

4.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

This chapter contains information about agriculture and forest resources in Vacaville relevant to the proposed General Plan and Energy and Conservation Action Strategy (ECAS). It provides an overview of the current regulatory framework, describes existing conditions, and analyzes the potential impacts related to agriculture and forest resources under the General Plan and ECAS. As noted in Chapter 3, Project Description, impacts are determined by comparing the proposed General Plan and ECAS to existing conditions, rather than to the existing General Plan. The following evaluation is based on a spatial analysis and examines whether farmland or forest land will be lost or converted to non-agricultural or non-forest use.

A. Regulatory Framework

This section summarizes key State and local regulations and programs pertaining to agriculture in Vacaville.

1. State Regulations and Programs

State regulations and programs pertaining to agricultural resources are discussed in this section.

a. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

Part of the California Natural Resources Agency, which is charged with restoring, protecting and maintaining the State's natural, cultural, and historical resources, the State Department of Conservation (DOC) provides technical services and information to promote informed land use decisions and sound management of the State's natural resources. DOC manages the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), which supports agriculture throughout California by developing maps and statistical data for analyzing land use impacts to farmland. Every two years, FMMP publishes a field report for each county in the state. The most recent field report for Solano County was published in 2010. The field report categorizes land by agricultural production potential, according to the following classifications:

- ◆ **Prime Farmland** has the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. Prime Farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agriculture production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
- ◆ **Farmland of Statewide Importance** is similar to Prime Farmland, but with minor shortcomings, such as steeper slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have

been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

- ◆ **Unique Farmland** consists of lesser quality soils used for the production of the State’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been farmed at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
- ◆ **Grazing Land** is the land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.
- ◆ **Urban and Built-Up Land** is occupied by structures with a building density of at least one unit per 1.5 acres, or approximately six structures to a 10-acre parcel. Common examples include residential structures, industrial structures, commercial structures, institutional facilities, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment structures, and water control structures.
- ◆ **Other Land** is land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low-density rural developments, brush, timber, wetlands, riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing, confined livestock, poultry facilities, aquaculture facilities, and strip mines. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.
- ◆ **Water** is used to describe perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

b. Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, better known as the Williamson Act, conserves agricultural and open space lands through property tax incentives and voluntary restrictive land use contracts administered by local governments under State regulations. Private landowners voluntarily restrict their land to agricultural and compatible open space uses under minimum ten-year rolling term contracts, with counties and cities also acting voluntarily. In return, restricted parcels are assessed for property tax purposes at a rate consistent with their actual use, rather than potential market value.¹

Nonrenewal status is applied to Williamson Act contracts that are within the nine-year termination process, during which the annual tax assessment for the property gradually increases.

c. Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)

This section of the Public Resources Code defines “forest land” for the purposes of CEQA. According to the Code, “forest land” is land that can support 10-percent native tree cover of any

¹ California Department of Conservation, 2002, *California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act Status Report*, page 1.

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.

d. Government Code Section 51104(g)

This section of the Government Codes defines “Timber,” “Timberland,” and “Timberland Production Zone” for the purposes of CEQA and “Timberland Preserve Zone,” which may be used in city and county General Plans.

- ◆ (e) “Timber” means trees of any species maintained for eventual harvest for forest production purposes, whether planted or of natural growth, standing or down, on privately or publicly owned land, including Christmas trees, but does not mean nursery stock.
- ◆ (f) “Timberland” means privately owned land, or land acquired for State forest purposes, which is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses, and which is capable of growing an average annual volume of wood fiber of at least 15 cubic feet per acre.
- ◆ (g) “Timberland Production Zone” or “TPZ” means an area which has 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 uses, as defined in subdivision (h). With respect to the general plans of cities and counties, “Timberland Preserve Zone” means “Timberland Production Zone.”

2. Solano County Regulations and Policies

The Solano County General Plan and Municipal Code include policies and regulations related to agriculture. These policies and regulations apply to the lands outside of the Vacaville city limits, which includes portions of the EIR Study Area.

a. Solano County General Plan

The Solano County General Plan, which was adopted in November 2008, is a long-range guide for the future of land use in the unincorporated areas of the county. The General Plan includes an Agriculture Element with goals and policies for agriculture that apply to lands adjacent to, and surrounding, Vacaville. The General Plan considers agriculture to be a significant business within Solano County and highlights agriculture as a major theme of the Plan. One specific provision requires using an urban-agricultural buffer of approximately 300 to 500 feet of vegetated land in municipal service areas between residential and agricultural uses.² Such buffers are considered tools that can be used both to minimize resident-farmer conflict and to reduce pesticide

² Solano County, November 2008, *General Plan*, Agriculture Chapter, page AG-14.

drift.³ The General Plan includes policies to strengthen the Williamson Act, encourage the conservation of water resources for agricultural purposes, and encourage water districts in the county to expand agricultural water usage and explore new water sources.

In addition, the General Plan establishes ten unique production regions defined by the agricultural environment. The five regions bordering Vacaville are the Dixon Ridge; Elmira and Maine Prairie; Jepson Prairie; Pleasants, Vaca, and Lagoon Valleys; and Western Hills regions. These regions are described in further detail in Section B.3, Agricultural Regions. Solano County General Plan land use standards for each region are as follows:

- ◆ **Dixon Ridge.** Agricultural production, processing facilities, and services are allowed in this region, with a minimum lot size of 40 acres.
- ◆ **Elmira and Maine Prairie.** Agricultural production, processing facilities, and services are allowed in this region. The General Plan requires a minimum lot size of 40 acres in Elmira, the northwest portion of the region, and 80 acres in the Maine Prairie, the southwest portion of the region.
- ◆ **Jepson Prairie.** The General Plan only allows agricultural production in this region, with a minimum lot size of 160 acres.
- ◆ **Pleasants, Vaca, and Lagoon Valleys.** Agricultural production, produce sales facilities, and agricultural tourism services are allowed in this region, with minimum lot sizes of 20 or 40 acres.
- ◆ **Western Hills.** The General Plan only allows agricultural production in this region. The minimum lot size west of Pleasant Valley Road is 160 acres; east of Pleasant Valley Road and in the Tri-City and county area, the minimum lot size is 20 acres.

b. Solano County Code

Chapter 2.2 of the Solano County Code, commonly known as the “Right-to-Farm Ordinance,” protects agricultural operations from nuisance complaints. Nuisance complaints against agricultural uses are most commonly issued when residential uses are located adjacent to agricultural operations. These complaints can cease or curtail agricultural operations and prevent investment in local agricultural infrastructure or operations that would result in a boost to the local economy. Chapter 2.2 protects the right of an agricultural operator to continue any agricultural operation that took place before the establishment of adjacent residential uses. Additionally, upon the purchase of real property in agricultural areas, the County notifies the buyers to accept inconveniences or discomforts resulting from nearby agricultural activities as a normal and necessary aspect of living in a county with a strong rural character and a healthy agriculture sector. To as-

