

3.1 Agricultural and Forestry Resources

This section describes the affected environment and regulatory settings for agricultural and forestry resources in the Plan Area. Impacts that would result from implementing the proposed action and alternatives are described in Chapter 4, *Environmental Consequences*, along with mitigation measures to reduce impacts, where appropriate.

3.1.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal

There are no federal laws or regulations pertaining to agricultural and forestry resources that are relevant to the proposed action or alternatives.

State

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

CEQA includes a finding that the conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses threatens the long-term health of the state's agricultural economy. Impacts on agricultural resources are evaluated on the basis of a project's potential to affect land designated as Important Farmland (Figure 3.1-1). In California, the farmland classification system developed by the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) is the primary system used to evaluate the quality and distribution of farmland in California. The FMMP prepares Important Farmland maps approximately every 2 years for most of the state's agricultural regions on the basis of soil survey information and land inventory and monitoring criteria developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The farmland classification system used by the FMMP consists of eight mapping categories: five categories of agricultural lands and three categories of nonagricultural lands. The characteristics of these categories are described below.

Agricultural Land

- **Prime Farmland.** Prime Farmland is defined by the state as "irrigated land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops." Prime Farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. To be designated as Prime Farmland, the land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date (California Department of Conservation 2016a).
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance.** The state defines Farmland of Statewide Importance as "irrigated land similar to Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of agricultural crops." However, this land has minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture than Prime Farmland. In order for land to be designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance, it must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date (California Department of Conservation 2016a).

- **Unique Farmland.** Unique Farmland is considered to consist of lower-quality soils and is used for production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. To qualify for this designation, land must have been used for crops at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Local Importance.** Farmland of Local Importance is important to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.
- **Grazing Land.** Grazing Land is land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category is used only in California and was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association, the University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities.

Nonagricultural Lands

- **Urban and Built-up Lands.** Urban and Built-up Lands consist of land occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately six structures to a 10-acre parcel. This type of land is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administration, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.
- **Other Land.** Other Land is land not included in any other mapping category. Examples include low-density rural developments and brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing. This category also includes vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; strip mines; borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than 40 acres.
- **Water.** Water includes perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act, or Williamson Act, is one of the state's primary mechanisms for conserving farmland. The Williamson Act enables counties and cities to designate agricultural preserves (Williamson Act lands) and offer preferential taxation to private agricultural landowners based on the income-producing value of their property in agricultural use, rather than on the property's assessed market value. In return for the preferential tax rate, the landowner is required to sign a contract with the county or city agreeing not to develop the land for a minimum 10-year period or 20 years for a Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) contract. An FSZ is an area created within an agricultural preserve by a county upon request by a landowner or group of landowners. A FSZ contract provides a landowner with a greater property tax deduction than the traditional Williamson Act contract in exchange for a commitment to a 20-year contract. Both types of Williamson Act contracts are automatically renewed annually unless a party to the contract files for non-renewal or petitions for cancellation. If the landowner chooses not to renew the contract, it expires at the end of its duration. Under certain circumstances, a county or city may approve cancellation of a Williamson Act contract. Cancellation requires the county or city to make specific findings in support of the cancellation and private landowners to pay back-taxes and cancellation fees. Under certain circumstances, a Williamson Act contract may be used to protect lands for open space and recreational uses.

Permissible land uses under Williamson Act contracts are governed by Government Code Section 51238.1. Each city and county has the discretion to determine land uses that are or are not compatible with Williamson Act contracts, provided these uses are not prohibited under the act. The following are categories into which land can be placed under the Williamson Act.

Prime Agricultural Land

Prime Agricultural Land enrolled under Williamson Act contract meets any of the following criteria.

1. Land that is Class I or Class II in the NRCS land use capability classification system.
2. Land that rates 80–100 in the Storie Index Rating system.
3. Land that supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by USDA.
4. Land planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes, or crops that have a non-bearing period of less than 5 years and will normally return during the commercial-bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than \$200 per acre.
5. Land that has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production with an annual gross value of not less than \$200 per acre for 3 of the previous 5 years.

