

3.2 AGRICULTURE AND FOREST RESOURCES

3.2 AGRICULTURE AND FOREST RESOURCES

This section of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR; DEIR) addresses agricultural lands and the potential impacts of the proposed project on these lands. Key issues addressed in this section include conflicts/incompatibilities between urban land uses and agricultural operations and loss of agricultural land.

3.2.1 SETTING

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Regional Setting

Agriculture is an important component of Nevada County's economy and rural character, with agricultural lands being the largest private open space resource in the county (Nevada County 2002, p. 4). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2007 Census of Agriculture (the most recent year for which data is available), Nevada County included a total of 690 farms covering a total of 70,167 acres in 2007. **Table 3.2-1** compares total farm acreage and farm sizes in the county for 1997 and 2007. As shown, both the number of farms and total farmland acreage increased during the 10-year period between 1997 and 2007. However, the average size of farms decreased by 50 acres and the number of larger farms (500 to over 1,000 acres) decreased.

**TABLE 3.2-1
USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE DATA – NEVADA COUNTY**

	1997	2007	Change
Total Number of Farms	412	690	+ 278
Total Land in Farms (Acres)	62,772	70,167	+ 7,395
Average Size of Farms (Acres)	152	102	-50
Number of Farms by Size			
1 to 9 acres	108	209	+ 101
10 to 49 acres	181	332	+ 151
50 to 179 acres	67	91	+ 24
180 to 499 acres	23	32	+ 9
500 to 999 acres	18	15	-3
1,000 or more acres	15	11	-4

Source: USDA 1999, 2009

Nevada County's most recent crop report (2009) indicates that the county's top six crops include cattle and calves, pasture/rangeland, timber, wine grapes, fruit and vegetables, and nursery stock (Nevada County Department of Agriculture 2010, p. 4).

FARMLAND CLASSIFICATIONS AND RATING SYSTEM

Farmland classification programs are used to determine the agricultural productivity of a particular soil. The two systems used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to determine a soil's agricultural productivity are the Land Capability Classification System and the Storie Index Rating System. The Land Capability

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Classification System takes into consideration soil limitations, the risk of damages when the soils are used, and the way in which soils respond to treatment, whereas the Storie Index Rating System ranks soils based on their suitability for agriculture.

Land Capability Classification System

The Land Capability Classification System is a system of grouping soils primarily on the basis of their capability to produce common cultivated crops and pasture plants without deteriorating over a long period of time. Capability classes, the broadest groups, are designated by numerals 1 through 8. Generally, as the ratings of the classification system increase, yields and profits are more difficult to obtain. Descriptions of land capability classes, as defined by the NRCS Soil Survey Handbook, are provided in **Table 3.2-2** below.

TABLE 3.2-2
LAND CAPABILITY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM – CLASS DEFINITIONS

Class	Definition
1	Soils have few limitations that restrict their use
2	Soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices
3	Soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices, or both
4	Soils have very severe imitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both
5	Soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use
6	Soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation
7	Soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation
8	Soils and miscellaneous areas have limitations that nearly preclude their use for commercial crop production

Source: USDA-NRCS 2007

Capability subclasses are soil groups within any one soil class that indicate the specific limitation of that soil class. Subclasses are designated by adding a small letter, e, w, s, or c, to the class numeral, for example, 2e. The capability subclasses are defined in **Table 3.2-3** below.

TABLE 3.2-3
LAND CAPABILITY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM – SUBCLASS DEFINITIONS

Subclass	Definition
e	Indicates that the main hazard is the risk of erosion unless close-growing plant cover is maintained
w	Indicates that water in or on the soil interferes with plant growth or cultivation (in some soils the wetness can be partly corrected by artificial drainage)
s	Indicates that the soil is limited mainly because it is shallow, droughty, or stoney
c	Indicates that the chief limitation is climate that is very cold or very dry (used in only some parts of the United States)

Source: USDA-NRCS 2007

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Capability subclasses are further delineated into capability units that group soils which are similar enough to be suited to the same crops and pasture plants, require similar management, and have similar productivity.