³ Solano County, November 2008, *General Plan*, Agriculture Chapter, page AG-14.

sist in resolving problems between residential and agricultural land use, an Agricultural Grievance Committee has been created in Solano County to arbitrate and mediate disputes concerning agricultural operations.⁴

c. Land Conservation Contract⁵

As a method of implementing the Williamson Act locally, Solano County has adopted Uniform Rules and Procedures Governing Agricultural Preserves and Land Conservation Contracts (Uniform Rules). The Uniform Rules require a landowner to first establish an agricultural preserve prior to entering into a land conservation contract. An agricultural preserve officially devotes an area solely to agricultural, recreational, or open space uses. Once land is part of an agricultural preserve, then the property owner can enter into a land conservation contract with the County, which:

- ◆ Restricts land uses to agricultural, recreational, or open space for a minimum of ten years.
- ◆ Reduces property taxes for the length of the contract.
- ◆ Assesses property by agricultural production capacity, as opposed to fair market value or Proposition 13 value.

The Uniform Rules set forth permitted and compatible land uses for agricultural preserves. Land within an agricultural preserve for agricultural purposes must be maintained in commercial agricultural use and adhere to stated principles of compatibility. The Uniform Rules designate principal dwellings, secondary dwellings, companion living units, agricultural employee housing, and temporary single-family dwellings as consistent residential uses incidental to agricultural uses. A property owner may request a determination of compatibility by the County Planning Commission to establish that the compatibility criteria set forth in the Uniform Rules are met and that the land use is incidental to the commercial agricultural use of the property.

The Williamson Act, described in Section A.1.b, Williamson Act, provides that open space and recreational uses may be permitted on agricultural preserves. Allowable open space uses include scenic highway corridors, wildlife habitat areas, salt ponds, managed wetland areas, and submerged areas. Allowable recreational uses include the use of land, in its agricultural or natural state, by the public for walking, hiking, picnicking, camping, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, or other outdoor games or sports. Any fee charged for these recreational uses on the land

⁴ Solano County Code, <http://www.co.solano.ca.us/civica/filebank/blobdload.asp?BlobID=4607>, accessed on May 17, 2010.

⁵ Solano County, *Final Draft Solano County Uniform Rules and Procedures Governing Agricultural Preserves and Land Conservation Contracts*, January 3, 2008, <http://www.co.solano.ca.us/civica/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid=2492#page=>, accessed March 17, 2012.

shall be a “reasonable amount and shall not have the effect of unduly limits on its use by the public.”

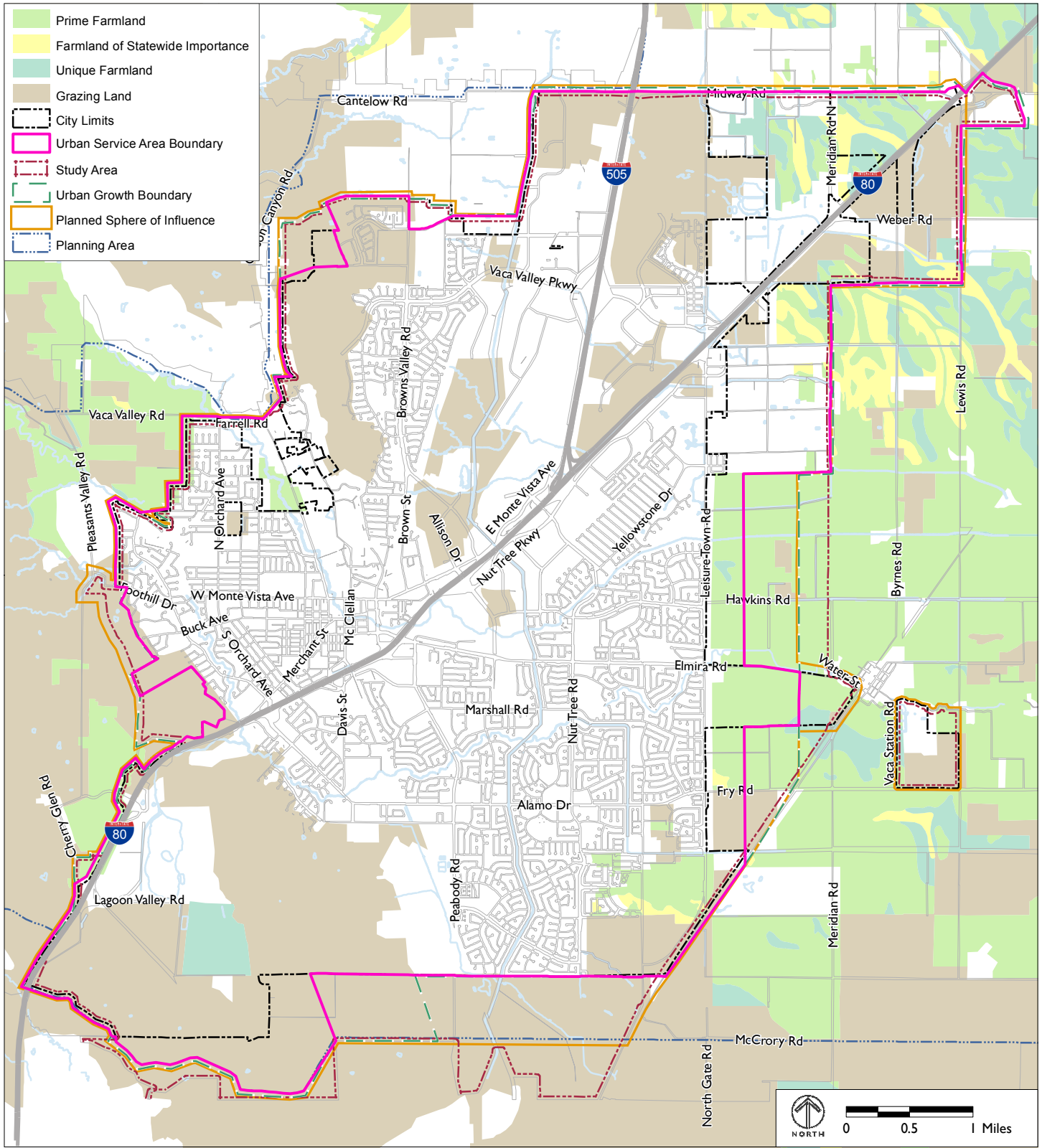
The Uniform Rules require that any land entered into a Williamson Act contract be designated as Intensive Agriculture, Extensive Agriculture, Watershed, or Marsh on the Solano County General Plan Land Use and Circulation Map, and that the land be zoned as Exclusive Agriculture, Limited Agriculture, Watershed and Conservation, or Marsh Preservation under the Solano County Zoning Code.