Non-Prime Agricultural Land

Non-Prime Agricultural Land enrolled under Williamson Act contract is other agricultural land that does not meet any of the criteria for classification listed above for Prime Agricultural Land. Non-Prime Agricultural Land is defined as Open Space Land of Statewide Significance under the California Open Space Subvention Act and may be identified as such in other documents. Most Non-Prime Agricultural Land is used for grazing or nonirrigated crops. However, Non-Prime Agricultural Land may also include other open space uses compatible with agriculture and consistent with local general plans.

Land in Non-Renewal

The non-renewal period begins with a Notice of Non-Renewal from the county or city, and the contract is terminated at the end of the non-renewal period. During the non-renewal process, the annual tax assessment gradually increases.

Local

Placer County General Plan

The general distribution and location and the extent of allowable uses for agricultural lands within a given city or county is typically designated by the land use element in the general plan. In California, it is common for local planning documents to include goals and policies aimed at balancing the preservation of existing agricultural land with the increasing demands for housing and other types of urbanization or non-agricultural uses.

Excerpted below are the relevant goals and policies from the *Placer County General Plan* that pertain to agriculture (Placer County 2013).

Goals

- 1.H.** To designate adequate agricultural land and promote development of agricultural uses to support the continued viability of Placer County's agricultural economy.
- 7.A.** To provide for the long-term conservation and use of agriculturally-designated lands.
- 7.B.** To minimize existing and future conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses in agriculturally-designated areas.
- 7.C.** To protect and enhance the economic viability [of] Placer County's agricultural operations.

Policies

- 1.H.1.** The County shall maintain agriculturally-designated areas for agricultural uses and direct urban uses to designated urban growth areas and/or cities.
- 1.H.2.** The County shall seek to ensure that new development and public works projects do not encourage expansion of urban uses into designated agricultural areas.
- 1.H.4.** The County shall allow the conversion of existing agricultural land to urban uses only within community plan areas and within city spheres of influence where designated for urban development on the General Plan Land Use Diagram.
- 7.A.1.** The County shall protect agriculturally-designated areas from conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- 7.A.2.** The County shall ensure that unincorporated areas within city spheres of influence that are designated for agricultural uses are maintained in large parcel sizes of 10-acre minimums or larger.
- 7.A.3.** The County shall encourage continued and, where possible, increased agricultural activities on lands suited to agricultural uses.
- 7.A.7.** The County shall maintain agricultural lands in large parcel sizes to retain viable farming units.
- 7.A.11.** The County shall support appropriate efforts by private conservation organizations to use conservation easements as a tool for agricultural preservation.
- 7.A.12.** The County shall actively encourage enrollments of agricultural lands in its Williamson Act program.
- 7.B.1.** The County shall identify and maintain clear boundaries between urban/suburban and agricultural areas and require land use buffers between such uses where feasible, except as may be determined to be unnecessary or inappropriate within a Specific Plan as part of the Specific Plan approval. These buffers shall occur on the parcel for which the development permit is sought and shall favor protection of the maximum amount of farmland.
- 7.B.2.** The County shall weigh the economic benefits of surface mining against the value of preserving agriculture when considering mineral extraction proposals on land designated for agricultural use.
- 7.B.4.** The County shall continue to enforce the provisions of its Right-to-Farm Ordinance and of the existing state nuisance law.
- 7.C.6.** The County shall ensure that land use regulations do not arbitrarily restrict potential agricultural-related enterprises which could provide supplemental sources of income for farm operators.

Placer County Right to Farm Ordinance

The purpose of Placer County's (County's) Right to Farm Ordinance is to reduce the loss of commercial agriculture resources to the County by limiting the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be deemed to constitute a nuisance. Under the ordinance, no agricultural activity, operation, or facility conducted or maintained for commercial purposes shall be

or become a nuisance, private or public, due to any changed condition in or about the locality, after being in operation for more than 1 year, provided the activity, operation, or facility was not a nuisance when it began.

Placer County Zoning Ordinance Sections 17.08.010, 17.10.010, and 17.64.090

Zoning Ordinance Section 17.64.090 establishes limitations on land uses in agricultural preserves, open space preserves, and FSZs. Relevant compatible uses allowed on land under Williamson Act contract include, in addition to agricultural uses, open space uses defined as fisheries and game preserves.

The Zoning Ordinance also establishes two zone districts, Farm and Agricultural Exclusive, which regulate land uses in agricultural areas.