Storie Index Rating System

The Storie Index Rating System ranks soil characteristics according to their suitability for agriculture. Ratings range from Grade 1 soils (80 to 100 rating), which have few or no limitations for agricultural production, to Grade 6 soils (rating of less than 10), which are not suitable for agriculture. The Storie Index Rating System ranks four factors — soil profile, surface soil texture, slope of the land, and other conditions exclusive of profile such as drainage, alkali content, or erosion. The percentage values for the four factors are multiplied to get the Storie Index Rating (University of California 1978, p.1). The six grades, ranges in index rating, and definition of grades, as defined by the NRCS, are provided below in **Table 3.2-4**.

**TABLE 3.2-4
STORIE INDEX RATING SYSTEM**

Grade	Index Rating	Definition
1 – Excellent	80 through 100	Soils are well suited to intensive use for growing irrigated crops that are climatically suited to the region.
2 – Good	60 through 79	Soils are good agricultural soils, although they 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	Soils are only fairly well suited to general agricultural use and are limited in their 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	Soils are poorly suited. They are severely limited in their agricultural potential because of shallow soil depths; less permeable subsoil; steeper slope; or more clayey or gravelly surface soil textures than Grade 3 soils, as well as poor drainage; greater flood hazards; hummocky micro-relief; salinity; or fair to poor fertility levels, all acting alone or in combination.
5 – Very Poor	10 through 19	Soils are very poorly suited for agriculture, are seldom cultivated, and are more commonly used for range, pasture, or woodland.
6 – Nonagricultural	Less than 10	Soils are not suited for agriculture at all due to very severe to extreme physical limitations, or because of urbanization.

Source: University of California 1978

Project Site Characteristics

Currently, the project site is not used for any commercial agricultural purposes; however, the project site has been used for ranching in the past as evidenced by remnants of a small ranch complex, including a livestock corral and loading chute, on the site. The site also contains segments of two Nevada Irrigation District (NID) irrigation canals.

Soils on the project site consist of Boomer Loam, Boomer-Rock Outcrop, Sobrante Loam, and Chaix-Rock Outcrop (see Section 3.7, Geology and Soils). The Land Capability Classification

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System and Storie Index rating and grade for these soils are presented in **Table 3.2-5**. As shown, the majority of the project site has a Storie Index Grade of 3 or 4, indicating soils that are only fairly well suited to general agricultural use and are limited in their use or soils that are poorly suited for agricultural use (USDA-NRCS 2011).

**TABLE 3.2-5
PROJECT SITE SOIL RATINGS**

Soil Type	Acreage Within Project Site	Soil Capability Classification	Storie Index Grade
Boomer-Rock Outcrop complex, 5 to 30 percent slopes	130	4e	3
Boomer-Rock Outcrop complex, 30 to 50 percent slopes	31	6e	4
Boomer Loam, 5 to 15 percent slopes	29	3e	2
Sobrante Loam, 2 to 15 percent slopes	17	3e	3
Chaix-Rock Outcrop complex, 30 to 75 percent slopes	8	8	4

Source: USDA-NRCS 2011

Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), administered by the California Department of Conservation (DOC), uses a series of definitions known as Land Inventory and Monitoring (LIM) criteria to classify farmland in California. The LIM criteria were originally developed nationally by the NRCS and classified the land's suitability for agricultural production; suitability included both the physical and chemical characteristics of soils and the actual land use. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program uses LIM criteria modified for California, including consideration for physical conditions such as a dependable water supply for agricultural production, soil temperature range, depth of the groundwater table, flooding potential, rock fragment content, and rooting depth.

The FMMP compiles and continually updates Important Farmland Maps for the state by identifying five agriculture-related categories: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land.

