soil, although it may not be so desirable as Grade 1 because of moderately coarse, coarse, or gravelly surface soil texture; somewhat less permeable subsoil; lower plant available water holding capacity, fair fertility; less well drained conditions, or slight to moderate flood hazards, all acting separately or in combination.
3 – Fair	40 through 59	The soil is only fairly well-suited to general agricultural use and is limited in its use because of moderate slopes; moderate soil depths; less permeable subsoil; fine, moderately fine or gravelly surface soil textures; poor drainage; moderate flood hazards; or fair to poor fertility levels, all acting alone or in combination.
4 – Poor	20 through 39	The soils is poorly suited to generally agricultural use and is severely limited in its agricultural potential because of shallow soil depths; less permeable subsoil; steeper slope; more clayey or gravelly surface soil textures than Grade 3 soils, as well as poor drainage; greater flood hazards; hummocky microrelief; salinity; or fair to poor fertility levels, all acting alone or in combination.
5 – Very Poor	10 through 19	The soil is very poorly suited for agriculture, seldom cultivated and more commonly used for range, pasture, or woodland.
6 – Nonagricultural	Less than 10	The soil is not suited for agriculture at all due to very severe to extreme physical limitations, or because of urbanization.

Source: USDA Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey of Antelope Valley Area (January 1970).

b. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The FMMP was established in 1982 to continue the Important Farmland mapping efforts begun in 1975 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service (USDA-SCS), now known as the NRCS. The intent of the USDA-SCS was to produce agricultural resource maps based on soil quality and land use

across the nation. As part of the nationwide agricultural land use mapping effort, the USDA-SCS developed a series of definitions known as Land Inventory and Monitoring (LIM) criteria. The LIM criteria classified the land's suitability for agricultural production; the suitability criteria addressed both the physical and chemical characteristics of soils and the actual land use. Important Farmland maps are derived from the USDA-SCS soil survey maps using the LIM criteria.

Since 1980, the State of California has assisted in the completion of agricultural resources mapping. The FMMP was created within the DOC to carry on the mapping activity on a continuing basis, and with a greater level of detail through the modification of the LIM criteria for California-specific use. The California-specific LIM criteria use the Soil Capability Classification and Storie Index Rating Systems, but also consider other physical conditions, such as water supply, soil temperature range, depth of groundwater, flooding potential, rock fragment content, and rooting depth.

Important Farmland maps for California are compiled using the modified LIM criteria (as described above) and current land use information. The minimum mapping unit is 10 acres, unless otherwise specified. Units of land smaller than 10 acres are incorporated into the surrounding classification. The Important Farmland maps identify five agriculture-related categories: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land. Each is summarized below, based on *A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program* (1998), prepared by the DOC. Additionally, three other categories are described below that are not agriculturally related, but are mapped by the FMMP, including Urban and Built-up Land, Other Land, and Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use.

(1) Prime Farmland

Prime Farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. This type of farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained, high yields of crops when treated and managed according to current farming methods. Prime Farmland must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date (mapping date 2004–2006), thus prior to the 1998-to-2000 update cycle. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

Prime Farmland must meet **all** of the following criteria:

a. Water

The soils have xeric, ustic, or aridic (torric) moisture regimes in which the available water capacity is at least 4.0 inches (10 cm) per 40 to 60 inches (1.02 to 1.52 meters) of soil, and a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality. A dependable water supply is one which is available for the production of the commonly grown crops in 8 out of 10 years.

b. Soil Temperature Range

The soils have a temperature regime that is frigid, mesic, thermic, or hyperthermic (pergelic and cryic regimes are excluded). These are soils that, at a depth of 20 inches (50.8 cm), have a mean annual temperature higher than 32 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition, the mean summer temperature at this depth in soils with an O horizon is higher than 47 degrees Fahrenheit; in soils that have no O horizon, the mean summer temperature is higher than 59 degrees Fahrenheit.

c. Acid-Alkali Balance

The soils have a pH between 4.5 and 8.4 in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches.

d. Water Table

The soils have no water table or have a water table that is maintained at a sufficient depth during the cropping season to allow cultivated crops common to the area to be grown.

e. Soil Sodium Content

The soils can be managed so that, in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches and during part of each year, the conductivity of the saturation extract is less than 4 mmhos/cm and the exchangeable sodium percentage is less than 15.

f. Flooding

Flooding of the soil (uncontrolled runoff from natural precipitation) during the growing season occurs infrequently, taking place less often than once every two years.

g. Erodibility

The product of K (erodibility factor) multiplied by the percent of slope is less than 2.0.

h. Permeability

The soils have a permeability rate of at least 0.06 inch per hour in the upper 20 inches, and the mean annual soil temperature at a depth of 20 inches is less than 59 degrees Fahrenheit. The permeability rate is not a limiting factor if the mean annual soil temperature is 59 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.

i. Rock Fragment Content

Less than 10 percent of the upper 6 inches in these soils consists of rock fragments coarser than 3 inches.

j. Rooting Depth

The soils have a minimum rooting depth of 40 inches.

(2) Farmland of Statewide Importance

Farmland of Statewide Importance is land with a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. This type of farmland must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date of 2004 to 2006 (i.e., prior to 1998). It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

Farmland of Statewide Importance must meet **all** the following criteria:

a. Water

The soils have xeric, ustic, or aridic moisture regimes in which the available water capacity is at least 3.5 inches within a depth of 60 inches of soil, or within the root zone if it is less than 60 inches deep. This type of farmland also must have a developed irrigation supply that is dependable and of adequate quality. A dependable water supply is one which is available for the production of the commonly grown crops in 8 out of 10 years.

b. Soil Temperature Range

The soils have a temperature regime that is frigid, mesic, thermal, or hyperthermic. These are soils that, at a depth of 20 inches, have a mean annual temperature higher than 32 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition, the mean summer temperature at this depth in soils with an O horizon is higher than 47 degrees Fahrenheit; in soils that have no O horizon, the mean summer temperature is higher than 59 degrees Fahrenheit.

c. Acid-Alkali Balance

The soils have a pH between 4.5 and 9.0 in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches or in the root zone, if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep.

d. Water Table

The soils have no water table or have a water table that is maintained at a sufficient depth during the cropping season to allow cultivated crops common to the area to be grown.

e. Soil Sodium Content

The soils can be managed so that, in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches or in the root zone if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep, and during part of each year, the conductivity of the saturation extract is less than 16 mmhos/cm and the exchangeable sodium percentage is less than 25.

f. Flooding

Flooding of the soil during the growing season occurs infrequently, taking place less often than once every two years.

g. Erodibility

   The product K (erodibility factor) multiplied by the percent of slope is less than 3.0.

h. Rockland Fragment Content

   Less than 10 percent of the upper 6 inches in these soils consists of rock fragments coarser than 3 inches.

