

4.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section evaluates impacts to agricultural and forest resources within the project site and its vicinity. This analysis is based on the following information:

- Proposed Vesting Tentative Map
- The *Contra Costa County General Plan 2005-2020* (General Plan)
- The Contra Costa County Important Farmland 2014 Map
- Agricultural classifications as reported by the California Department of Conservation (DOC) and by the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Resources Conservation Service
- Tree Survey Report prepared by Joseph McNeil (December 2016)

These documents are available for review at the Contra Costa County (County) Department of Conservation and Development, Community Development Division, 30 Muir Road, Martinez, California.

No comments regarding agricultural and forest resources were submitted in response to the Notice of Preparation for this draft environmental impact report.

Farmland Classification

The DOC administers California's statewide agricultural inventory, called the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). Four farmland classifications are considered valuable by DOC, including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance. Any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered a significant impact. Other categories of land not protected by the DOC include Grazing Land, Urban and Built Up Land, and Other Land. Topography, climate, soil quality, and available irrigation water all factor into the FMMP farmland classifications.

The 2014 Important Farmland Map for Contra Costa County designates the lower approximately 20 acres of the project site as "Urban and Built-up Land," and the remaining approximately 41 acres of the site as "Other Land." The FMMP defines these lands as follows:

Urban and Built-up Land

Urban and Built-up Land is land that is occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. Common examples include residential, industrial, commercial, institutional facilities,

cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, and water control structures.

Other Land

Other Land is 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 waterbodies smaller than 40 acres.

4.2.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Regional Agricultural Resources

Urbanization in the County began in the 1940s. Today, 35 percent of the County is now considered urbanized and within the Urban Limit Line (ULL), an area delineated by the General Plan as land in which development and urbanization is permitted. The remaining 65 percent of the County that lies outside of the ULL is comprised of agricultural, open space, and rural residential lots.

Within California, prime locations for agricultural land are contingent on the quality of the soil and the irrigation status of the land. High-quality soils on irrigated lands, for example, would be considered an attractive location for agricultural purposes. According to a 2014 inventory conducted by the DOC, the County contained 88,867 acres of Important Farmland; 25,502 acres of which are Prime Farmland, 7,436 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 3,543 acres of Unique Farmland, and 52,431 acres of Farmland of Local Importance (DOC, 2014). Between 2012 and 2014, the County experienced a net gain of 45 acres of Important Farmland (**Table 4.2-1**).

According to the General Plan, remaining agricultural land is designated as Agricultural Core (AC), and is predominantly located in eastern portions of the County outside of the ULL.

Table 4.2-1 Contra Costa County Farmland Conversion

Important Farmland	Total Acreage (2012)	Total Acreage (2012)	Acreage Converted (2012-2014)
Prime Farmland	25,601	25,502	-99
Farmland of Statewide Importance	7,348	7,436	88
Unique Farmland	3,011	3,543	532
Farmland of Local Importance	52,907	52,431	-476
Important Farmland Total	88,867	88,912	1,795

Source: California Department of Conservation, 2014.

Local Agricultural Resources

The project site is located in Alamo, an unincorporated area of Contra Costa County, west of Danville Boulevard. The project site lies within the County's ULL. The closest incorporated city is Danville, which lies 2.6 miles southeast of the project site. The unincorporated land that lies between the project site and the Town of Danville is designated primarily as Single-Family Residential – Low Density (SL) with small pockets of Open Space (OS); however, there is no agricultural land east of the Las Trampas Wilderness Trail between Alamo and Danville, as the area lies within the ULL.

The approximately 61-acre project site has historically been used for agricultural production. The most recent agricultural production, prior to the 1992, has been the operation of walnut orchards. Currently, the property is not irrigated for commercial agricultural activities and no agricultural production occurs on the site.

As described in **Subsection 4.2.1, Introduction**, the 2014 FMMP for the County designates the lower portion of the project site as "Urban and Built-up Land," and the upper portion of the site as "Other Land."