Project Site Characteristics

The majority of the project site is designated by the FMMP as Grazing Land (135 acres). The remainder is designated as Farmland of Local Importance (38 acres) and Other Land (42 acres). The FMMP designations for the site and adjacent parcels are shown in **Figure 3.2-1**. As previously stated, the project site is not currently used for any commercial agricultural purposes. The FMMP definitions for the farmland designations that occur on the project site are as follows:

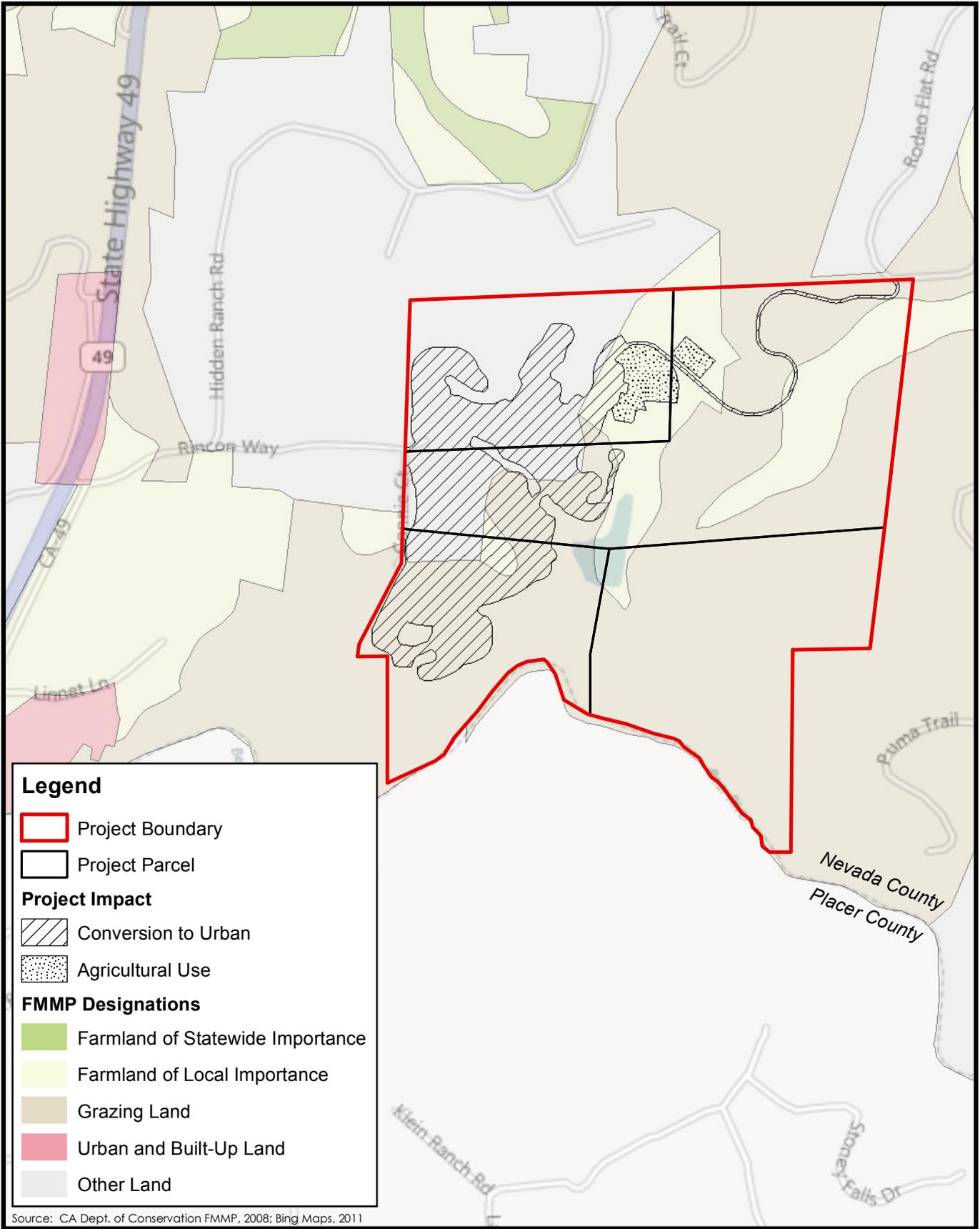


Figure 3.2-1

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) Designations



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Farmland of Local Importance

Land of importance to the local agricultural economy is determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee. In some counties, confined animal agriculture facilities are part of Farmland of Local Importance, but they are shown separately.