Farmland of Statewide Importance does not have any restrictions regarding permeability or rooting depth.

(3) Unique Farmland

Unique Farmland is land that has been used for the production of specific, high economic value crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the 2004–2006 mapping date (i.e., prior to 1998–2000 mapping date). This type of farmland has the special combination of soils quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. Examples of such crops may include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

Characteristics of Unique Farmland include:

a. use for high value crops;

b. a moisture supply, the source of which is stored moisture, precipitation or a developed irrigation system, which is adequate for the specific crop; and

c. favorable factors of soil quality, growing season, temperature, humidity, air drainage, elevation, exposure, or other conditions, such as nearness to market, that favor growth of a specific food or fiber crop.

As noted above, in order for land to be classified as Unique Farmland, the crop grown on the land must have qualified for the list at some time during the two update cycles prior to the 2004–2006 mapping date. High-value crops are listed in *California Agriculture*, an annual report of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Unique Farmland does not include abandoned orchards or vineyards, dryland grains, and extremely low yielding crops, such as irrigated pasture, as determined in consultation with the County Cooperative Extension Director and Agricultural Commissioner.

(4) Farmland of Local Importance

Farmland of Local Importance either is currently producing crops, has the capability to produce crops, or is used for the production of confined livestock. This land may include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

In a few counties, the local advisory committee has elected to additionally define area of Local Potential (LP) farmland. This land includes soils that qualify for classification as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, but generally are not cultivated or irrigated. For reporting purposes, Local Potential and Farmland of Local Importance are combined in the acreage tables, but are shown separately on the Important Farmland maps.

Farmland of Local Importance initially is identified by a local advisory committee (LAC) convened in each county by the FMMP, in cooperation with the NRCS and the county board of supervisors.[1] The FMMP presents each draft map prepared by the LAC to the board of supervisors, which then is provided with a 90-day review period. (An extension may be granted upon request.) The board of supervisors may approve or disapprove the Farmland of Local Importance mapping designations, and the FMMP will accept the recommendations of the board of supervisors if they are consistent with the general program guidelines. Any revision to the board of supervisors' initial action on the Farmland of Local Importance designations requires a 30-day written notice to FMMP and members of the LAC. This process may require reconvening of the LAC.

Farmland of Local Importance in Los Angeles County includes lands that do not qualify as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland, but: (i) currently are used for irrigated crops, pasture or non-irrigated crops; (ii) satisfy the Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance criteria and have been improved for irrigation, but are now idle; or (iii) currently support confined livestock, poultry operations, and/or aquaculture.[2]

(5) Grazing Land

Grazing Land is defined in Government Code section 65570, subdivision (b)(3), as:

> *land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock.*

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1 If no action is initiated by the county to identify or adopt a Farmland of Local Importance definition within one year of contact by the FMMP, the county will be deemed to have no adopted definition for Farmland of Local Importance.

2 California Department of Conservation, *A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program* (1994).

The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres. Grazing land does not include land previously designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance, or land that is heavily brushed, timbered or excessively steep, or rocky lands that restrict the access and movement of livestock.

The FMMP convenes a grazing land advisory committee in each county to assist in the identification of grazing lands. The committees consist of members of the local livestock ranching community, livestock ranching organizations, and the U.C. Cooperative Extension livestock advisor. The FMMP works with the president of the local Cattleman's Association and the U.C. Cooperative Extension livestock advisor in selecting members of these committees.

(6) Urban and Built-Up Land

Urban and Built-up Land is used for residential,[3] industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administrative purposes, railroad yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment plants, water control structures, and other development purposes. Highways, railroads, and other transportation facilities are mapped as part of Urban and Built-Up Land if they are a part of the surrounding urban areas.

Urban and Built-Up Land must contain man-made structures or buildings under construction, and the infrastructure required for development (e.g., paved roads, sewers, water, electricity, drainage, or flood control facilities). Parking lots, storage and distribution facilities, and industrial uses, such as large parking operations for agricultural produce, generally will be mapped as Urban and Built-Up Land even though they may be associated with agriculture.

Urban and Built-Up Land does not include strip mines, borrow pits, gravel pits, farmsteads, ranch headquarters, commercial feedlots, greenhouses, poultry facilities, or road systems for freeway interchanges outside of areas classified as Urban and Built-Up Land.

Within areas classified as Urban and Built-Up Land, vacant and nonagricultural land that is surrounded on all sides by urban development and is less than 40 acres in size is mapped as Urban and Built-Up Land. Vacant and nonagricultural land larger than 40 acres in size is mapped as Other Land.

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3 The building density for residential use must be at least 1 structure per 1.5 acres (or approximately 6 structures per 10 acres).

(7) Other Land

Other Land is that which is not included in any of the other mapping categories. The following types of land are generally designated as Other Land:

a. Rural development with a building density of less than 1 structure per 1.5 acres, but with at least 1 structure per 10 acres

b. Brush, timber, wetlands, and other lands not suitable for livestock grazing

c. Government lands not available for agricultural use

d. Road systems for freeway interchanges outside of Urban and Built-Up Land areas

e. Vacant and nonagricultural land larger than 40 acres in size and surrounded on all side by urban development

f. Confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities, unless accounted for by the county's Farmland of Local Importance definition

g. Strip mines, borrow pits, gravel pits, and ranch headquarters, or water bodies smaller than 40 acres

h. A variety of other rural land uses

(8) Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use

Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use is land that is permanently committed by local elected officials to nonagricultural development by virtue of decisions that cannot be reversed simply by a majority vote of a city council or county board of supervisors. County boards of supervisors and city councils have the final authority to designate lands in this category, and the FMMP works with local planning staff to obtain this information.

Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use is mapped when the respective local government notifies the FMMP that the land meets certain criteria, identified below, and submits 1:24,000 maps identifying the area and showing its boundaries. (The information provided is subject to verification by FMMP and, in some cases, local government must also provide FMMP with documentation of the permanent commitment.) The areas designated as Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use are shown on an overlay to Important Farmland maps. The current land use will be indicated on the base map, with the overlay indicating the areas that are designated as Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use.

Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use must be designated in an adopted, local general plan for future nonagricultural development. The resulting development must meet the requirements of Urban and Built-Up Land or the rural development density criteria of Other Land.

Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use also must meet the requirements of either (a) or (b) below:

a. The land must have received one of the following final discretionary approvals:

    1. Tentative subdivision map (approved per the Subdivision Map Act);

    2. Tentative or final parcel map (approved per the Subdivision Map Act);

    3. Recorded development agreement (approved per Government Code section 65864);

    4. Other decisions by a local government that are analogous to items number 1 through 3 above and exhibit an element of permanence. Zoning by itself does not qualify as a permanent commitment.

b. The land must be the subject of one of the following final fiscal commitments to finance the capital improvements specifically required for future development of the land in question:

    1. Recorded Resolution of Intent to form a district and levy an assessment;

    2. Payment of assessment;

    3. Sale of bonds;

    4. Binding contract, secured by bonds, guaranteeing installation of infrastructure;

    5. Other fiscal commitments that are analogous to items number 1 through 4 above and exhibit an element of permanence.

c. Contribution of Agriculture to the Los Angeles County Economy

Los Angeles County ranked 28th in agricultural production out of the 58 counties in the state, with gross revenues from the sales of agricultural commodities of $270,915,000 in 2006.[4] The leading crops included trees and shrubs, bedding plants, root vegetables, orchard fruit and alfalfa hay.

Agricultural land conversion has a long history in Los Angeles County; the extent of this conversion is reflected in **Table 4.19-3, Los Angeles County Agricultural Production 1965 through 2007**. One of the basic underlying premises of agricultural conversion is that the proximity of agricultural land to urban uses increases the value of the agricultural land either directly through formal purchase offers, or indirectly through recent sales in the vicinity and the extension of utilities and other urban infrastructure into productive agricultural areas.

As shown in **Table 4.19-3,** the amount of acreage in production for fruit and nut trees, vegetable crops, cut flowers, and field crops decreased over the period extending from 1965 to 2007. Of the total acreage

4 *California Agricultural Resource Directory 2007, Agricultural Statistical Review, County Rank, Total Value of Production and Leading Commodities* (2006), 29.

under crop production in the County in 2007, approximately 47.7 percent was cultivated for field crops (including alfalfa, grain, barley, and miscellaneous field crops), which contributed to only 4.9 percent of the County's total crop revenues of $253,368,000 for that year. Conversely, 12.2 percent of the land was used to cultivate nursery products, which made up 68.5 percent of the total 2007 crop revenues.

Table 4.19-3
Los Angeles County Agricultural Production 1965 through 2007

	Acreage					
Crop	**1965**	**1970**	**1980**	**1993**	**2007**	**1965–07 % Change**
Fruit and Nut Trees	14,039	7,829	3,032	1,939	1,906	-86.4%
Vegetable Crops	12,380	6,592	6,446	2,245	6,581	-46.8%
Nursery Products	1,925	1,972	2,280	2,248	2,608	-35.5%
Cut Flowers	565	656	490	289	70	-87.6%
Field Crops	79,103	57,890	42,298	9,905	10,201	-87.1%
Total Crop Production	**108,012**	**74,939**	**54,546**	**16,626**	**21,366**	**-80.2%**
Rangeland	200,000	210,000	242,250	230,229	42,200	-78.9%

Source: County of Los Angeles Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures, 1965, 1970, 1980, 1993, 2007 Crop Report, http://acwm.co.la.ca.us/scripts/publications.htm (last accessed March 27, 2009).

d. Plans, Policies, and Agreements for Agricultural Land

(1) Williamson Act Contracted Lands

Agricultural activities in the State of California can be protected through a variety of legislative means, including the California Land Conservation Act and local Right-To-Farm Ordinances and Greenbelt Agreements. The California Land Conservation Act (CLA), also known as the Williamson Act, was adopted in 1965 in order to encourage the preservation of the state's agricultural lands and to prevent their premature conversion to urban uses. In order to preserve these uses, the CLA established an agricultural preserve contract procedure by which any county or city within the state taxes landowners at a lower rate, using a scale based on the actual use of the land for agricultural purposes as opposed to its unrestricted market value. In return, the owners guarantee that these properties will remain under agricultural production for a 10-year period. The contract is renewed automatically unless the owner files

a Notice of Non-Renewal. As of January 1, 2007, 15,670,805 million acres of agricultural land was enrolled under Williamson Act Contracts statewide.[5]

Prime Farmland under the Williamson Act includes land that qualifies as Class I and II in the Soil Capability Classification System or land that qualifies for rating 80 to 100 in the Storie Index Rating System.

To date, no Williamson Act contracts have been executed in the County except on Catalina Island, where the majority of the land on the island is currently under Williamson Act Contracts.[6]

(2) Right-To-Farm Ordinances

Right-To-Farm Ordinances have been adopted by several California jurisdictions to protect farmers in established farming areas from legal action that new residents in nearby urban settings may take against nuisances associated with normal, day-to-day farming activities, such as odor, noise, and dust. The City of Santa Clarita does not have a Right-To-Farm Ordinance.

e. Forestland Resources

According to Public Resources Code section 12220(g), a Forestland is defined as "land that can support 10 percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions, and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits." The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), in collaboration with the United States Forest Service (USDA Forest Service), develops Land Cover Maps that depict the different types of land cover that exist within the State of California, which includes the following classifications: conifer-forest; conifer-woodland; hardwood-woodland; hardwood-forest; shrub; herbaceous; wetland; desert-shrub, desert-woodland; agriculture; urban, barren/other; water; and, not mapped. According to the CalFire/USDA Forest Service Land Cover Maps, the project site is classified as urban land.[7]

In order to determine whether a project site should be classified as forestland, surveys must be completed to determine if the site currently contains native trees (including hardwoods) within its boundaries. Trees

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5 California Department of Conservation, *The California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act 2008 Status Report* (2008), 26.