3. Urban Service Area Boundary and Master Water Agreement

The Urban Service Area Boundary, shown on Figure 4.2-1, is a result of the 1995 Master Water Agreement between the City and the Solano Irrigation District (SID). The SID is an independent special district and a local government agency that provides agricultural and domestic water to farms, families, and businesses within its jurisdiction. As part of the Master Water Agreement, which remains in effect until 2050, the City and SID committed to accommodate and support urban development within the Urban Service Area Boundary. Conversely, both entities have committed not to support urban development outside of the boundary, which is considered to be the SID’s agricultural service area. The agreement specifies that the City and SID could mutually amend the agreement to consider an easterly expansion of the Urban Service Area Boundary. Such an amendment would be required to allow water service in the East of Leisure Town Road and Northeast Growth Areas, areas that are designated for urban development under the proposed General Plan.

The City requires a 500-foot agricultural buffer between residential and agricultural uses. The agricultural buffer is intended to protect viable agricultural operations (particularly crops that require irrigation, tilling, and spraying) from the intrusion of urban uses. The Master Water Agreement stipulates that any proposal for the expansion of the Urban Service Area Boundary must consider the potential expansion of the City’s existing 500-foot agricultural buffer requirement.

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Source: City of Vacaville, 2010; California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2010.

Note: The farmland classifications shown in this figure are based on soil quality and irrigation status, and have a minimum mapping unit of 10 acres.

**FIGURE 4.2-1
 IMPORTANT FARMLANDS**

4. Vacaville Land Use and Development Code

The Vacaville Land Use and Development Code contains two agricultural zoning code districts: Agriculture (AG) and Agricultural Hillside (AH).⁶ The AG district accommodates long-term commercial animal-raising and crop cultivation, and typical uses and structures accessory to farm or ranch operation, such as grazing, farm employee housing, and seasonal roadside stands.⁷ The Land Use and Development Code lists specific intentions informing the standards in the AG district, including:

- ◆ Protect land for long-term agricultural use on land suitable for raising crops or livestock.
- ◆ Provide for interim agricultural uses on land potentially suitable for future development.
- ◆ Provide for single-family dwellings and accessory uses pertinent to a principal agricultural use.
- ◆ Prevent intrusion of urban development into prime agricultural areas.

The AH district is an area designated for low intensity agricultural uses on privately-held, typically steeply sloped, hillside lands.⁸ In the AH district, only one dwelling unit per 20 acres is permitted.⁹ Similar to the AG district, uses and structures accessory to agriculture, such as livestock stables and corrals, are also allowed in the AH district.¹⁰ The intent behind the AH designation includes:

- ◆ Providing for the continuation of agricultural uses in hillside areas.
- ◆ Ensuring that development with the AH district minimizes risk from natural hazards.
- ◆ Ensuring that area development complies with established policies and standards while providing a reasonable use of property.
- ◆ Ensuring that development does not result in unreasonable impact or hazard to urban development at lower elevations.
- ◆ Ensuring that development practically minimizes the impact on the sensitive natural environment of the hillside area.

⁶ City of Vacaville, April 12, 2011, *Municipal Code*, Land Use and Development Code, Division 14.09 Zoning.

⁷ City of Vacaville, April 12, 2011, *Municipal Code*, Land Use and Development Code, Division 14.09 Zoning, Chapter 14.09.097 Agriculture Districts – AG, Agriculture District Uses and Development Standards.

⁸ City of Vacaville, April 12, 2011, *Municipal Code*, Land Use and Development Code, Division 14.09 Zoning, Chapter 14.09.098 Agriculture Districts – AH, Agriculture Hillside District Uses and Development Standards.

⁹ City of Vacaville, April 12, 2011, *Municipal Code*, Land Use and Development Code, Division 14.09 Zoning, Chapter 14.09.098 Agriculture Districts – AH, Agriculture Hillside District Uses and Development Standards.

¹⁰ City of Vacaville, April 12, 2011, *Municipal Code*, Land Use and Development Code, Division 14.09 Zoning, Chapter 14.09.098 Agriculture Districts – AH, Agriculture Hillside District Uses and Development Standards.

While the Land Use and Development Code does not contain a zoning district for forest or timberland, development within the Open Space (OS) zoning district is subject to the following provision regarding woodland under Section 14.09.101.100 of the Code:

Woodland Vegetation and Habitat. All development shall be found by the decision-maker to minimize the disruption of woodland vegetation and wildlife habitat consistent with the provisions of the Fire Protection Standards referenced in this section.

In addition, Section 14.09.131 of the Land Use and Development Code includes tree preservation requirements that apply to any tree with a circumference of 31 inches or more when measured at 4½ feet above ground level. Removal of such trees requires a tree removal permit, which is issued by the City based on the condition of the tree, tree species, number of existing trees, sound forestry practices, the size of the tree, replacement trees, and the location of the tree.

B. Existing Conditions

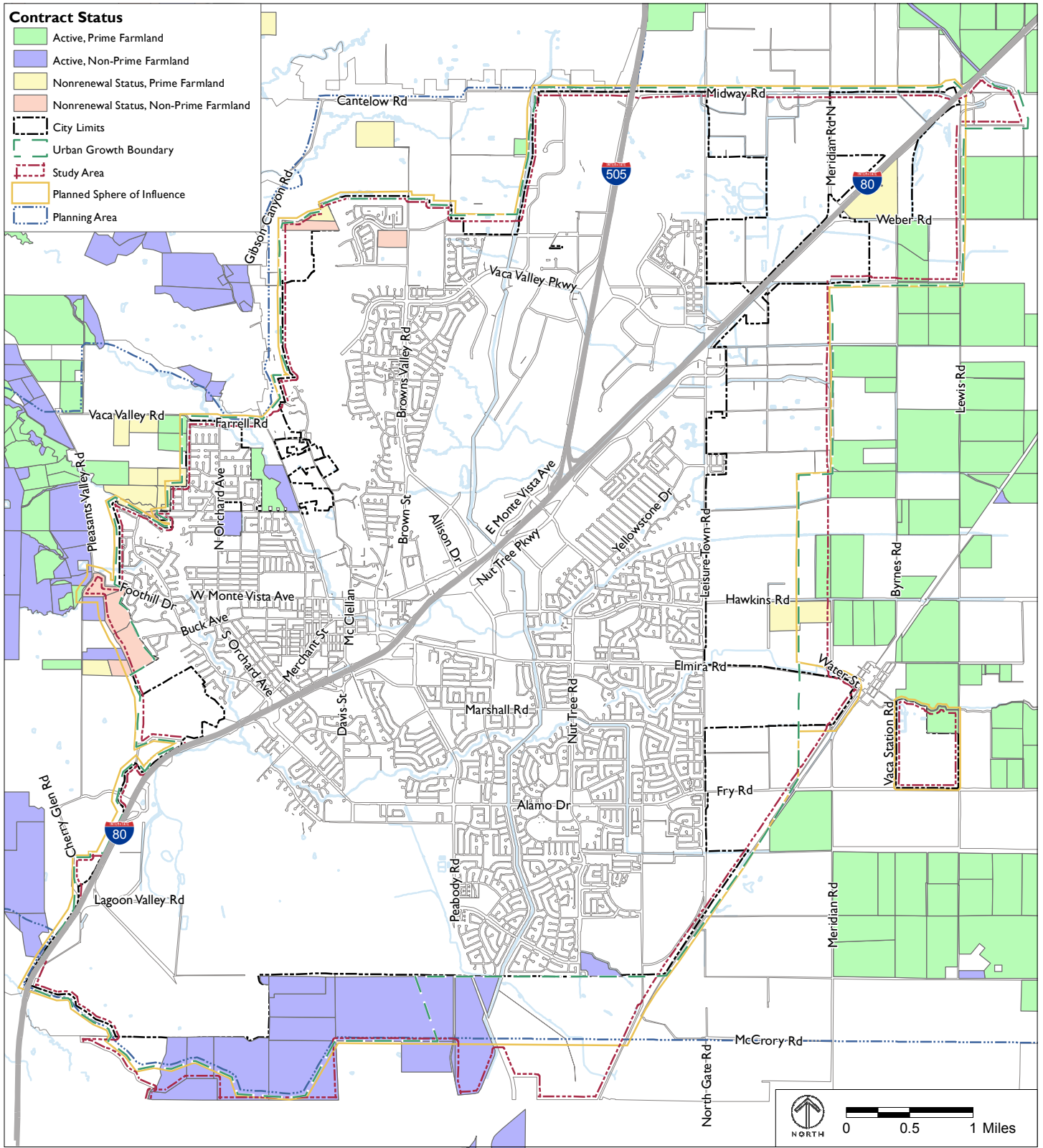
This section provides a general description of the existing agriculture and forest resources in Vacaville.