Sutter County General Plan

Excerpted below are the relevant goal and policies from the *Sutter County General Plan* that pertain to agriculture (Sutter County 2011).

Goal

AG 1. Preserve and protect high-quality agricultural lands for long-term agricultural production.

Policies

AG 1.1 Agricultural Land Preservation. Preserve and maintain agriculturally designated lands for agricultural use and direct urban/suburban and other nonagricultural related development to the cities, unincorporated rural communities, and other clearly defined and comprehensively planned development areas.

AG 1.5 Agricultural Land Conversion. Discourage the conversion of agricultural land to other uses unless all of the following findings can be made:

- a. The net community benefit derived from conversion of the land outweighs the need to protect the land for long-term agricultural use
- b. There are no feasible alternative locations for the proposed use that would appreciably reduce impacts upon agricultural lands
- c. The use will not have significant adverse effects, or can mitigate such effects, upon existing and future adjacent agricultural lands and operations (*AG 1-A*)

AG 1.6 Interrelationship with Habitat Conservation. Permit agriculturally designated lands to be used for habitat conservation and/or mitigation with approval of a development agreement, provided such use does not interfere or adversely affect existing or planned agricultural uses or impact County flood control operations. (*AG 1-A*)

AG 1.13 Cooperation with Other Agencies. Coordinate with the cities, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), local service providers, and other relevant agencies on joint mechanisms to preserve agricultural lands and limit urban encroachment.

City of Lincoln General Plan

Excerpted below are the relevant goals and policies from the *City of Lincoln General Plan* that pertain to agriculture (City of Lincoln 2008).

Goals

LU-1. To grow in orderly pattern consistent with the economic, social, and environmental needs of Lincoln.

LU-5. To retain rural designations for large parcels of land outside the city limits but within the Planning Area, until annexed to city.

Policies

LU-1.11 Natural Resource Conservation. To promote a high quality of life within the community, the City will in conjunction with related polices in other general plan elements, promote the retention of natural open space areas, greenbelts and the provision of adequate parks as part of approving new land use designs.

LU-1.14 Land Use Conflicts. The City shall continue to apply the regulations and procedures of the City's Zoning Ordinance and shall use the environmental process to prevent or mitigate land use conflicts.

LU-5.3. Protect Agriculture. The City shall ensure that agricultural land uses are not prematurely terminated by protecting the continued operation of agricultural land uses.

LU-5.4. Agricultural Buffers. The City shall require that agricultural land uses designated for long-term protection (i.e., in a Williamson Act contract or under a conservation easement) shall be buffered from urban land uses through the use of techniques including, but not limited to, greenbelts, open space setbacks, soundwalls, fencing and berming.

LU-5.5. Agricultural Disclosure. Residential developments locating next to active agricultural areas will have a notice included in the deed notifying buyers of the agricultural use.

3.1.2 Environmental Setting

Agricultural Land Use Designations in Western Placer County

The *Placer County General Plan* establishes one agricultural land use designation. The Agriculture (AG) (10, 20, 40, 80–160 acre minimum) designation identifies land for the production of food and fiber, including areas of prime agricultural soils, and other productive and potentially production lands where commercial agricultural uses can exist without creating conflicts with other land uses, or where potential conflicts can be mitigated.

The AG designation allows crop production, orchards and vineyards, grazing, pasture and rangeland, hobby farms, other resource extraction activities, facilities that directly support agricultural operations (such as agricultural products processing), and necessary public utility and safety facilities. Residential development can include one principal dwelling and one secondary dwelling per lot (Placer County 2013).

Baseline Agricultural Uses Agricultural data in Placer County are presented below for 2006; where available, more recent data are included. Important Farmland data are not available for Baseline Year (2005), therefore 2006 data were used. As described below, farmland has been converted, with a conversion of 13,140 acres in the 10 years between 2006 and 2016. The change from 2005 to 2006 would have been small in the context of the whole Plan Area and, for this reason, 2006 data were considered adequate to describe the environmental setting.

The majority of agricultural land in the Plan Area is located in the unincorporated areas of Placer County, in the northwestern portion of western Placer County. Within the Plan Area, approximately 129,804.6 acres (about 48%) are designated agricultural (using 2006 land cover data). The West

Valley, or Sacramento Valley plain, contains the majority of cropland in the Plan Area. Rice crops dominate the western edge of the county. The North Foothills region is characterized by rangeland with small orchards (Placer County 2002). Important Farmland in the Plan Area is shown in Table 3.1-1.