6 California Department of Conservation, *Williamson Act Parcels Santa Catalina Islands,* ftp://ftp.consrv.ca.gov/pub /dlrp/wa/Map%20and%20PDF/Los%20Angeles/la_wa_2006.pdf, Accessed October 6, 2009 and California Department of Conservation, *The California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act 2008 Status Report* (2008), 26.

7 California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Fire and Resources Assessment Program, Land Cover Map, http://www.frap.fire.ca.gov/data/frapgismaps/download.asp. Accessed May 28, 2010.

that are native to the Vista Canyon project site and the area surrounding the project site include: southern California black walnut; big-leaf maple; white alder; western sycamore; big-cone spruce; canyon oak; coast live oak; valley oak; holly-leaf cherry; Fremont cottonwood; red willow; arroyo willow; Gooding's willow and, California ash.

The Vista Canyon project site consists of approximately 185 acres of land that is mostly vacant, and contains vegetated and disturbed areas. The most recent plant survey of the project site was conducted in March through May of 2009. Upon completion of the plant surveys, it was determined that there are only five types of native trees that currently exist on the project site: coast live oak, Fremont's cottonwood, Gooding's willow, red willow and arroyo willow. The project site contains 2.83 acres containing coast live oak and 1.03 acres containing Fremont cottonwood-willow riparian forest. The Fremont cottonwood-willow riparian forest consists of cottonwood and the three willow species growing intermixed as subdominant trees. In total, forest resources are present on 3.86 acres of the project site.

3. EXISTING CONDITIONS

a. Los Angeles County

Land owned by The Newhall Land and Farming Company historically has comprised the majority of cultivated farmland in the Santa Clarita Valley. Approximately 2,773 acres of existing agricultural uses are located within the County of Los Angeles portion of the Santa Clarita Valley.[8] The following are current acres of the agricultural uses that are located within the Santa Clarita Valley's Los Angeles County land portions:[9]

- 6 acres of Dairy, Livestock and Associated Facilities
- 547 acres of Horse Ranches
- 1,663 acres of Irrigated Cropland and Improved Pasture
- 275 acres of Non-Irrigated Cropland and Improved Pasture
- 2 acres of Nurseries
- 65 acres of Orchards and Vineyards
- 212 acres of Other Agriculture
- 2 acres of Poultry Operations

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8 City of Santa Clarita, information gathered from Caitlin Morais, December 4, 2008.

9 City of Santa Clarita, information gathered from Caitlin Morais, December 4, 2008.

In the past, Irrigated Cropland has been predominant in the Santa Clarita Valley. Irrigated Cropland was cultivated on 3,224 acres in 1965, as compared to 1,663 acres in 2009. This represents a 48.4 percent decrease in Irrigated Cropland within the Santa Clarita Valley over a 44-year period. This figure reflects a larger and continuing trend in Los Angeles County to convert cultivated farmland to urban land uses to accommodate population growth. This trend is expected to continue and it is demonstrated by the fact that much, if not all, of the remaining agricultural land east of Interstate 5 (I-5) has been zoned for urban land uses by the City of Santa Clarita and Los Angeles County.

b. Project Site

(1) Historic Agricultural Production

Col. Thomas Mitchell settled the project site in 1860 and started a cattle ranch.[10] Eventually Mitchell increased his land holdings to nearly a thousand acres, which included portions of the proposed project site, and focused on raising cattle, producing honey, and farming.[11] Following Mitchell's death in 1907, the ranch continued to be operated by his descendants, including his son-in-law, Walter Murphy. Records do not indicate that the project site was used for agricultural production; instead, the site was used mainly as a homestead and ranch headquarters for the Mitchell Ranch property. Since at least 1994, the project site has been vacant, with no signs of agricultural activity.[12]

c. Federal Soil and State Farmland Classifications

Whether a piece of land is farmed or not, the USDA classifies soils on that land for both agricultural and engineering purposes, while the DOC classifies them according to their agricultural value, focusing only on those lands that are farmed. Both of these classification systems, and their applicability to the project site, are discussed below.

(1) USDA Soil Survey Classifications

According to the NRCS, there are a total of 11 different soil types on the project site. **Table 4.19-4**, **Soil Types on the Proposed Project Site,** located below, lists these soils and identifies the agricultural activities for which each soil is most suited (if any) and whether or not the soil meets the criteria for Prime Farmland. **Figure 4.19-1, Soil Types on the Proposed Project Site**, shows the location of soils on

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10 W & S Consultants, *Intensive Phase 1 Archaeological Survey of the Vista Canyon Ranch Study Area, Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California* (September 14, 2008), 14.

11 W & S Consultants, *Intensive Phase 1 Archaeological Survey of the Vista Canyon Ranch Study Area, Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California* (September 14, 2008), 14..

