

## **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.

### **4.11.2 EXISTING SETTING**

The undeveloped project site contains gently sloping to flat terrain covered with grassland, oak woodlands, two ponds, intermittent drainages, rock outcroppings, boulders, and other features. The site is not currently in agricultural production. The site is south of Interstate 80 (I-80). Rural residential land uses are located to the east and south. Sierra College Boulevard, the I-80 northbound on- and off-ramps, and a planned commercial site are located to the west with rural residential land uses located further to the west and a church located to the southwest.

#### **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 2005). See Section 4.13, Cultural Resources, of this Draft EIR for more information on history of the vicinity and archaeological sites.

The Takuma family cultivated orchards west of the project site, growing 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 site has remained fallow land and goats and horses have grazed minor portions of the project site. The Agricultural Commissioner's Office indicated that the project area was used in the past predominately for plum orchards (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 (DOC 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 California Department of Conservation (DOC) from 1994 through 2004. A decline in acreages occurred for all Important Farmland categories over the last decade.

#### **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 (DOC 2006).

<b>Table 4.11-1 Acreages of Important Farmland in Sacramento County</b>						
<b>Important Farmland Category</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>153,419</b>	<b>152,984</b>	<b>152,125</b>	<b>150,816</b>	<b>139,998</b>	<b>124,262</b>

Source: CDC Farmland Conversion Reports at [http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/FMMP/stats\\_reports/farmland\\_conv\\_reports.htm](http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/FMMP/stats_reports/farmland_conv_reports.htm)

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 (DOC 2006).

The CDC, Division of Land Resource Protection, Placer County Important Farmland Map designates the entire project site as grazing land (Exhibit 4.11-1), 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**

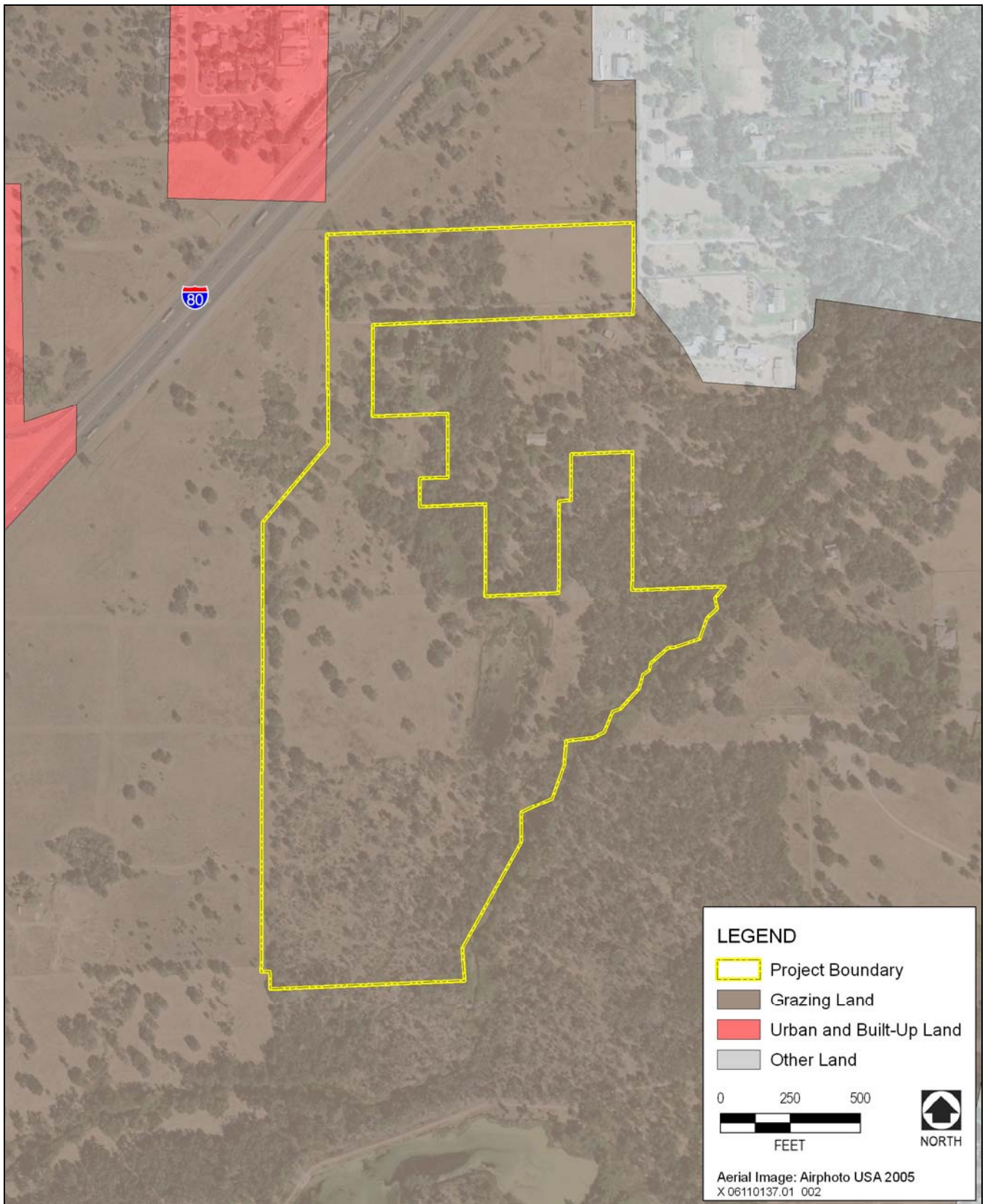
### **WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTS**