Forest Land Resources

None of the lands within the project site—or the County at large—are used for timber harvesting.

In accordance with the definition under California Public Resources Code Sections 12220(g) and 51104(g), "Forest land" is land that can support, under natural conditions, 10 percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, 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, while a Timberland Production Zone (TPZ) is an area which "been zoned pursuant to Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible use".

The area of the project site designated as open space currently supports more than 10 percent native tree cover; therefore, the project site meets the definition of "Forest land" under Section 12220(g). The project site is not considered a TPZ as classified by Sections 51112 and 51113 of the California Government Code, as the project site is not "devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible use."

4.2.3 REGULATORY SETTING

State

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, 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 its conversion to urban uses. In order to preserve these uses, this Act established an agricultural preserve contract procedure by which the landowners pay State taxes at a lower rate using a scale based on the actual use of the land for agricultural or open space purposes, as opposed to its unrestricted market value.

Project Consistency Analysis

The project site is not covered by a Williamson Act contract and therefore would not conflict with any Williamson Act contract (County, 2015).

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

In 1982, the FMMP was established by the California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resources Protection. The FMMP provides a consistent and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California, and produces Important Farmland Maps by county every two years.

The FMMP farmland classifications are further described below in order of productivity, from the most productive to the least productive.

Prime Farmland

Prime Farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical features to sustain the long-term production of agricultural crops. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply necessary to produce sustained high yields. Soil must meet the physical and chemical criteria determined by the National Resources Conservation Service.

Farmland of Statewide Importance

Farmland of Statewide Importance is similar to Prime Farmland, but with minor differences, such as greater slopes or a lesser ability of the soil to store moisture.

Unique Farmland

Unique Farmland is used for the production of the State's leading agricultural crops but may contain lesser quality soils than Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. These lands are usually irrigated but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards found in some climatic zones in California.

Farmland of Local Importance

Farmland of Local Importance holds a different definition within each county in California. According to the FMMP inventory, the County contained 52,431 acres of Farmland of Local Importance in 2014 (DOC, 2014).

Project Consistency Analysis

The project site is not designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance.

Local

Contra Costa County General Plan

The Land Use and Conservation Elements of the General Plan contain the following policies related to agricultural and forest resources.

Land Use Element

- 3-11: Urban uses shall be expanded only inside the Urban Limit Line where conflicts with the agricultural economy will be minimal.
- 3-12: Preservation and buffering of agricultural land should be encouraged as it is critical to maintaining a healthy and competitive agricultural economy and assuring a balance of land uses. Preservation and conservation of open space, wetlands, parks, hillsides, and ridgelines should be encouraged as it is crucial to preserve the continued availability of unique habitats for wildlife and plants, to protect unique scenery, and provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for County residents.
- 3-14: Protect prime productive agricultural land from inappropriate subdivisions.

Conservation Element

- 8-12: Natural woodlands shall be preserved to the maximum extent possible in the course of land development.
- 8-29: Large continuous areas of the County should be encouraged to remain in agricultural production, as long as economically viable.
- 8-30: In order to reduce adverse impacts on agricultural and environmental values, and to reduce urban costs to taxpayers, the County shall not designate land located outside of the ULL for an urban land use.
- 8-31: Urban development in the future shall take place within the Urban Limit Line and areas designated by this plan for urban growth.
- 8-32: Agriculture shall be protected to assure a balance in land use. The policies of Measure C-1990 shall be enforced.

8-33: The County shall encourage agriculture to continue operating adjacent to developing urban areas.

8-38: Agricultural operations shall be protected and enhanced through encouragement of Williamson Act contracts to retain designated areas in agricultural use.