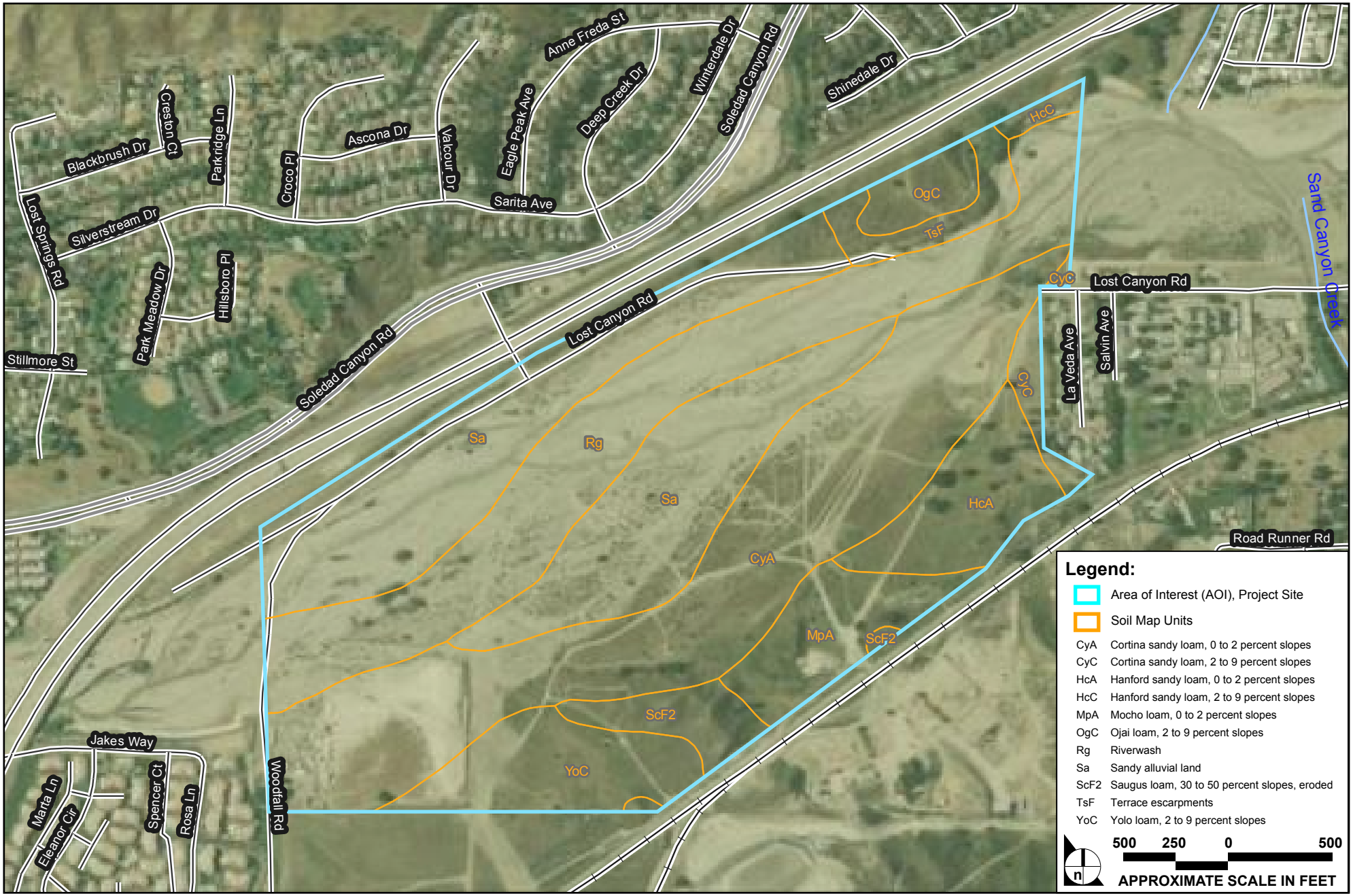
12 Google Earth Imagery, obtained March 27, 2009.

the project site. The proposed project site is currently non-irrigated and has been vacant since at least 1994.

Table 4.19-4
Soil Types on the Proposed Project Site

Soil Unit Symbol	Name of Soil Type	Acres on Project Site	Most Suitable Agricultural Activity for Soil type	Meet Prime Agricultural Criteria?
CyA	Cortina sandy loam (0 to 2 percent slopes)	51.4	Range, Dryland small grains and pasture. Irrigated alfalfa, small grains, pasture, and small areas of onions.	Farmland of Statewide Importance
CyC	Cortina sandy loam (0 to 9 percent slopes)	2.5	Range, Dryland small grains, Irrigated alfalfa, small grains, and pasture.	Farmland of Statewide Importance
HcA	Hanford sandy loam (0 to 2 percent slopes)	10.2	Irrigated crops, dryland grains and pasture, range.	Prime Farmland if Irrigated
HcC	Hanford sandy loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	1.8	Irrigated crops, dryland grains and pasture, range.	Prime Farmland if Irrigated
MpA	Mocho loam (0 to 2 percent slopes)	9.2	Dryland and irrigated crops.	Prime Farmland if Irrigated
OgC	Ojai loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	3.6	Irrigated alfalfa, row crops, range. Sites for homes and industries.	Prime Farmland if Irrigated
Rg	Riverwash	36.0	Wildlife and watershed purposes.	Not Prime Farmland
Sa	Sandy alluvial land	49.5	Grazing, wildlife habitat, and watershed purposes.	Not Prime Farmland
ScF2	Saugus loam (30 to 50 percent slopes, eroded)	5.2	Range, homesites, and subdivisions.	Not Prime Farmland
TsF	Terrace escarpments	4.4	Incidentally for grazing, and cover for wildlife.	Not Prime Farmland
YoC	Yolo loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	11.3	Irrigated crops and range. Uses for homesites rapidly increasing.	Prime Farmland if Irrigated

Source: USDA Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey of Antelope Valley Area (January 1970)



SOURCE: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services, Web Soil Survey 2.1 - December 2008

FIGURE **4.19-1**

Soil Types on the Proposed Project Site

The USDA places soil in capability classes that reflect the soils' suitability for farming under non-irrigated conditions as shown in **Figure 4.19-2, Site Suitability for Farming under Non-Irrigated Conditions.** In addition, **Table 4.19-5, Storie Index Rating for Soils on the Proposed Project Site**, identifies each soil type, its profile, texture, slope, index rating, soil grade, and limitation factors.

Table 4.19-5
Storie Index Rating for Soils on the Proposed Project Site

Soil Type	Profile	Texture	Slope	Other	Index Rating	Soil Grade	Limitation Factor
Cortina sandy loam (0 to 2 percent slopes)	90	95	100	100	86	1	--
Cortina sandy loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	90	95	90	90	69	2	Erosion
Hanford sandy loam (0 to 2 percent slopes)	100	95	100	100	95	1	--
Hanford sandy loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	100	95	90	95	81	1	Erosion
Mocho loam (0 to 2 percent slopes	100	100	100	100	100	1	--
Ojai loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	70	100	90	90	57	3	Erosion
Riverwash	--	--	--	--	<5	6	--
Sandy alluvial land	--	--	--	--	<10	6	--
Saugus loam (30 to 50 percent slopes, eroded)	75	100	40	70	21	4	Erosion
Terrace escarpments	--	--	--	--	<5	6	--
Yolo loam (2 to 9 percent slopes)	100	100	90	95	86	1	Erosion

Source: USDA Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey of Antelope Valley Area (January 1970).