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 California Department of Conservation. 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 nine 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 (EDAW 2006).



Source: FMMP 2004

**Important Farmland Map**

**Exhibit 4.11-1**

## CITY OF ROCKLIN GENERAL PLAN

The City of Rocklin General Plan Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Element outlines the City's goals and policies pertaining to agricultural resources. The City's General Plan includes the following policy related to conserving agricultural land.

To permit the continued use of open space land for established agricultural activities until such time as development occurs, as long as such activities are compatible within an urban environment (Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Element, Policy OCR-9).

### 4.11.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### METHODOLOGY

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 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, due to 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 4.11-1**    **Conversion of Important Farmlands.** *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.*

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program land classification map for Placer County identifies the entire project site consists of grazing land. Grazing land is not considered an Important Farmland type as defined by CEQA, therefore, the project site does not support land considered to be of significant agricultural value. The project is currently zoned for urban land uses (i.e., 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. Therefore, implementation of the project would not convert any important farmland and **no impact** to important farmlands would be anticipated.

**Mitigation Measure 4.11-1: Conversion of Important Farmlands.**

No mitigation is necessary.

**IMPACT 4.11-2** **Conflict with Agricultural Zoning and Williamson Act Contracts.** *The project site is not under a Williamson Act contract and the project site is not zoned for agricultural land uses. Therefore, development of the project site as proposed would not result in any conflicts with Williamson Act contracts or agricultural zoning designations and **no impact** would result.*

The project site and adjacent parcels are not under a Williamson Act contract (EDAW 2006). The project is currently zoned for urban land uses (i.e., residential), which are consistent with the proposed project. Therefore, implementation of the project would not conflict with any existing agricultural contracts or Williamson Act contracts or agricultural zoning designations and **no impact** would occur.

**Mitigation Measure 4.11-2: Conflict with Agricultural Zoning and Williamson Act Contracts.**

No mitigation is necessary.

**IMPACT 4.11-3** **Conflict with Offsite Agricultural Operations.** *The project site is not located adjacent to agricultural operations and development of the project site would not result in conflicts between any agricultural activities and proposed residential land uses, which could lead to the abandonment of agricultural operations and ultimate conversion of this land to non-agricultural land uses. Therefore, the impact is considered **less than significant**.*

The project site is not located adjacent to any agricultural operations. Surrounding land uses currently consist of rural residences, open spaces, and retail-commercial land uses across I-80. Properties in the Town of Loomis east of Dias Lane have Rural Residential and Rural Estates zoning, but may have small-scale animal husbandry such as chickens and horses. However, the primary land use of such properties is residential, and small-scale operations of this variety are not of the type addressed in CEQA documents within the context of agricultural impact analysis. Implementation of the project would not place any urban land uses adjacent to any existing agricultural operations. Therefore, the project would not result in any conflicts between proposed onsite urban land uses and offsite agricultural operations and would not perpetuate the conversion of agricultural land uses to urban land uses. The impact is considered **less than significant**.

**Mitigation Measure 4.11-3: Conflict with Offsite Agricultural Operations.**

No mitigation is necessary.