1. Important Farmland

A significant amount of agricultural land occurs outside of the Vacaville city limit and within the EIR Study Area. The EIR Study Area includes prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, unique farmland, and grazing land. The majority of agricultural land within the EIR Study Area is classified as grazing land. Table 4.2-1 lists the number of acres within the EIR Study Area in each classification. As shown in Figure 4.2-1, most of the prime farmland is located on the eastern side of the EIR Study Area. A significant block of prime farmland, about 1,500 contiguous acres, is located on the east side of Leisure Town Road, north of Fry Road. In the northeast portion of the EIR Study Area, the productivity of the soil is highly variable, resulting in a mix of prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, unique farmland, and grazing land.

Throughout the northern and southern limits of the EIR Study Area, the agricultural land is predominantly grazing land, with the exception of prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance at the southeastern boundary and one area of prime farmland in the Gibson Canyon area.

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Source: Solano County, 2010.

**FIGURE 4.2-2
 WILLAMSON ACT LANDS**

TABLE 4.2-1 **AGRICULTURAL LANDS WITHIN THE EIR STUDY AREA**

Classification	Acres
Prime Farmland	1,977
Farmland of Statewide Importance	246
Unique Farmland	570
Grazing Land	7,614
Total	10,407

Source: Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program GIS data, 2010.

2. Williamson Act Contracts

The Williamson Act is the most widely used agricultural easement program within the EIR Study Area, Solano County, and the State of California. As shown in Figure 4.2-2, there are active Williamson Act contracts on both prime and non-prime farmland within the EIR Study Area. Approximately 199 acres of prime farmland and 1,079 acres of non-prime farmland have active Williamson Act contracts in the EIR Study Area. There are also Williamson Act contracts in nonrenewal status within the EIR Study Area. Approximately 147 acres of prime farmland and 133 acres of non-prime farmland have Williamson Act contracts that are in non-renewal status.¹¹

3. Agricultural Regions

Agricultural-related businesses play a major role in Vacaville’s economy and agriculture continues to be a major land use in the area just beyond the Vacaville city limit, within the EIR Study Area, and throughout unincorporated Solano County.

Agricultural land located within the EIR Study Area is intricately linked to the larger agricultural landscape of Solano County. Agriculture in Solano County is a major land use, occupying approximately 362,000 acres, or 62 percent of the county’s total area.¹² Solano County boasts nine agricultural regions, each unique in the commodities grown, soil conditions, cultivation practices, and water conditions. The Solano County General Plan considers these regions as planning units for policy development.

¹¹ Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2010; and Solano County, 2010. Acreage numbers based on GIS data, as calculated by The Planning Center | DC&E, 2012.

¹² Richter, Kurt R. & Alvin D. Sokolow, 2007. *The Economic Roots of Solano County Agriculture*, page i.

Figure 4.2-3 shows the five agricultural regions in Solano County that border the City of Vacaville: Dixon Ridge; Elmira and Maine Prairie; Jepson Prairie; Pleasants, Vaca, and Lagoon Valleys; and Western Hills. Each of these five agricultural regions is described below.

a. Dixon Ridge

The Dixon Ridge agricultural region borders the City of Vacaville to the north. This region consists of the second most valuable farmland in Solano County, after the Winters region.¹³ The majority of the goods produced in this region are field crops, including tomatoes, alfalfa, and sunflowers. Also, two of the few processing facilities in Solano County, the Campbell Soup Plant and Superior Meat, are located in the Dixon Ridge region.

The Dixon Ridge region faces intense development pressure. The majority of development in this region is considered to be ranchette-type development, which generally takes place on parcels up to 5 acres in size and uses viable agricultural land for primarily residential purposes.

b. Elmira and Maine Prairie

The Elmira and Maine Prairie agricultural region borders Vacaville to the east. This region is primarily planted with field crops, such as alfalfa, corn, and wheat. These crops are commonly sold to dairies throughout the local area for livestock feed. The southern portion of the region is dedicated to grazing.