Table 3.1-1. Important Farmland in the Plan Area (2006)

Important Farmland Category	Acres in the Plan Area	Percent of Plan Area
Prime Farmland	8,286.3	3.07%
Farmland of Statewide Importance	4,491.7	1.67%
Farmland of Local Importance	95,622.3	35.48%
Unique Farmland	21,404.4	7.94%
Total	129,804.6	48.16%

Source: California Department of Conservation 2006.

The climate and availability of water have allowed agricultural industry to flourish; Placer County was one of the leading tree fruit growing regions in the United States for over a century, which lasted until the 1960s (Placer County 2002). According to the *Placer County Agricultural Crop Report 2006*, Placer County's total gross value of agricultural crops and products was \$64,297,934. The top five selling crops in 2006 were nursery products, timber production, cattle and calves, rice, and walnuts (Placer County Agriculture Department n.d.).

According to the *2016 Crop Report* for Placer County, Placer County's total gross value of agricultural crops and products for 2016 was \$65,206,000. This was an increase of approximately 1.4% from 2015. The top five selling crops for 2016 were rice, other livestock (poultry, swine goats), cattle and calves, nursery stock, and walnuts (Placer County Agriculture Weights and Measures n.d.).

Conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use is largely due to development in western Placer County. The total inventoried acreage of Important Farmland (this includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and farmland of state and local importance) in 2016 was 125,044 acres, compared to 138,184 in the year 2006. Between 2014 and 2016, approximately 3,868 acres of farmland of local importance was converted to urban and built-up land. Prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, and unique farmland all increased in acreage (954 acres total) (California Department of Conservation 2006, 2016b).

Baseline agricultural uses in western Placer County include orchards, pasture, row crops, unidentified croplands, and vineyard.

The following provides a description of irrigated agriculture types found in the Plan Area. Unless otherwise noted, acreages are from Placer County land cover data (2006).

Rice

Rice fields generally occur at elevations of about 45–140 feet, and all rice fields in Placer County are located within private land. This type of agriculture is the most common of the agricultural land-cover types, and covered approximately 19,580.2 acres in production in 2006, or 7.3% of the Plan Area.

Row Crops

Row crops are generally found in alluvial valley bottoms or gently rolling terrain in the low to mid-elevations, where there are deep, fertile soils. The major row crops found in western Placer County are alfalfa, corn fodder, oats, wheat, and hay. Row crops covered an area totaling 704.3 acres in production in 2006, or 0.3% of the Plan Area.

Unidentified Croplands

Unidentified croplands include plowed or fallow agricultural fields or where the crops could not be identified. These areas are likely to be in rotation for the next year's cycle of row crop cultivation. Unidentified croplands are found at elevations of 47–1,368 feet and occupied approximately 1,807.3 acres in 2006, or 0.7% of the Plan Area.

Alfalfa

Small amounts of alfalfa are grown in western Placer County for use as a hay crop in irrigated fields. Alfalfa fields are found at elevations of about 70–135 feet and occupied approximately 175.6 acres in production in 2006, or 0.07% of the Plan Area.

Irrigated Pasture

Irrigated pastures occur throughout the western Placer County and vary from small irrigated fields in rural-residential areas in the foothills used for small-scale livestock rearing to extensive pastures on floodplains in the lower foothills and valley area used for intensive cattle rearing. Irrigated pastures covered approximately 141.1 acres of irrigated pasture in 2006, or approximately 0.05% of the Plan Area.

Vineyard

Vineyards are found at elevations of about 85–1,290 feet in elevation and are located within private lands. Vineyards occupied approximately 95.6 bearing acres of wine grapes in 2006, or 0.04% of the Plan Area.

Orchard

Orchards in western Placer County are found in the foothill region and are frequently adjacent to streams or irrigation canals. Walnuts, plums, peaches, oranges, apples, and pears are the most commonly planted crops. Orchards are found at elevations of 60–1,680 feet, and in 2006 occupied approximately 2,522 acres including almonds, or 0.8% of the Plan Area.