(2) State of California Department of Conservation Classifications

Using the NRCS's soil classifications, the DOC and the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts translate soil survey data into Important Farmland maps for the state's agricultural counties. The purpose of the DOC's FMMP, which updates its maps biannually, is to provide land use conversion information for decision makers to use in their planning for the present and future of California's agricultural land resources. These classifications focus only on those lands that have been recently farmed. Land not recently farmed is not shown on the Important Farmland maps.

The conversion of Important Farmlands for Los Angeles County from 2004 to 2006 is shown in **Table 4.19-6, Conversion of Important Farmland – Los Angeles County (2004 to 2006)**. In Los Angeles County, there has been a decrease in acreage of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance, and an increase in acreage of Farmland of Local Importance between 2004 and 2006.

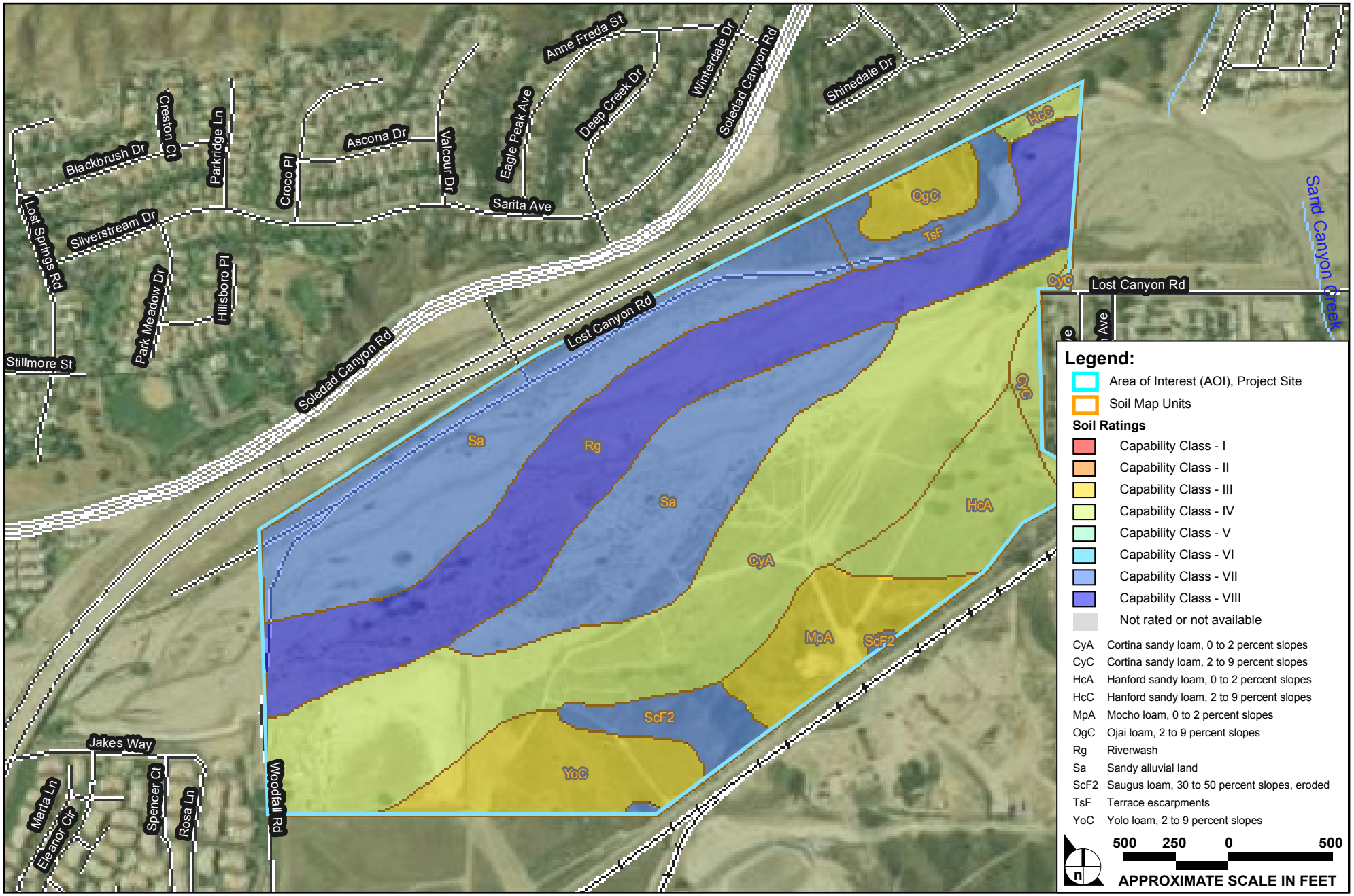
Table 4.19-6
Conversion of Important Farmland – Los Angeles County (2004 to 2006)

Category	Acreage 2004	Acreage 2006	% Change
Prime Farmland	33,218	32,610	-1.8 %
Farmland of Statewide Importance	1,029	1,024	-0.5%
Unique Farmland	1,119	1,024	-8.5%
Farmland of Local Importance	8,684	8,973	+3.2 %
Total Agricultural Land	44,050	43,631	**-0.95%**

Source: California Department of Conservation, Department of Land Resource Protection, Farm Land Management Program, 2004-2006 Agricultural Land Conversion Report, Table A-42, http://www.consrv.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/stats_reports/farmland_conv_reports.htm.

As shown on **Figure 4.19-3, DOC Important Farmland Map**, the project site is designated as Other Land because it has not been actively utilized for farming activities. The Other Land designation is land not included in any other mapping category (e.g., Prime Farmland; Farmland of Statewide Importance; Unique Farmland; Farmland of Local Importance), as described above.