c. Jepson Prairie

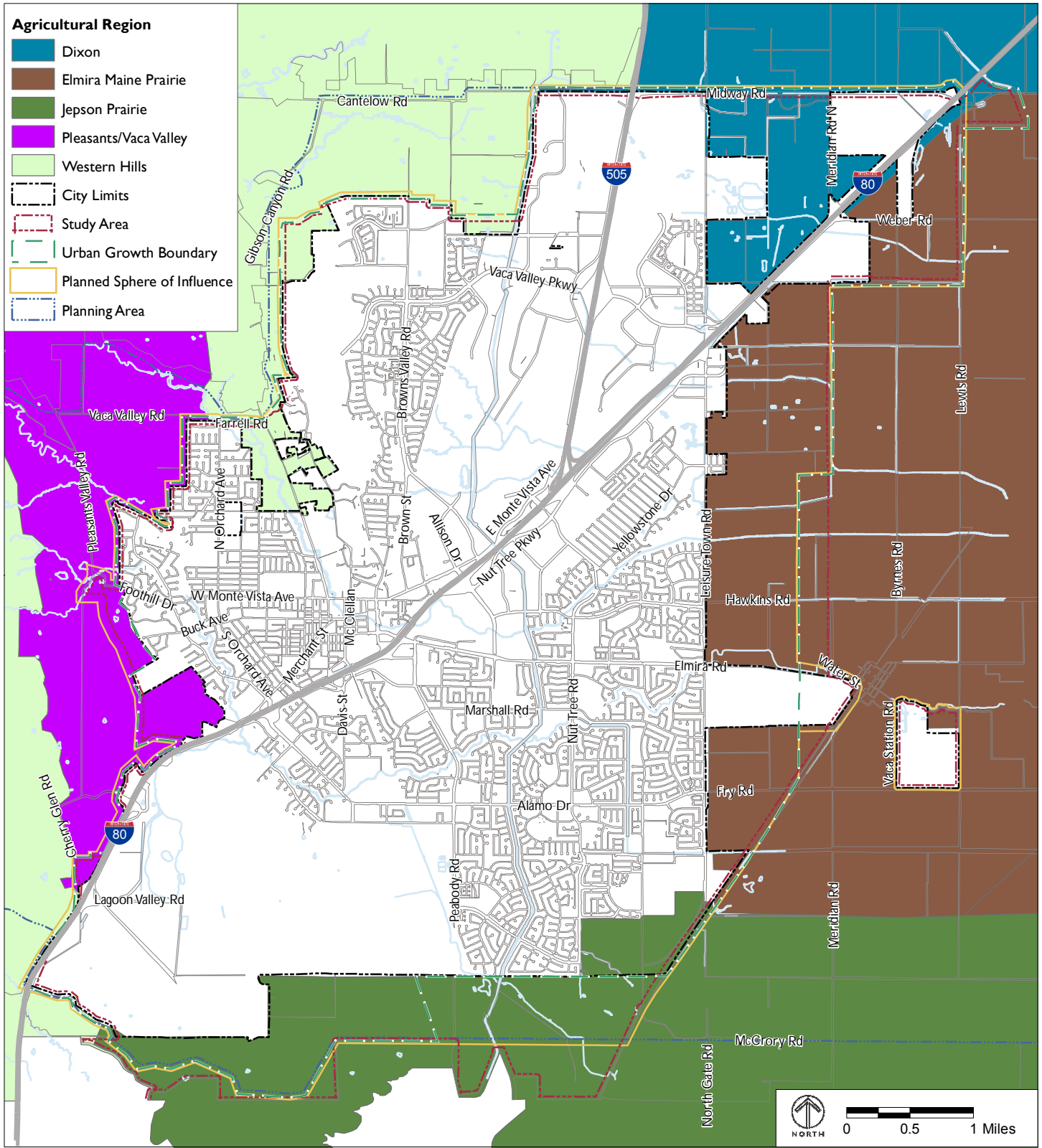
The Jepson Prairie region borders Vacaville to the south, and is dedicated to cattle and sheep grazing. This region has low rolling hills and vernal pool habitat.

d. Pleasants, Vaca, and Lagoon Valleys

The Pleasants, Vaca, and Lagoon Valleys region borders Vacaville to the northwest. This region is the most agriculturally diverse region in Solano County. It hosts a range of agricultural pursuits, from horse and livestock operations and wine grape growing to organic produce.

¹³ Richter, Kurt R. & Alvin D. Sokolow, 2007. *The Solano Agricultural Futures Project, The Economic Roots of Solano County Agriculture*, page 99.

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Source: CASIL, 1993 and 1996 and Solano County, 2008.

**FIGURE 4.2-3
 AGRICULTURAL REGIONS**

The University of California Agricultural Issues Center describes this area as producing “small-scale commodity and niche agriculture.”¹⁴ As a result of its high quality soils, combined with the intense pressure to develop the area due to its proximity to Vacaville, the region features progressive conservation efforts.

e. Western Hills

The Western Hills region northwest of Vacaville is characterized by grasslands, oak woodlands, and mountain plateaus. The steep slopes and lesser-quality agricultural soils limit agricultural productivity here. Consequently, cattle grazing is the primary use in this region.

4. Forest Land and Timberland

Isolated woodlands that could fall under California Public Resource Code Section 12220(g) are scattered throughout the southwestern and northern portions of the EIR Study Area, according to 2002 mapping data from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). These woodlands are shown in Figure 4.2-4 and are primarily located on hillsides and vacant and agricultural lands in these areas of the EIR Study Area. In the northern portion of the EIR Study Area, Figure 4.2-4 shows scattered woodlands on low-lying parcels; based on a review of aerial photography, some of these areas have been developed or have been cleared for future development since the 2002 data was mapped. CAL FIRE data also shows greater concentrations of woodlands beyond the EIR Study Area, to the west and north.