Nevada County defines Farmland of Local Importance as farmlands that have physical characteristics that would qualify for Prime or Statewide except for the lack of irrigation water. Farmlands that produce crops that are not listed under Unique Lands but are important to the economy of the county are Christmas trees, Sudan grass, meadow hay, chestnuts, poultry houses and feedlots, improved dryland pasture (not rangeland), and irrigated pasture (land is under Statewide or Prime if soils are listed as such, otherwise as Local). Also, Farmland of Local Importance in Nevada County includes lands that are legislated to be used only for agricultural (farmland) purposes, such as Williamson Act land in western Nevada County (DOC 2011).

Grazing Land

Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

Other Land

Land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low-density rural developments; brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; strip mines, borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.

In 2008, the most recent year for which data is available, Nevada County contained a total of 25,962 acres of Important Farmland, including 514 acres of Prime Farmland, 2,284 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 500 acres of Unique Farmland, and 22,664 acres of Farmland of Local Importance. The county also contained 116,865 acres of Grazing Land (DOC 2008b).

Williamson Act Contract Lands

The Williamson Act is a mechanism for protecting agricultural and open space land from premature and unnecessary urban development whereby landowners receive property tax assessments which are much lower than normal in exchange for restricting their land to agricultural or related open space use (see the Regulatory Framework subsection below for further details). In 2009, Nevada County had a total of 3,381 acres under Williamson Act contracts (DOC 2010).

Neither the project site nor are any of the adjacent properties are subject to a Williamson Act contract (DOC 2006b).

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FORESTRY RESOURCES

Forestry Resources Defined

Forestland is defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g) 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.

Timberland is defined in Public Resources Code Section 4526 as:

Land, other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the board as experimental forest land, which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of any commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees.

Commercial timberlands are located primarily in the middle and eastern areas of the county, at elevations ranging from 1,200 feet above sea level in the west to over 9,000 feet in the east. The most extensive timberlands are located in the Tahoe National Forest, where nearly 200,000 acres are considered suitable for timber production (Nevada County 1996).

Project Site Characteristics

Portions of the project site are covered with ponderosa pine, California black oak, and several kinds of oak-dominated woodlands. As discussed in Section 3.4, Biological Resources, the project site contains 51.4 acres of montane hardwood-conifer and 106.4 acres of montane hardwood, both of which are characterized by a pronounced hardwood tree layer. Furthermore, there are 39.9 acres of oak grove (with hardwood canopy coverage greater than 33 percent) occurring in 24 scattered large and small patches in all parts of the project site as shown in **Figure 3.4-3** in Section 3.4, Biological Resources. Given that the site supports a significant number of native trees, it appears to be consistent with the definition for forestland provided in Public Resources Code Section 1222(g), as described above.

The project site is not currently designated or zoned by the County for timberland production or other forestry-related uses and is not in a designated Timber Preserve Zone (TPZ). While the site has been used historically for logging, no logging has occurred on the site in the past five years and the site is not considered to be suitable for growing a crop of trees of any commercial species. Therefore, the site does not meet the definition for timberland provided in Public Resources Code Section 4526, as described above.

3.2.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

STATE

Assembly Bill 2881 – Right to Farm Disclosure

Assembly Bill 2881 was passed by the State Legislature in 2008 and became effective January 1, 2009. This bill requires that as a part of real estate transactions, land sellers and agents must disclose whether the property is located within 1 mile of farmland as designated on the most recent Important Farmland Map. Any of the five agricultural categories — Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land — on the map qualifies for disclosure purposes.