Williamson Act Lands

In 2017 32,336 acres in Placer County were under Williamson Act contracts. This was a decrease from 8,260 acres in 2013 (Brown pers. comm.). In 2013, Placer County was ranked in the top 10 of counties with the largest net enrollment decrease (California Department of Conservation 2015). The majority of lands enrolled in Williamson Act contracts are found in the west and northwestern portion of western Placer County. Figure 3.1-2 shows Williamson Act-enrolled lands in Placer County and the Plan Area.

Forest Land

There is no forest land or timber land in the Plan Area.

3.1.3 References Cited

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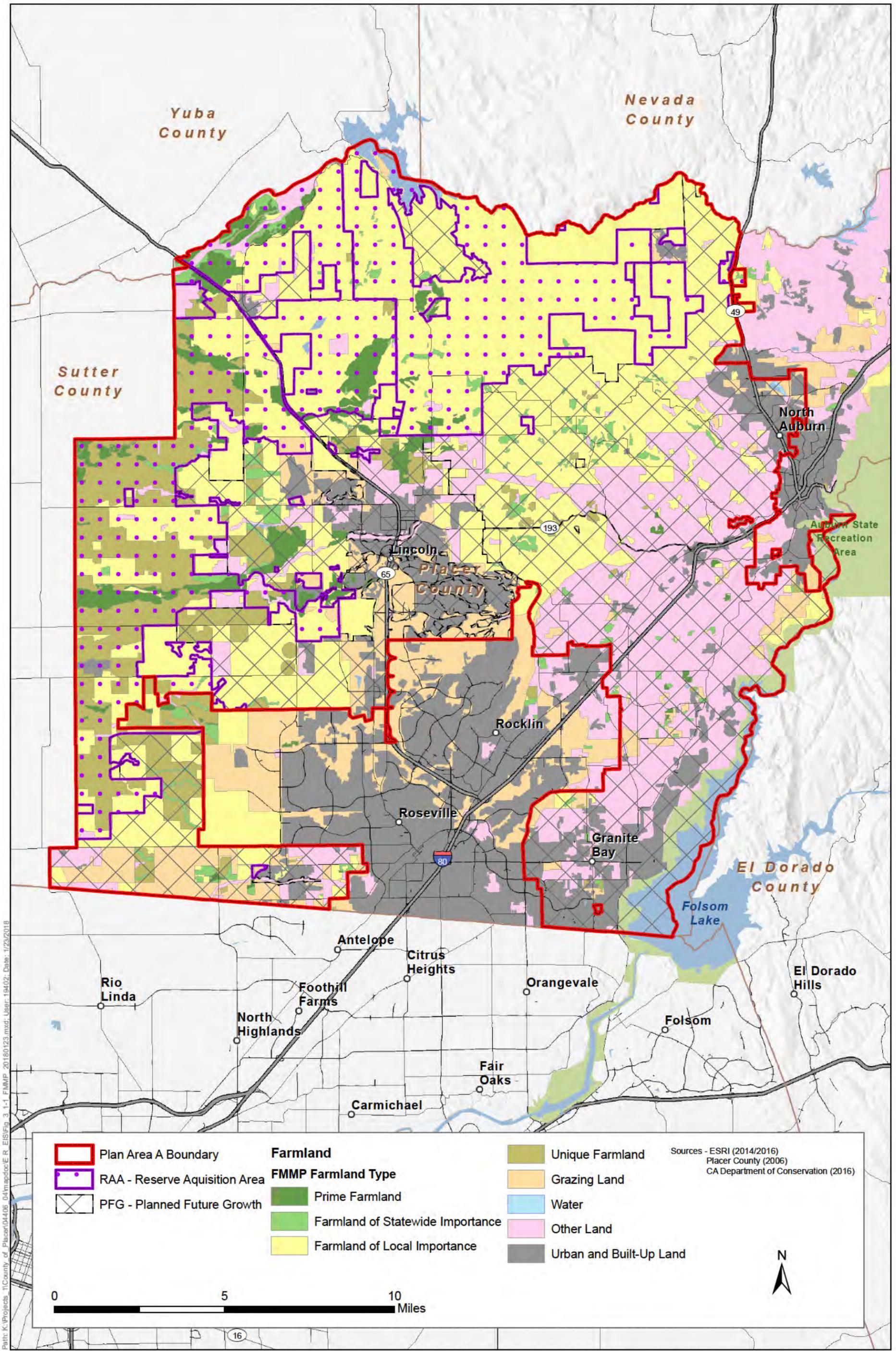
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Personal Communications