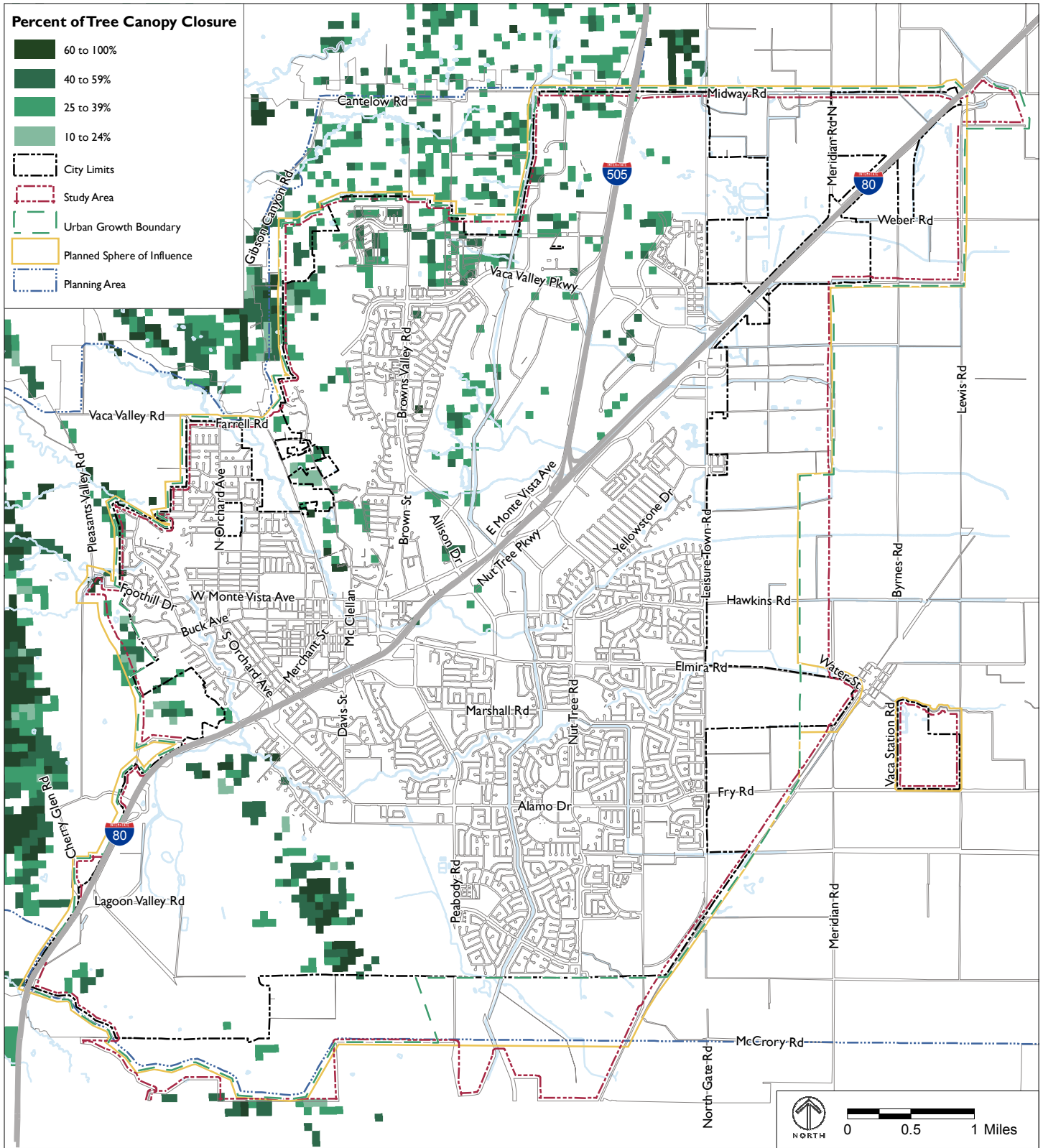
C. Standards of Significance

Implementation of the proposed General Plan and ECAS would have a significant impact on agriculture and forestry resources if they would:

- ◆ Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (farmlands of concern under CEQA), 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 an existing Williamson Act contract.
- ◆ 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)).

¹⁴ Richter, Kurt R. & Alvin D. Sokolow, 2007. *The Solano Agricultural Futures Project, The Economic Roots of Solano County Agriculture*, page 91.

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Source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 2002 and Solano County, 2008.

FIGURE 4.2-4
FOREST AND TIMBERLAND

- ◆ 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 farmlands of concern under CEQA, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

D. Impact Discussion

This section discusses potential impacts of the proposed General Plan on agriculture and forestry resources. Implementation of the proposed ECAS would have minimal agriculture and forestry resource impacts and is discussed, where relevant, in the sections below.

1. Project Impacts

The discussion of potential project impacts is organized by and responds to each of the potential impacts identified in the Standards of Significance.

- a. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (farmlands of concern under CEQA), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use.

As shown in Table 4.2-1, the EIR Study Area contains 1,977 acres of Prime Farmland, 246 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 570 acres of Unique Farmland. The proposed General Plan would have a significant impact if it would result in the conversion of these lands to non-agricultural use.

The proposed General Plan designates approximately 2,640 acres of farmlands of concern under CEQA for non-agricultural uses (i.e. any designation except Agriculture or Hillside Agriculture).¹⁵ The largest areas that would be converted to non-agricultural use from development allowed by the proposed General Plan are as follows:

- ◆ In the northeastern portion of the EIR Study Area, on both sides of Interstate 80, where lands are designated for various residential, commercial, technology park, public, and public park uses.
- ◆ To the east of Leisure Town Road, where lands are designated for various residential, commercial, and public park uses and schools.
- ◆ South of the lagoon, where the proposed General Plan calls for residential golf course uses.

¹⁵ Acreage numbers based on GIS data, as calculated by The Planning Center | DC&E, 2012.

- ◆ In the southeastern portion of the EIR Study Area, east of Vanden Road and south of Alamo Drive, where lands are designated for various residential and public park uses.

In addition, the proposed ECAS includes measures that would promote the development of alternative energy facilities. If such facilities were located in farmlands of importance, they would be converted to a non-agricultural use.

The City of Vacaville maintains its UGB as a strategy to protect agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural use. Goal LU-5 in the proposed General Plan and its associated policies outline the City's strategy to protect agricultural lands beyond the UGB. Policy LU-P5.4 outlines the central premise of the UGB, "so that urban development within the City's land use jurisdiction will be focused within the Urban Growth Boundary and the land outside the Urban Growth Boundary within the City's land use jurisdiction will be maintained primarily for agriculture, park, open space, public facility, and utility uses."

In addition, Policy LU-P8.1 directs the City to work with the County to "ensure land uses outside the Sphere of Influence and Urban Growth Boundary, but within the Planning Area, remain in agricultural or open space use," with some exceptions based on the Solano County General Plan. To implement this policy, the proposed General Plan includes Action LU-A8.1, which directs the City to maintain and implement agreements with the Solano Irrigation District, nearby cities, and Solano County, and negotiate agreements with other local government entities to help direct the provision of urban services to urban areas while maintaining as much viable agriculture on prime agricultural soils as is practical. Policy COS-P3.1 directs the City to maintain a compact urban form and locate new development to minimize the loss of agricultural resources. Policy COS-P3.3 encourages the continued agricultural use of land within the Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area, which is discussed below, and Planning Area that is currently being used for agricultural purposes. Policy COS-P3.4 directs the City to work cooperatively with non-profit organizations, such as land trusts, to preserve agricultural land within the Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area. Action COS-A3.1 directs the City to adopt an Agriculture Preservation Policy that addresses the width, location, and allowed uses in the 500-foot agricultural buffer, and addresses the right-to-farm.

These policies and actions describe the City's intent to concentrate growth within the city, Sphere of Influence, and UGB as a means to protect agricultural lands outside of the UGB from conversion to non-agricultural use.

The proposed General Plan also outlines a mitigation strategy that would apply to a portion of the agricultural lands that would be converted to non-agricultural use by development allowed by the General Plan. The proposed General Plan includes a Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area, which covers lands located within 1 mile of the eastern boundary of the UGB. Policy LU-

P2.4 requires development in the East of Leisure Town Road Growth Area to purchase conservation easements to permanently protect lands within the Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area at a ratio of 1 acre of conserved agricultural land per 1 acre of developed agricultural land. If for any reason an adequate amount of agricultural conservation land cannot be identified or acquired within the Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area, the City and the Solano Land Trust or other land conservation entity will identify other areas located within 1 mile of the eastern boundary of the Permanent Agriculture Overlay Area where conservation acquisitions can occur to satisfy the City's conservation goals. Implementation of this mitigation strategy would ensure that the loss of agricultural lands within the area east of Leisure Town Road is offset by the preservation of other agricultural lands nearby.