LOCAL

Nevada County General Plan

The Nevada County General Plan serves as the overall guiding policy document for the unincorporated areas of Nevada County. A summary of the project's consistency with applicable General Plan agriculture and forestry policies is contained in **Appendix 3.0-A**. While this Draft EIR analyzes the project's consistency with the General Plan pursuant to CEQA Section 15125(d), the Nevada County Board of Supervisors makes the ultimate determination of consistency with the General Plan.

Nevada County Land Use and Development Code

Section L-II 4.3.4 – Agricultural Lands, Important

The Nevada County Land Use and Development Code Chapter II, Article 4.0, Section L-II 4.3.4 Agricultural Lands, Important, intends to minimize the conversion of important agricultural areas to nonagricultural uses, minimize the adverse impact of potentially incompatible land uses upon important agricultural land and operations, and minimize the impairment of agricultural productivity of important agricultural land. If a project is within or adjacent to important farmland as defined by the code, the project is required to prepare a management plan that avoids or minimizes impacts to the important agricultural lands. The code defines important farmland as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance as defined by the DOC's Important Farmland Map.

As previously stated, the project site contains 38 acres of Farmland of Local Importance (**Figure 3.2-1**); those 38 acres would be considered important farmland pursuant to the Nevada County Code.

Section L-XIV 1.3 and 1.4 – Agricultural Lands and Operations

The Nevada County Land Use and Development Code Chapter XIV, Article 1, Sections L-XIV 1.3 and 1.4, seeks to reduce the loss to the county of its agricultural resources by limiting the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be considered a nuisance. The ordinance states, "No existing or future agricultural operation or any of its facilities or appurtenances, while conducted, operated or managed in a manner consistent with proper and accepted customs and standards on agricultural land shall become or be a nuisance." The ordinance also requires that sellers of properties in agricultural zones provide a disclosure to buyers regarding the right to farm.

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Section L-II 4.3.15 – Trees

The Nevada County Land Use and Development Code Chapter II, Article 4.0, Section L-II 4.3.15 includes regulations intended, among other things, to preserve and minimize the disturbance of landmark and heritage trees and groves from development projects through on-site vegetation inventories, mandatory clustering, and other measures necessary to protect such habitat. The regulations indicate that a project may only be approved when they do not remove or disturb defined trees or groves, unless a management plan is prepared consistent with the regulations.

3.2.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The impact analysis provided below is based on the State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G. An impact to agriculture and forest resources is considered significant if the project would:

- 1) Result in the conversion of 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.
- 2) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.
- 3) 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)).
- 4) Result in the loss of forestland or conversion of forestland to non-forest use.
- 5) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forestland to non-forest use.

Definition of Agricultural Lands

As reflected in Standard of Significance 1 above, CEQA Statute (Public Resources Code Section 21060.1) defines “agricultural land” as:

Agricultural land means prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance or unique farmland, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California.

However, the Nevada County General Plan EIR (1995) expands on CEQA’s Standard of Significance to state that a significant impact could occur if development would convert prime agriculture land, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, or Grazing Lands in ownership patterns of 40(+) acres to nonagricultural uses. Therefore, the impact analysis considers this standard of significance in addition to those identified above.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis of agriculture and forest resources was based on review of current uses of the project site, soil characteristics of the project site, and the project site's farmland classifications per the USDA-NRCS and the FMMP. This information was used to determine the proposed project's specific agriculture-related impacts, paying particular attention to the potential direct and indirect conversion of farmland and/or forestland. The impact analysis below focuses on whether those impacts would be significant and if so, whether existing regulations would mitigate impacts. After consideration of existing regulations, mitigation measures are identified for impacts that would remain potentially significant.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Conversion of Farmland to Nonagricultural Use (Standards of Significance 1 and 5)

Impact 3.2.1 Implementation of the project would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland. However, the project would result in the conversion of limited amounts of Farmland of Local Importance and Grazing Land. In addition, the project site contains and is adjacent to important farmland as defined by Nevada County. This impact is considered to be **less than significant**.

No portion of the project site is designated by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland. Furthermore, based on the Storie indices shown in **Table 3.2-5**, the majority of soils on the project site are only ranked fair or poor for agricultural use. Therefore, the project would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP.