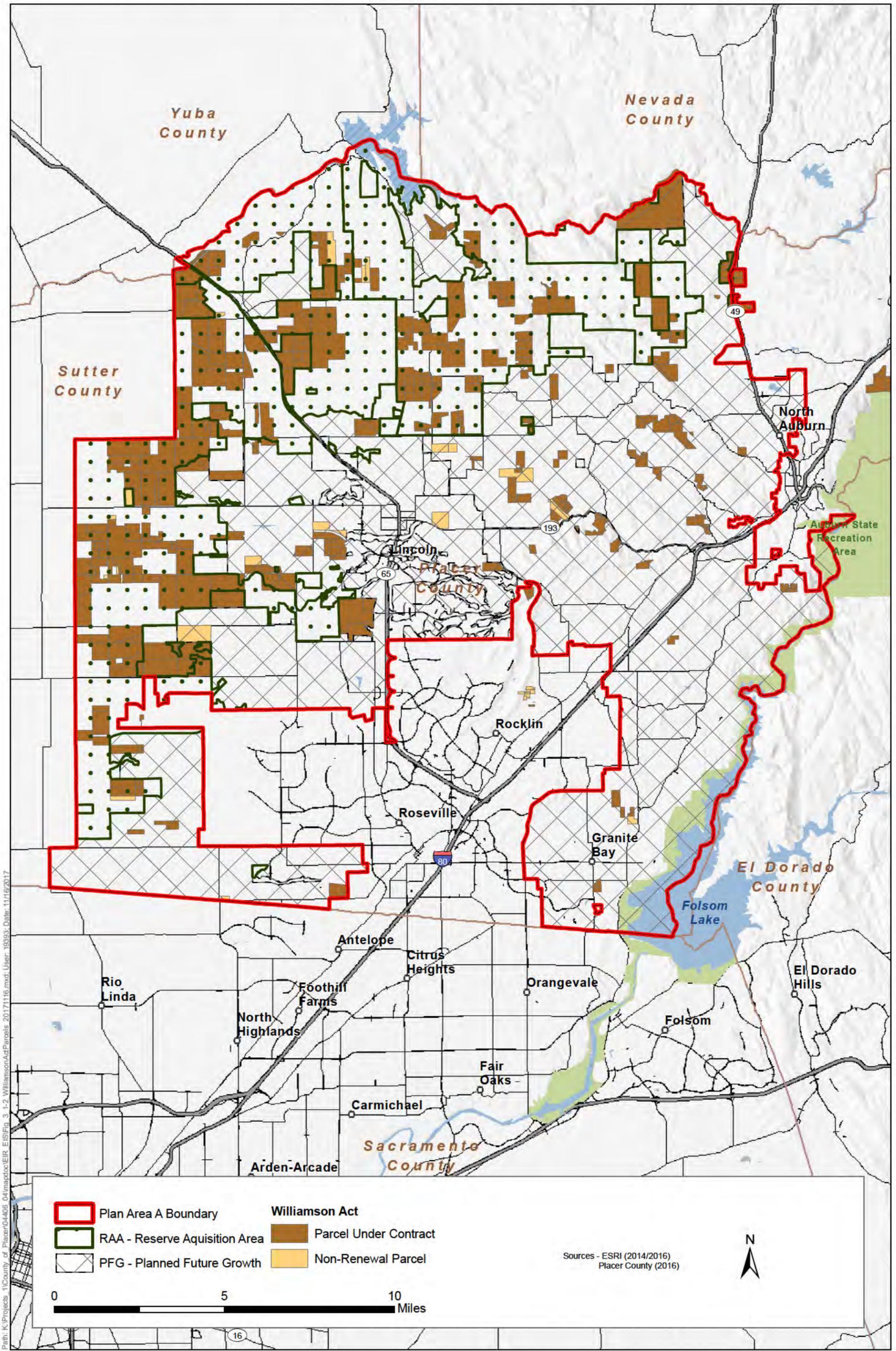
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Figure 3.1-1
Farmland
Placer County Conservation Program—EIS/EIR



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Figure 3.1-2
Williamson Act Parcels
Placer County Conservation Program—EIS/EIR