In addition to the above-mentioned policies, the County enacted the 65/35 Land Preservation Standard as part of Measure C-1990, which calls for the preservation of at least 65 percent of the land in the County for agriculture, open space, wetlands, parks, and other non-urban uses. Measure C-1990 also established the ULL, which was extended to 2026 by the passage of Measure L in 2006. Inside the ULL there are approximately 144,018 acres designated as Urban Use, including the approximately 61-acre project site. In fulfillment of a Measure L requirement, the ULL was reviewed on February 2, 2016 to determine if the line needed to be expanded due to land use plans and employment and housing needs. The County's Board of Supervisors accepted and approved the proposed approach and schedule for the ULL Mid-term Review required under Measure L – 2006 and directed staff to consult with the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), BIA/Bay Area, East Bay Leadership Council and the East Bay Economic Development Alliance for data gathering purposes, and include business and community stakeholders at the public meetings.

Project Consistency Analysis

The project would be consistent with the General Plan policies related to agricultural resources. The project area is within the ULL and therefore in compliance with General Plan policies 3-11, 8-30, and 8-31. The project lands are not held in Williamson Act contracts, and are not considered Prime Farmland, and thus the project would not conflict with General Plan policy 3-14 or 8-38. In reference to General Plan policies 8-29, 8-32, and 8-33, the project site is surrounded by existing or planned residential development, and is not part of a larger agricultural production area that would be subdivided by the project. As project consistency pertains to General Plan policy 8-12, natural woodlands would be preserved to the maximum extent possible; however, in the incidence of forest land removal for project buildout, sufficient mitigation will be implemented to replace the native trees potentially proposed for removed (see **Mitigation Measure BIO-8**).

Contra Costa County General Plan and Zoning Designations

The General Plan designates the project site as Single-Family Residential-Low Density (SL), and Open Space (OS). The current site zoning is Single-Family Residential (R-20), which allows the following uses:

1. A detached single-family dwelling on each lot and the accessory structures and uses normally auxiliary to it;

2. Crop and tree farming, and horticulture;
3. A temporary stand for the sale of agricultural products grown on the premises, with two and one-half acres per stand, set back at least thirty-five feet from the front property line, and operated not more than three months in any calendar year;
4. Small farming; including the raising of poultry and rabbits or other grain-fed rodents, primarily for home consumption thereon;
5. Keeping livestock on lots forty thousand or more square feet in area (with at least forty thousand square feet for each two head of livestock) and all contiguous and in one fee ownership;
6. Publicly owned parks and playgrounds;
7. A residential care facility for the elderly, operated by a person with all required state and local agency approvals or licenses, where not more than six persons reside or receive care, not including the licensee or members of the licensee's family or persons employed as facility staff;
8. A family day care home where care, protection and supervision of twelve or fewer children in the provider's own home are provided for periods of less than twenty-four hours per day, while the parents or guardians are away;
9. Aviaries, which shall be not over twelve feet high nor exceeding one square foot in area for each fifty square feet of net land area per lot, and unless otherwise provided herein, shall be set back at least twenty-five feet from the front property line or any street line and at least ten feet from any side or rear property line, and shall be maintained in a sanitary manner as determined by the county health department.

Project Consistency Analysis

The project is proposing 35 residential lots within an area zoned as R-20. Detached single-family dwellings are allowable under this zoning designation. As discussed in **Section 4.11, Land Use and Planning**, the project would comply with the current land use designations.

4.2.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Significance Criteria

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines identifies environmental issues a lead agency can consider when determining whether a project could have significant effects on the environment. The project would have a significant impact if it would:

- Convert 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 non-agricultural use.

- Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (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 forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract.

Discussion of No Impacts

Would the project convert 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 non-agricultural use?

The project site does not contain farmland designated Prime, Unique, of Statewide Importance, or of Local Importance. Furthermore, the project site does not contain prime agricultural land as defined in Section 56064 of the California Government Code. No impact would occur.

Would the project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract?

The site is not under Williamson Act contract. Though small-scale agricultural uses are allowable under the R-20 zoning designation, this designation also allows for single-family residences. Therefore, the project would not conflict with existing zoning, and no impact would occur.