According to the FMMP, the project site contains approximately 135 acres of Grazing Land, 38 acres of Farmland of Local Importance, and 42 acres of Other Land. Although the conversion of these portions of the project site would not be considered a significant impact according to the CEQA Standards of Significance listed above, the Nevada County General Plan EIR (1995) expands on CEQA's Standard of Significance to include as a significant impact the conversion of Farmland of Local Importance or Grazing Lands in ownership patterns of 40(+) acres to nonagricultural uses. As shown in **Figure 3.2-1**, proposed development associated with the project would be limited to 48 acres total, with all development except the proposed emergency access road, trails, barbeque areas, water tank, and sewer lift station to be clustered within the northwest portion of the site. Approximately 4 acres of the site designated as Farmland of Local Importance would be used for agricultural uses (row crops and an orchard). Most of the 48 acres of development would be on land designated by the FMMP as Other Land, and the majority of the site would not be precluded from future agricultural or grazing use. This is consistent with Nevada County General Plan Policies 1.18 and 16.9, as well as with Nevada County Land Use and Development Code requirements that new residential development be clustered in order to reduce potential conflicts between agricultural operations and provide for a natural or man-made buffer between the residential development and adjacent agricultural uses.

Of the 38 acres that are designated as Farmland of Local Importance and the 135 acres designated as Grazing Land, the project would result in the conversion of only 4.2 acres of Farmland of Local Importance to urban uses and 19.2 acres of Grazing Land to urban uses. Therefore, the project would not directly convert more than 40 acres of Farmland of Local Importance or Grazing Land to nonagricultural uses.

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In addition, Nevada County Land Use and Development Code Section L-II 4.3.4 requires the preparation of a management plan that avoids or minimizes impacts to important farmland for any project within or adjacent to important farmland as defined by the code. Because the project site contains 38 acres of Farmland of Local Importance, which are considered important farmland pursuant to the Nevada County Code, the project is required to prepare a management plan that minimizes impacts to important farmland, as defined by Nevada County. Consistent with this requirement, the proposed project includes an Agricultural Management Plan (SCO 2010), which is included in **Appendix 3.2-A**. According to the plan, by leaving the majority of the Farmland of Local Importance undisturbed and by utilizing a portion of it for row farming, gardening, and on-site food production, the project meets the County's stated purpose of minimizing the conversion of important agricultural areas to nonagricultural uses.

In addition, the project site is not adjacent to any existing major agricultural operations and would not be expected to result in the indirect conversion of agricultural land. The proposed project would be required to comply with Nevada County Land Use and Development Code Section L-II 4.3.4, which would require the project to record a declaration acknowledging proximity to agricultural resources and the potential for conflict with adjacent land uses. Such "right-to-farm" disclosures are intended to promote a good neighbor policy between agriculturalists and residents by encouraging the advising of purchasers and users of property adjacent to or near agricultural operations of the inherent environmental aspects that accompany an adjacent agricultural operation, so that such purchasers and users will understand any inconveniences that may accompany living side by side with agriculture and be prepared to accept such factors as a natural result of living in or near rural areas.

The proposed project would not convert agricultural land as defined by CEQA and Standards of Significance and would not directly convert more than 40 acres of Farmland of Local Importance or Grazing Land. Furthermore, the project is consistent with Nevada County General Plan policies and County Code requirements intended to protect and preserve agricultural resources, including the preparation of an agricultural management plan. Impacts associated with the conversion of farmland would therefore be considered **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Conflict with Existing Zoning for Agricultural Use or a Williamson Act Contract (Standard of Significance 2)

Impact 3.2.2 The project proposes to rezone the site, which will eliminate any potential conflicts with the current zoning. Furthermore, the majority of the project site would remain undeveloped and some agricultural uses are proposed as part of the project. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Neither the project site itself nor any of the surrounding parcels is subject to a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with an existing Williamson Act contract and no impact would occur.