Although the proposed General Plan contains a strategy to protect agricultural lands beyond the UGB from conversion to non-agricultural use and includes a mitigation program to offset the loss of agricultural lands east of Leisure Town Road, the conversion of 2,640 acres of farmlands of concern under CEQA to non-agricultural uses would be a *significant* impact.

Impact AG-1: Although the proposed General Plan includes policies and actions that would reduce and partially offset the conversion of farmland, it designates approximately 2,640 acres of farmlands of concern under CEQA for non-agricultural uses.

Because these farmland areas are located near existing urbanized areas, they may not be viable for agricultural operations due to conflicts with nearby urbanized areas. The only way to mitigate this impact would be to prohibit any development on farmland of concern, even within the UGB. The UGB identifies where future urban development is appropriate and was adopted as such by the City Council. CEQA does not require that the project be changed in order to avoid an impact, and no additional mitigation is available, resulting in a *significant and unavoidable* impact.

b. Conflict with an existing Williamson Act contract.

Approximately 199 acres of prime farmland and 1,079 acres of non-prime farmland have active Williamson Act contracts in the EIR Study Area.¹⁶ These areas are shown in Figure 4.2-2. Some of these areas are designated for agricultural use under the proposed General Plan, which would avoid a conflict with Williamson Act contracts on these sites.

In addition, as shown in Figure 4.2-2, several portions of the EIR Study Area are under Williamson Act contracts in non-renewal status: 147 acres of prime farmland and 133 acres of non-

¹⁶ Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2010; and Solano County, 2010. Acreage numbers based on GIS data, as calculated by The Planning Center | DC&E, 2012.

prime farmland have Williamson Act contracts that are in non-renewal status.¹⁷ Nonrenewal status is applied to Williamson Act contracts that are within the nine-year termination process, during which the annual tax assessment for the property gradually increases. The proposed General Plan includes non-agricultural designations for some of the parcels under non-renewal Williamson Act contracts, but it is assumed that new development under the proposed General Plan land use designations would not occur until the end of the non-renewal period, consistent with Williamson Act restrictions.

To assess the potential impacts of the proposed General Plan, the following discussion focuses on parcels that are under active Williamson Act contracts and are designated for non-agricultural land uses (i.e. any designation except Agriculture or Hillside Agriculture) under the proposed General Plan.

The largest portion of the EIR Study Area with active Williamson Act contracts is located to the south of the city limit, and the majority of this area is designated as Hillside Agriculture by the proposed General Plan and would therefore remain in a use compatible with Williamson Act requirements. However, a small portion of this area, located in Lagoon Valley, is designated as Residential Golf Course by the proposed General Plan. Although this area is already designated for development under the existing General Plan and the approved development plan for Lagoon Valley, and the Lagoon Valley Specific Plan EIR has been certified (SCH No. 2003032063), development has not yet occurred, and the area is currently open space.

As described in Chapter 3, Project Description, CEQA requires a comparison of the proposed project to existing conditions on the ground rather than a comparison to what would be allowed by an existing plan. Even though the General Plan does not change any approved projects, this EIR must consider the impacts of implementation of the General Plan on the existing conditions. The Residential Golf Course designation permits residential uses in conjunction with a golf course development or comparable large recreation center. Under the Uniform Rules set forth by Solano County to implement the Williamson Act, such uses would require a determination of compatibility by the County Planning Commission and it would be unlikely that these uses could be considered incidental to ongoing agricultural use. Therefore, these uses would conflict with an active Williamson Act contract.

Additional active Williamson Act contracts exist within the EIR Study Area that are similarly designated for non-agricultural uses by the proposed General Plan:

- ◆ To the southeast of the city limit, east of the intersection of Nut Tree Road and Foxboro Parkway, a parcel is designated for residential use.

¹⁷ Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2010; and Solano County, 2010. Acreage numbers based on GIS data, as calculated by The Planning Center | DC&E, 2012.

- ◆ To the northeast of the city limit, south of Interstate 80 and north of Kilkenny Road, two parcels are designated as Technology Park.
- ◆ Northwest of the Downtown, along Gibson Canyon Road, two parcels are designated for residential use.
- ◆ An unincorporated pocket at the intersection of North Orchard Avenue and Fruitvale Road is designated for residential and park use.

Development allowed by the proposed General Plan on all of these sites would require a determination of compatibility and would be expected to conflict with Williamson Act compatibility requirements.

All of the lands under active Williamson Act contracts in the EIR Study Area are outside of the current city limits and therefore would not be developed under the proposed General Plan until annexed to the City. Upon annexation, proposed General Plan land use designations would apply. Under the County's Uniform Rules, lands under Williamson Act contracts must be under agricultural land use and zoning designations. Therefore, upon annexation, the proposed General Plan designations would conflict with the Uniform Rules for any remaining Williamson Act contracts.

In summary, future development allowed by the proposed non-agricultural land use designations on 206 acres would be incompatible with agricultural uses on Williamson Act lands, and proposed land use designations would conflict with Uniform Rule requirements applicable to Williamson Act contracts. This would be a *significant* impact.

Impact AG-2: The proposed General Plan designates 206 acres of lands with active Williamson Act contracts for non-agricultural uses.

Because these parcels with Williamson Act contracts are located near existing urbanized areas, they may not be viable for agricultural operations due to conflicts with nearby urbanized areas. As discussed under Section D.1.a, Project Impacts, above, no additional mitigation is available, resulting in a *significant and unavoidable* impact.

- c. 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)).

The Vacaville Land Use and Development Code does not contain a zoning district for forest or timberland. Therefore, the proposed General Plan would not conflict with or rezone existing zoning for forest or timberland and there would be *no impact*.

- d. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

As shown in Figure 4.2-4, according to 2002 mapping data from CAL FIRE, forest and timberland areas exist in certain areas of the EIR Study Area. CAL FIRE data also shows greater concentrations of woodlands beyond the EIR Study Area, to the west and north.

The majority of these areas are located on hillside areas, where development potential is low. In the northern portion of the EIR Study Area, Figure 4.2-4 shows the existence of tree density scattered on low-lying parcels designed for residential and industrial uses under the proposed General Plan. Since the time that the 2002 data was compiled, some of these areas have been developed or cleared for future development.

As described in Section D.1.a, Project Impacts, the City of Vacaville maintains a UGB that allows urban development within the UGB as a means to protect greater amounts of land from development beyond the boundary. Although the General Plan would allow development on some areas that contain woodlands, the General Plan would also protect contiguous woodland areas with a greater density of trees outside the UGB from development.

In addition, the proposed General Plan includes the following policies and actions that would minimize the loss of forest land:

- ◆ Policy COS-P1.4 directs the City to continue to protect mature trees and existing native non-agricultural trees.
- ◆ Policy COS-P1.6 requires that new development minimize the disturbance of natural habitats and vegetation, and requires revegetation of disturbed natural habitat areas with native or non-invasive naturalized species.
- ◆ Policy COS-P1.14 requires new development that would result in the loss or conversion of woodland resources to develop and implement a plan that clusters impacts in order to reduce tree removal and impacts to trees to the maximum extent feasible.