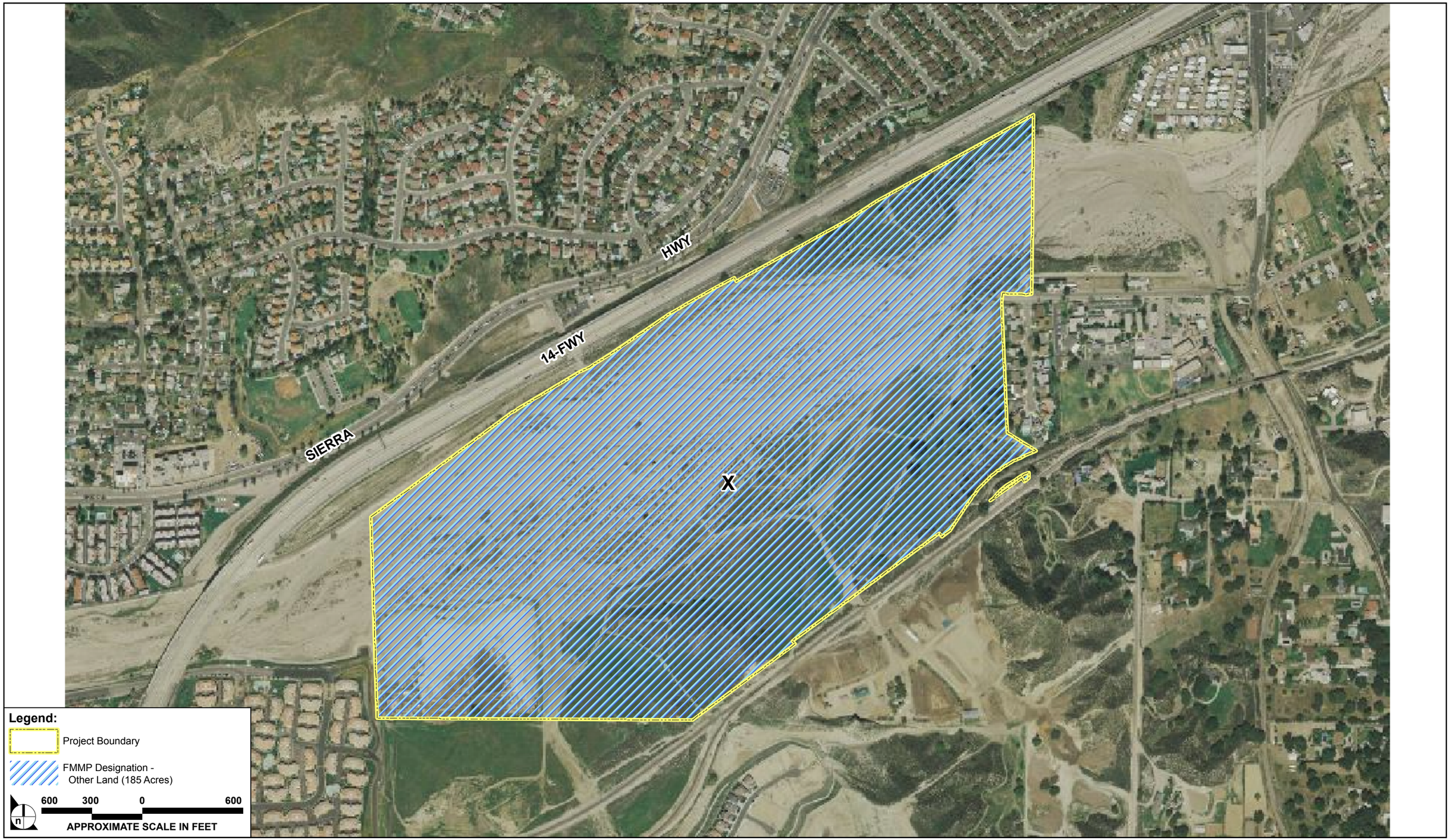
For at least the past 15 years, the project site has been non-irrigated. The Other Land designation given to the site by the DOC is appropriate because the project site has not been used for agricultural activities for at least the past 15 years, is greater than 40 acres in size, and is surrounded by urbanized land uses.



SOURCE: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services, Web Soil Survey 2.1 - December 2008

FIGURE **4.19-2**

Site Suitability for Farming under Non-Irrigated Conditions



SOURCE: Google Earth - 2009; California Department of Conservation - 2008

FIGURE **4.19-3**

DOC Important Farmland Map

4. PROJECT IMPACTS

a. Significance Threshold Criteria

According to Appendix G of the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines*, a project would have a significant impact on agricultural or forest resources if a project would:

- 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 nonagricultural use;
- conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;
- conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forestland (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526) or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g));
- result in the loss of forestland or conversion of forestland to non-forest use; or
- involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forestland to non-forest use.

b. Conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance to Nonagricultural Uses

This significance threshold states that a significant impact would occur if the proposed project would convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural land uses. The proposed project consists of approximately 185 acres of land that is designated as "Other Land" by the DOC's FMMP.

Further, there currently is no agricultural productivity occurring on the project site, and none has occurred for at least the past 15 years. As previously indicated, the USDA has identified certain soil types that may favor some agricultural activities on the project site. However, the agricultural productivity of this land is constrained by the following factors:

- The project site is bordered by existing urban development uses on all sides and is bisected by the Santa Clara River, such that agricultural activity on the site would be increasingly isolated, fragmented, and may conflict with the surrounding uses.
- The project site is currently non-irrigated.

Such conditions make the land unavailable to agricultural production.

In summary, since the proposed project does not involve the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as designated by the DOC's FMMP, there are no significant impacts.

c. Conflict with Existing Zoning or a Williamson Act Contract

First, the approximately 185-acre project site is located in unincorporated Los Angeles County and is currently zoned as M-1.5 (Light Industrial), A-1-1 (Light Agriculture-One Acre minimum lot sizes), R-A-8,000 (Residential Agriculture – 8,000-square-foot minimum lot size) and A-1-10,000 (Light Agriculture – 10,000 minimum lot sizes), thereby allowing for limited agricultural activity to take place on the project site if feasible. However, prior to implementing any approved entitlements for development of the project site, the land would be annexed into the City of Santa Clarita. The applicant has further proposed to amend the City of Santa Clarita Zoning Map by zoning the project site, once annexed, for Specific Plan uses, including residential and commercial. Approval of the proposed project by the City would ensure consistency with the proposed zoning classifications for the project site. Therefore, there would be no conflicts with existing zoning and impacts would not be significant.

