

4.11 AGRICULTURE

This section includes descriptions of the existing environmental setting and regulatory background related to agriculture resources. It also examines the proposed project's consistency with the City's agricultural resource policies and evaluates the project's impacts on agricultural resources.

4.11.1 EXISTING SETTING

The generally undeveloped project site contains gently sloping to flat terrain covered with annual grasses dotted with rock outcroppings, boulders, seasonal wetland features and scattered trees and shrubs. The site is not currently in agricultural production. The site is bordered to the north by Interstate 80 (I-80) and by freeway-serving commercial uses further to the north. Rural residential land uses are located to the east and south. Sierra College Boulevard and the I-80 northbound on- and off-ramps are located to the west with rural residential land uses located further to the west and a church located to the southwest. The project site does not currently include agricultural operations.

HISTORICAL AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Land in the project vicinity was used during the mid to late 1800s to grow grain crops used as feed for draft animals that hauled supplies to the gold mining areas to the east. By the end of the nineteenth century, land was subdivided into small parcels for family farms engaged in fruit, citrus, and grape production. The project area was part of the Himes Tract, which was subdivided into 10-acre lots in the 1890s. Most of the lots were sold by the 1920s. Often, they were combined into 20- to 40-acre farmsteads. In the 1910s and 1920s, several Japanese families bought lots in the Himes Tract. One of these was the Takuma family whose farmstead was recorded as an archaeological site within the project boundaries (ECORP 2005b). See Section 4.13, Cultural Resources, of this Draft EIR for more information on archaeological sites.

The Takuma family cultivated orchards on the project site including plums, peaches, pears and persimmons. By 1971, the orchard had been removed. According to the Placer County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, the property has not supported a commercially producing orchard for over thirty years. Since that time the subject property has generally remained fallow land with the exception of some dry-farmed crops in the mid 1980s (Wallace-Kuhl & Associates Inc. 2005).

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

In 2004, Placer County was estimated to have 124,262 acres of Important Farmland: 9,236 acres of Prime Farmland, 5,509 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 23,283 acres of Unique Farmland, and 86,234 acres of Farmland of Local Importance (California Department of Conservation [CDC] 2006). Over the past decade, the availability of Important Farmland has been consistently declining from year to year primarily because of conversions to urban and other developed land uses. Table 4.11-1 identifies the acreages of Important Farmland in Placer County inventoried by the CDC from 1994 through 2004. A decline in acreages occurred for all Important Farmland categories over the last decade.

**Table 4.11-1
Acreages of Important Farmland in Placer County**

Important Farmland Category	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Prime Farmland	10,458	9,867	9,750	9,901	9,481	9,236
Farmland of Statewide Importance	5,608	5,546	5,196	5,312	5,513	5,509
Unique Farmland	23,848	23,300	22,726	23,616	22,166	23,283
Farmland of Local Importance	113,505	114,271	114,453	111,987	102,838	86,234
Total	153,419	152,984	152,125	150,816	139,998	124,262

Source: California Department of Conservation Farmland Conversion Reports at http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlpr/FMMP/stats_reports/farmland_conv_reports.htm

FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) land classifications system monitors and documents land use changes that specifically affect California’s agricultural land. The program, administered by the California Department of Conservation, produces maps, referred to as Important Farmland Maps, and statistical data that are used for assessing the significance and quality of agricultural lands. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality, based on the Natural Resources Conservation Service soil survey maps, and irrigation status. Maps are updated every 2 years, with current land use information gathered from aerial photographs, a computer mapping system, public review, and field reconnaissance (CDC 2006).

The FMMP land classification system is cited by the State CEQA Guidelines as the preferred information source for determining the agricultural significance of a property (CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G). The California Department of Conservation has characterized Prime Farmland as land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of agricultural crops. Prime Farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to current farming methods. Farmland of Statewide Importance is characterized as land with a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for agricultural use, having only minor shortcomings, such as less ability to store soil moisture, compared to Prime Farmland (CDC 2006).

The CDC, Division of Land Resource Protection, Placer County Important Farmland Map designates the entire project site as grazing land, which is not considered Important Farmland under the definition in CEQA of “Agricultural Land” that is afforded consideration as to its potential significance (see CEQA Section 21060.1 [a]).

4.11.2 REGULATORY SETTING

WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTS

In 1965, the California Legislature passed the California Land Conservation Act, which is commonly referred to as the Williamson Act. The act is a voluntary land conservation program that is administered by counties and cities, with technical assistance from the CDC. The objectives of the act are as follows:

- ▶ To preserve farmland for a secure food supply for the state and nation, and for future generations;
- ▶ To maintain agriculture’s contribution to local and state economic health;
- ▶ To provide economic relief to tax-burdened farmers and ranchers;
- ▶ To promote orderly city growth, and discourage leapfrog development and premature loss of farmland; and
- ▶ To preserve open space for its scenic, social, aesthetic, and wildlife values.

Landowners enrolled in the Williamson Act are taxed at a lower rate using a value based on the agricultural use of the land under contract. In turn, landowners commit to restricting the use of their land to agriculture and open space uses for 10 years. The term of the contract is essentially indefinite and it is automatically renewed on the anniversary date of which the contract was entered. To exit the contract, landowners must initiate the non-renewal process, which allows the remainder of the contract term to lapse (the remaining 9 years), thereby rendering the contract null and void at the end of the term.

No portions of the project site or adjacent parcels are subject to Williamson Act contracts.

CITY OF ROCKLIN GENERAL PLAN

The City of Rocklin General Plan does not include any policies related to agricultural resources.

4.11.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The environmental analysis in this section is based on a review of the Important Farmland Maps of the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) land classifications system to determine the agricultural significance of lands within the City of Rocklin.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Pursuant to Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact to agricultural resources is considered significant if the proposed project would:

- ▶ Convert Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance), 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; or
- ▶ Involve other changes in the existing environment which, because of their location or nature, could result in conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, to nonagricultural use.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT **Farmland Conversion.** *The project would not convert important farmlands to non-agricultural land uses and would not conflict with lands zoned for agricultural uses. Therefore, **no impact** on agricultural resources would be anticipated with project implementation.*

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The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program land classification map identifies the project site as grazing land, which is not considered important farmland, as defined by CEQA. The project is currently zoned for urban land uses (i.e., retail commercial, residential). Land uses surrounding the project site consist of rural residences, open space, and retail-commercial land uses. The project site is not located adjacent to land in productive agriculture or lands zoned for agricultural uses. Also, the project site and adjacent parcels are not under a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, because the project would not convert important farmland to non-agricultural uses, would not conflict with existing agricultural zoning or Williamson Act contracts, or involve other changes that could result in the conversion of important farmland to non-agricultural uses, **no impact** on agricultural resources would be anticipated with project implementation.

Mitigation Measure 4.11-1 Farmland Conversion

No mitigation measures are required.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

No impacts on agricultural resources would be anticipated with project implementation.