- ◆ Action COS-A1.3 directs the City to amend Section 14.09.131, Supplemental Standards, Tree Preservation, of the Land Use and Development Code to include tree protection measures for native trees and woodland habitat.
- ◆ Action COS-A1.7 directs the City to amend the Land Use and Development Code to require that new development mitigate all impacted oak woodland and oak savanna habitats by preserving oak woodland and oak savanna habitat with similar tree canopy densities at a 3:1 ratio (preservation: impact).
- ◆ Action COS-A1.8 directs the City to amend the Land Use and Development Code to require that applicants for development projects that would impact oak woodland and oak savanna prepare and implement a long-term management plan for oak woodland and oak savanna areas that are protected as open space and a mitigation plan to address short-term impacts.
- ◆ Action COS-A1.9 directs the City to amend Chapter 14.09.131 of the Land Use and Development Code (Tree Preservation) to set forth replacement ratios for native and non-native trees with a diameter at breast height (dbh) of 6 inches or greater. Replacement trees would be planted as part of a mitigation plan that would be reviewed by City staff on a case-by-case basis.

Furthermore, as discussed in Section A.4, Vacaville Land Use and Development Code, the City requires a tree removal permit for the removal of any tree with a circumference of 31 inches or more when measured at 4½ feet above ground level.

With implementation of the proposed General Plan policies and the Land Use and Development Code tree preservation requirements, and the impact related to the loss of forest land would be *less than significant*.

- e. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmlands of concern under CEQA to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

The land use map in the proposed General Plan, particularly within the Growth Areas, was generally developed to arrange new designations to place compatible uses adjacent to existing rural residential uses. For example, Residential Low Medium Density designations are located along Leisure Town Road, while Rural Residential designations adjoin Locke Paddon. Nevertheless, the proposed General Plan would allow development that could result in potentially incompatible urban uses for farms or ranches, creating circumstances that impair the productivity and profitability of agricultural operation, and could eventually lead farmers to take their land out of production. For example, complaints from new residents about noise, dust and chemical use from agricultural operations, and concerns of farmers and ranchers about increased vandalism, traffic, access difficulties and the introduction of domestic animals, can lower productivity. Ad-

adjacent urban development may also drive up land values, increasing the property tax burden for farmland not protected by Williamson Act contracts.

Because the forest lands in the EIR Study Area are not actively used for timber harvesting operations, it is unlikely that adjacent urban development would be incompatible with the forest land uses and result in the conversion of forest lands.

As described in Section D.1.a, Project Impacts, the City of Vacaville maintains its UGB as a strategy to protect agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural use. The UGB constrains urban development within its boundary, and maintains the land outside the UGB for agriculture, park, open space, public facility, and utility uses. In addition to protecting lands outside the UGB from direct conversion to urban uses, this strategy protects these lands from indirect conversion, which could occur if incompatible uses were developed alongside the agricultural uses.

In addition, the proposed General Plan includes the following policies and actions that would minimize potential conflicts between agricultural and urban uses:

- ◆ Action COS-A3.1 directs the City to adopt an Agriculture Preservation Policy that addresses the width, location, and allowed uses in the 500-foot agricultural buffer, and addresses the right to farm.
- ◆ Policy COS-P4.1 requires new development in the area east of Leisure Town Road to maintain a 500-foot wide agricultural buffer along the eastern boundary of all residential development and existing agricultural lands. The portion of the buffer that is located adjacent to the Pacific Gas & Electric Company easement and inside the Urban Growth Boundary must contain substantial landscaping to discourage unlawful access onto the agricultural lands, and to lessen the potential impacts of typical agricultural activities on residential uses.
- ◆ Policy COS-P4.2 requires a disclosure to residents of interim residential development in areas east of Leisure Town Road that agricultural operations happen nearby and that they will be exposed to impacts from such operations, such as dust, noise, and odors.
- ◆ Policy COS-P4.5 prohibits the conversion of agricultural buffer lands to developed urban uses.
- ◆ Action COS-A4.1 directs the City to adopt an Agricultural Buffer Policy and zoning district.

Furthermore, as discussed in Section A.2.b, Solano County Code, the Solano County Code contains a “Right-to-Farm Ordinance,” under which the County notifies property buyers to accept inconveniences or discomforts resulting from nearby agricultural activities, thereby protecting

agricultural operations from nuisance complaints. The proposed General Plan also includes Action COS-A4.2, which directs the City to adopt a right-to-farm ordinance as well.

With implementation of the proposed General Plan policies and actions discussed above, as well as the County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance, the impact would be *less than significant*.

2. Cumulative Impacts

The California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit forecasts that the Central Valley's population will more than double by the year 2040 to almost 10 million people.¹⁸ According to the American Farmland Trust, if current land use trends continue, by 2040 nearly 900,000 acres of Central Valley farmland would be converted to urban uses and ranchette development and another 2 million or more acres of agriculture could be compromised by potential conflicts with nearby urban uses.¹⁹ More locally, the Solano County General Plan EIR estimates that over 21,000 acres of agricultural land would be converted to an urban land use in Solano County by 2030.²⁰

Development allowed by the proposed General Plan would contribute to these cumulative agricultural impacts. Although the proposed General Plan policies and actions described in Section D.1, Project Impacts, would reduce and partially offset Vacaville's contribution to these impacts, the overall cumulative agricultural impact would remain significant. Because the amount of growth foreseen in the region and the decisions of surrounding areas regarding conversion of agricultural land are outside the control of Vacaville, the impact is *significant and unavoidable*.

Impact AG-3: Although the policies and actions in the proposed General Plan would reduce and partially offset regional agricultural impacts, the proposed project would contribute to cumulatively significant agricultural impacts in the region.

The amount of growth foreseen in the region and the decisions of surrounding counties regarding conversion of agricultural land are outside the control of Vacaville. Therefore, this impact is *significant and unavoidable*.

¹⁸ American Farmland Trust website, accessed June 23, 2012. <http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/futureisnow/projections.asp>.

¹⁹ American Farmland Trust website, accessed June 23, 2012. <http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/futureisnow/projections.asp>.

²⁰ Solano County, April 18, 2008, *Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Solano County 2008 General Plan*, Page 6-9.

E. Full Buildout

The full buildout anticipated under the proposed General Plan would include significantly more development than the 2035 horizon-year development projection analyzed in Section D, Impact Discussion, in terms of both the amount and the extent of development. Therefore, the potential for impacts to agriculture and forestry resources would increase. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Project Description, it is extremely unlikely that full buildout would ever occur under the proposed General Plan. Therefore, an analysis of full buildout is not required by CEQA.

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