The project site is currently zoned by the Nevada County Zoning Regulations (Chapter II of the Nevada County Land Use and Development Code) as RA-3-PD (Residential Agricultural, 3-acre, Planned Development). This zoning district allows for low-density single-family dwellings, as well

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as other dwelling unit types in keeping with the rural character of the area,¹ at densities equivalent to a 1.5-acre minimum parcel size, or a 3-acre minimum parcel size where neither a public water nor public sewer system is available. Within the Estate General Plan land use designation, including the project site, the single-family dwelling is of primary importance and agricultural uses are secondary. As such, the project site is not zoned exclusively for agricultural uses; some residential development is anticipated on the site under the existing zoning.

Furthermore, the project proposes to rezone the project site from RA-3-PD to PD-CCRC (Planned Development, Continuing Care Retirement Community). Therefore, if approved, the proposed project will be consistent with the zoning for the site and will not conflict with any agricultural zoning.² Furthermore, the majority of the site, approximately 167 acres, would not be precluded from future agricultural or grazing uses and the project itself includes some limited agricultural uses as part of the proposed development, such as raised-bed community gardens and 4 acres of row crops and an orchard. Therefore, this impact would be considered **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Loss and Conversion of Forestland (Standards of Significance 3 and 4)

Impact 3.2.3 Portions of the project site meet the definition of forestland. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

The project site does not contain any timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526) and is not zoned for Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g)). However, as described in the Setting subsection, the project site supports a significant number of native trees and therefore meets the criteria for forestland per Public Resources Code Section 12220(g).

As discussed under Impact 3.2.1 above, proposed development associated with the project would be limited to 48 acres total, with all development except the proposed emergency access road, trails, barbeque areas, water tank, and sewer lift station to be clustered within the northwest portion of the site. Approximately 4 acres of the site designated would be used for agricultural uses (row crops and an orchard), with approximately 163 acres to remain as undeveloped open space. As such, project design would avoid impacts to the majority of the forestland on the project site. Furthermore, mitigation measure **MM 3.4.6** in Section 3.4, Biological Resources, requires the project to submit and implement a Habitat Management Plan for high-canopy-coverage (landmark) oak woodlands affected by the project. The Habitat Management Plan would require restoration of oak woodland within the project site, establishment of a conservation easement for permanent protection of some of the important oak woodland areas within the eastern (undeveloped) portion of the site, and implementation of habitat management actions to minimize the likelihood that wildfire would completely destroy the protected oak stands and preclude rapid natural regeneration. As the oak

¹ Per Section L-II 2.2.1, Single Family, of the Nevada County Land Use and Development Code.

² It should be noted that this impact discussion is limited to the project's potential to conflict with agricultural zoning. Environmental impacts associated with amending the County's General Plan and Zoning Regulations are discussed in Section 4.0, Cumulative Impacts. Land use conflicts are discussed in Section 3.10, Land Use, of this Draft EIR.

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woodlands are also considered forestland per Public Resources Code Section 12220(g), these requirements would also reduce impacts to forestland on the project site.

Mitigation Measures

Given that the project design would avoid impacts to the majority of the forestland on the project site, that the project would be required to implement a Habitat Management Plan for high-canopy-coverage (landmark) oak woodlands affected by the project (mitigation measure **MM 3.4.6** in Section 3.4, Biological Resources), that the site is not considered to be suitable for growing a crop of commercial trees or for the production of timber or forest products, and that no commercial trees would be cut or removed as part of the project, this impact would be reduced to **less than significant**.

3.2.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

Agricultural and forestry resources are of statewide importance; as such, the cumulative setting consists of all agricultural and forestry resources within California. Throughout the state, development pressures are resulting in the conversion of thousands of acres of agricultural land. According to the latest statewide study by the FMMP (DOC 2011), approximately 162,277 acres of agricultural land were converted to nonagricultural use between 2006 and 2008. This acreage represents a 26 percent decrease from the 2004–2006 mapping cycle.