Discussion of Significant Impacts

Would the project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (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))?

and

Would the project result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

and

Would the project involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

Impact AG-1: Implementation of the project would result in the loss of forest land at the project site and thus would conflict with forest land zoning as established by California Public Resources Code 12220(g) (Less than Significant with Mitigation).

The project site is not currently used for agricultural production. Development of the project would therefore not result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. The project site is surrounded by urban development on its northern, northeastern, and southeastern borders. Additionally, the project would retain approximately 41 acres of open space.

The project site is located within the ULL designated by the General Plan. Development in this area would conform to the General Plan's policies 3-12 and 8-12 regarding the protection of forest resources. However, as described above, forest resources exist on the site and the removal of trees could significantly affect such resources.

The project site contains approximately 3,489 trees, including approximately 469 trees proposed for removal for in the development area. Many of these trees are proposed for removal due to unsuitability factors such as poor health, mechanical failure, crowding or interfering with the development of a healthier tree, a maladapted species, or of a species generally unsuited to the Alamo climate.

As discussed **Section 4.4, Biological Resources**, the project arborist recommended replacement requirements, which would be subject to the County's approval. Additionally, **Mitigation Measure BIO-8** requires arborist consultation throughout the construction period to ensure appropriate tree preservation and removal practices. With adherence to General Plan policies 3-12 and 8-12, continued

consultation with the arborist, and implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-8**, the project would have a less-than-significant impact to forest resources.

4.2.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The cumulative setting for agricultural and forest resources is the County, the project site, and the three proposed developments within a 1-mile radius of the project site (see **Chapter 4.0, Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures**). Buildout of these developments, when considered cumulatively, would not have a significant cumulative impact on agricultural and forest resources.

Agricultural Resources

The *Contra Costa County General Plan EIR Impacts and Mitigation Summary* (General Plan EIR) noted that build-out of the General Plan would result in land use and other conflicts between agricultural and urban uses. The General Plan update concluded that the conversion of these agricultural lands to urban uses is a significant cumulative impact. The County adopted overriding considerations as part of the adoption of the General Plan, and the General Plan EIR notes the following two reasons as a basis for this consideration:

1. The County is required by State Law to provide for its fair share of the regional housing need, as determined by ABAG, and to do so, the County must designate a certain amount of land for residential uses; and
2. The economic welfare of the County, and its continued ability to provide for the employment needs of its residents, would allow this conversion to occur.

All four of the projects that comprise the cumulative setting are within the ULL, and are developed under existing conditions. There are no designated agricultural resources on or within the vicinity of the proposed developments. Additionally, as discussed in this section, the project site is currently designated for Single-Family Residential-Low (SL) and Open Space (OS) land uses. The project site is not designated for agricultural land uses, and the project would not result in the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. Therefore, the project would have a less than significant contribution to the cumulative impacts on agricultural resources within the County.

Forest Resources

The three additional developments comprising the cumulative scenario are within the ULL, and entirely developed under existing conditions, and thus would not conflict with forest land zoning. As stated above, implementation of the Ball Estates project would result in the loss of forest land at the project site and thus would conflict with forest land zoning as established by California Public Resources Code 12220(g). However, the project site is located within the ULL designated by the General Plan. Development in this area would conform to the General Plan policies

3-12 and 8-12 regarding the protection of forest resources. With implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-8**, the project's contribution to the cumulative impacts to forest resources would be reduced and the project would not result in a considerable contribution to a cumulative impact. None of the land within the County is used for timber harvesting; therefore, the project in combination with the other development within the County, would not result in cumulative impacts to forest resources.

4.2.6 REFERENCES

California Department of Conservation, 2014. *Table A-5 2012-2014 Land Use Conversion*.

California Department of Conservation, 2015. Williamson Act Program. Available: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/lca/stats_reports/Documents/2014%20LCA%20Status%20Report_March_2015.pdf. Accessed August 31, 2015.

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