Second, the project site is not a part of a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, impacts would not be significant.

d. Conflict with Existing Zoning for Forestland or Timberland

Although native trees do exist on the Vista Canyon project site, the project site is not zoned for forestland or timberland and is generally surrounded by urban development. Therefore, no significant impacts relating to conflicts with existing zoning for forestland or timberland would result from implementation of the proposed project.

e. Loss or Conversion of Forestland

As described above, Public Resources Code section 12220(g) defines Forestland as "land that can support 10 percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions, and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation and other public benefits."

Most of the Vista Canyon project site is undeveloped, with portions of the site containing naturally occurring vegetation and other portions being disturbed. The most recent plant surveys conducted on the site determined that five types of native trees occur on the Vista Canyon project site, including coast live oak, Fremont's cottonwood, Gooding's willow, red willow and arroyo willow. More specifically, the

project site contains 2.83 acres of coast live oak and 1.03 acres of Fremont cottonwood-willow riparian forest. The Fremont cottonwood-willow riparian forest consists of cottonwood and the three willow species growing intermixed as subdominant trees. In total, 3.86 acres (2.1 percent of the 185-acre project site) of forest resources are present on the project site. It is expected that, due to development of the project site, 0.81 acre containing coast live oak would be disturbed, but that no other on-site forest resources would be disturbed.

As noted above, approximately 0.81 acre (or 0.4 percent of the 185-acre site) would be impacted due to the permanent disturbance (i.e., removal) of certain forest resources, particularly coast live oak. However, consistent with the City's Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance, the proposed project's biological resources analysis (see **Section 4.6**) recommends the incorporation of mitigation that would fully offset potential losses of coast live oaks through replacement and replanting efforts. Furthermore, upon review of the Land Cover Map developed by the USDA Forest Service and CalFire, the Vista Canyon project site is classified as urban land, and is not classified as forestland (which would include conifer-forest, conifer-woodland, hardwood-woodland, and hardwood-forest). Since the project site is not classified as a forestland or timberland by the USDA Forest Service and CalFire, and development of the site would not result in the loss of forestland due to the revegetation efforts that would be undertaken, development of the Vista Canyon project site would result in a less-than-significant impact in regards to the loss or conversion of forestland.

f. Involve Other Changes in the Existing Environment Which, Due to Their Location or Nature, Could Result in Conversion of Farmland to Nonagricultural Use or Forestland to Non-Forestland Use

As discussed above, the project site is generally bordered on all sides by existing or planned urban development; accordingly, neither farmland nor forestland is adjacent to or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not involve other changes in the existing environment that would result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural land uses or forestland to non-forest uses, and impacts would not be significant.

5. MITIGATION MEASURES ALREADY INCORPORATED INTO THE PROJECT

The proposed project has not incorporated any mitigation measures into its design.

6. MITIGATION MEASURES PROPOSED BY THIS EIR

Because the proposed project would not result in potentially significant impacts to agricultural resources, no mitigation measures are required. (*State CEQA Guidelines*, Section 15126.4, subd. (a)(3) ["Mitigation measures are not required for effects which are not found to be significant."].)

7. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Conversion of agricultural land to urban uses has a long history in the Santa Clarita Valley. The amount of irrigated crop acreage farmed within the Santa Clarita Valley has decreased from 3,224 acres in 1965 to 1,663 acres in 2009, which represents a 48.4 percent reduction over that period.

While it is beyond the scope of this analysis to quantify the amount of prime agricultural land that is under pressure to be converted to urban uses in the City of Santa Clarita, and the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, it is highly likely that such cumulative development pressure exists and will continue with or without implementation of the proposed project. Given that implementation of the proposed project would not eliminate any Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as designated by the DOC, the project's contribution to cumulative impacts to agricultural resources in the region is not significant. Moreover, the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses is a policy issue that lies in the hands of the local jurisdiction.

The USDA Forest Service and CalFire identifies Land Cover Changes in the State of California based on the California Land Cover Mapping and Monitoring Program (LCMMP).[13] The LCMMP provides data for four different regions in California, including the Southern Sierra, Northeastern area, South Coast area and North Coast area. The South Coast area (where the Vista Canyon project site is located) covers 19.9 million acres. The area covers some or most of Imperial, Kern, Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. The South Coast area also encompasses four national forests (Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino) and other federal, state and privately owned land.[14]

On a statewide basis, as of 2007, the USDA Forest Service surveyed and classified approximately 33,387,405 acres of forestland in California and approximately 19,335,993 acres of timberland in California.[15] On a regional scale, CalFire, in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service and using the

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13 United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Monitoring Land Cover Changes in California, South Coast Project Area, July 2002, pg. iv.

14 Monitoring Land Cover Changes in California, South Coast Project Area, July 2002, pg. iv.

15 United States Department of Agricultural Forest Service, Forest Inventory Analysis National Program, Forestry Inventory Data Onlines, http://fia.fs.fed.us/tools-data/default.asp. Accessed June 1, 2010.

LCMMP, has mapped and classified approximately 2,200,000 acres of hardwoods in the South Coast area of California.[16]

As discussed above, the development of the Vista Canyon project site would not result in the permanent loss or conversion of forestland resources due to revegetation efforts identified in the biological resources analysis (see **Section 4.6**) for coast live oaks. Therefore, the proposed project would not contribute to a cumulatively considerable impact to forest resources.

8. CUMULATIVE MITIGATION MEASURES

As the proposed project would not result in potentially significant cumulative impacts to agricultural and forest resources, no mitigation measures are required.

9. SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Based on the above analysis, there would be no significant unavoidable impacts with implementation of the proposed project.

16 United States Department of Agricultural Forest Service and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Monitoring Land Cover Changes in California, July 2002, p. 8.