Based on statewide data from 2003 through 2007, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) annually received an average of 13 Timber Conversion Permit (TCP) applications totaling 416 acres. In addition, during this same time period, CAL FIRE received an average of 13 Notices of Exemption from TCP requirements totaling 1,157 acres of timberland conversion. Finally, CAL FIRE received an average of 666 notices of conversion of timberland parcels of less than 3 acres totaling 1,230 acres. This indicates that, on average, approximately 2,800 acres of timberland were converted each year between 2003 and 2007 (CAL FIRE 2009).

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Impacts to Agricultural and Forestry Resources

Impact 3.2.4 The proposed project, including the amendments to the County's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, would not contribute to cumulative impacts on agricultural or forestry lands. This impact would be **less than cumulatively considerable**.

Proposed CCRC Development

Although the State of California is experiencing an ongoing loss of important farmland to urbanized uses as discussed under Cumulative Setting above, the project site does not contain any soils designated by the FMMP as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland (see Impact 3.2.1). As such, implementation of the proposed project would not contribute to the cumulative conversion of important farmland.

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Similarly, although the state is experiencing an ongoing loss of timberland to urbanized uses (see Cumulative Setting above), the project site is not designated as timberland, and the project would preserve the majority of forestland on the site (see Impact 3.2.3). Furthermore, the project would be required to implement a Habitat Management Plan for high-canopy-coverage (landmark) oak woodlands affected by the project, the project site is not considered to be suitable for growing a crop of commercial trees or for the production of timber or forest products, and no commercial trees would be cut or removed as part of the project.

Furthermore, the area surrounding the project site is characterized by rural residential development and some agricultural (grazing) land as well as undeveloped open space and the Bear River. There are no commercialized or intensive agricultural or timber production uses in the vicinity of the project site that would be affected by the proposed project.

Although the project would result in the project site being rezoned and thus result in the loss of land zoned RA-3-PD in the county, the RA-3-PD zoning is not intended for intensive agricultural uses. As stated above, within the Estate General Plan land use designation, including the project site, the single-family dwelling is of primary importance and agricultural uses are secondary. As such, the project site is not zoned exclusively for agricultural uses; some residential development is anticipated on the site under the existing zoning.

Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not contribute to the cumulative conversion of forestland or timberland. This impact would be **less than cumulatively considerable**.

General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments

In addition to development of the proposed CCRC, implementation of the proposed project would result in amendments to the County's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance in order to establish a CCRC land use designation and zoning district. The proposed text amendments are policy actions that would not directly impact agricultural or forestry lands within the cumulative setting. However, future cumulative development in Nevada County would be subject to the new uses allowed by the proposed amendments, meaning that, after implementation of the proposed project, CCRCs would be permitted in either a PD (Planned Development) or SDA (Special Development Area) land use designation with approval of a zone change.

At a programmatic level, the environmental impacts associated with development of all PD and SDA designated areas in the county were analyzed in the Nevada County General Plan Environmental Impact Report, Volume I, SCH #1995102136 (1995). In addition, any future CCRC development projects would be required to submit a rezoning application in order to establish CCRC Combining District zoning for an individual CCRC use on any of the eligible sites. Such rezoning applications would be subject to further CEQA analysis of project-specific agricultural and forestry impacts (proposed Zoning Ordinance amendment Section L.II 2.7.11(C)(4)). It is reasonable to assume that future site-specific CEQA analysis would result in project-specific mitigation to address impacts.

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Furthermore, as CCRCs would be limited to land with a PD or SDA land uses designation, the project's contribution to cumulative loss of viable farmland or agriculturally zoned parcels would not be significant because the PD designation is intended for planned developments in locations where a mix of uses is desirable and the SDA designation is intended to provide for the development of large land holdings as an integrated planned environment providing significant employment generation, along with supporting commercial, housing, public facilities, recreation, and open space. In other words, future CCRC development would only be allowed in areas already planned for some level of urban development and not in areas planned for intensive agriculture or timber production.

Therefore, cumulative agriculture and forestry impacts associated with the proposed General Plan and Zoning Ordinance text amendments are considered **less than cumulatively considerable**.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

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