

4.0 LAND USE AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This chapter evaluates the environmental impacts from implementation of the proposed project on existing land uses and agricultural resources. A description of the existing site characteristics and setting is followed by an analysis focused on the relationship between the proposed project and existing plans and policies, and the relationship with proposed on-site and existing adjacent land uses.

4.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

4.1.1 PROJECT AREA (EXISTING LAND USES, AGRICULTURE)

The proposed project is located between north Auburn and the City of Lincoln in Placer County, in the Sierra Nevada foothills approximately 40 miles northeast of Sacramento. The Park includes approximately 1,200 acres of open space lands consisting of Spears Ranch (979 acres) and Didion Ranch (221 acres). The project area is situated along Coon Creek and is south of the Bear River. Garden Bar Road is located to the west; Mt. Vernon and Mt. Pleasant Roads are to the south; and Bell and Hubbard Roads are to the east. The area is undeveloped except for an existing ranch house and several smaller support structures; the project area consists largely of open space comprising natural oak woodlands, with Coon Creek, Deadman Creek, and associated tributaries meandering from the eastern end of the property to the westernmost property boundary.

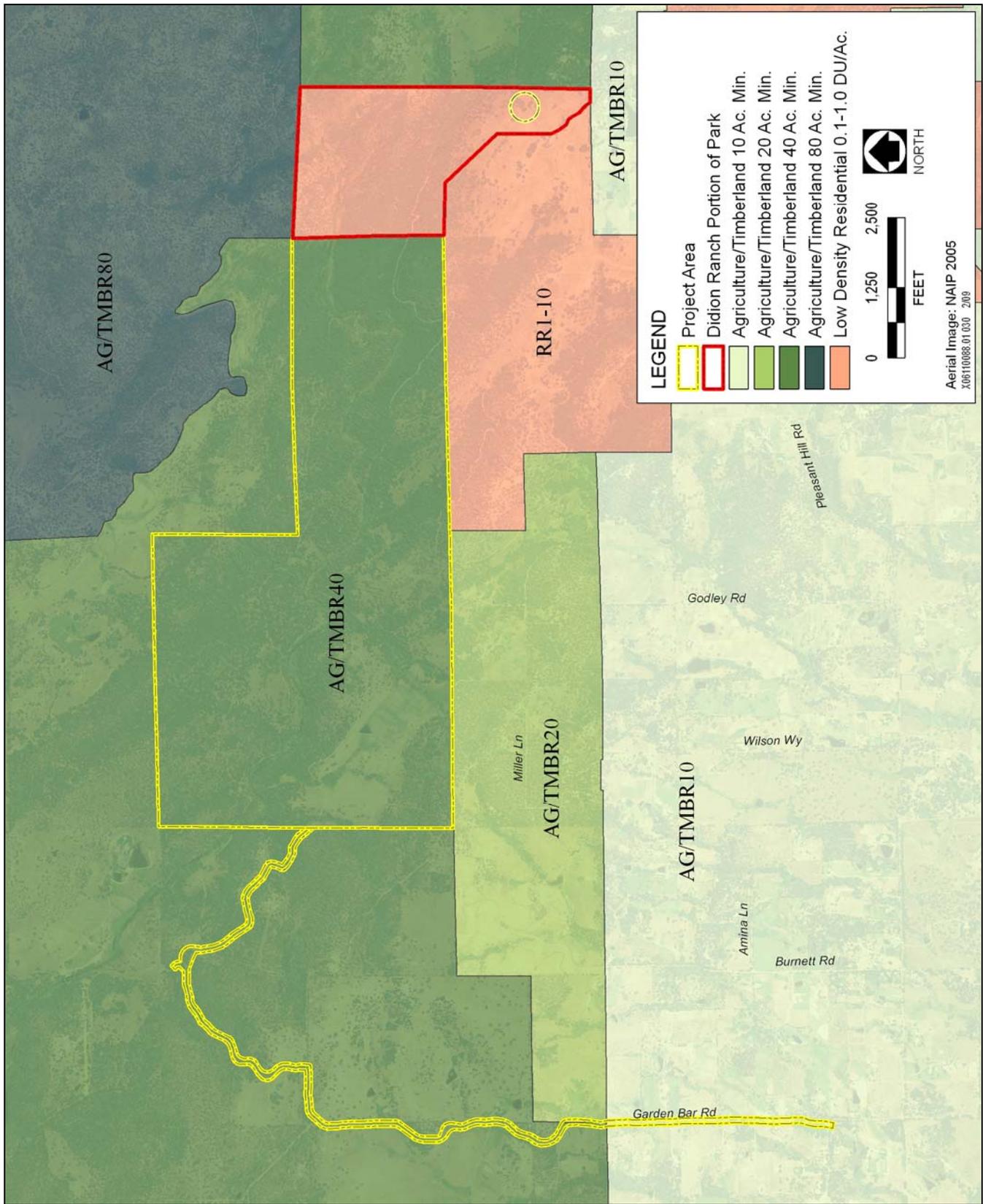
For the past 100 years, the western 979 acres (Spears Ranch) of the Park were used primarily for livestock grazing. The current tenant (i.e., the former owner) has used the property for cattle grazing since 1985. For the past 20 years, the stocking rate has fluctuated between 75 and 100 cows. The former owner has retained grazing rights in a portion of the Park until 2014, at which point the County will take over these rights. Cattle continue to be grazed on portions of the Park, primarily in irrigated pasture areas, and fencing has been placed in areas to manage the grazing activities. The ranch house, support structures, and grazing lands are located in the western portion of the Park. The property is currently served by public and private services and utilities. The eastern portion of the Park is not subject to heavy grazing activity because of uneven and undulating topography and inaccessibility of the area associated with Coon Creek, Deadman Creek, and associated tributaries.

The Didion Ranch portion of the Park, located adjacent to the proposed project area to the east, is currently open to public use and the Spears Ranch portion of the Park (project area) is currently closed to public use.

PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The land use designations for the Spears Ranch portion of the Park in the *Placer County General Plan* (General Plan) (Placer County 1994) are Agriculture, 40-acre minimum lot area and Timberland, 40-acre minimum lot area. These designations are described further below (see Exhibit 4-1).

- ▶ **Agriculture (AG) (40-acre minimum).** This designation identifies land used for production of food and fiber, including areas of prime agricultural soils. It also includes other productive and potentially productive lands where commercial agricultural uses can exist without creating conflicts with other land uses, or where potential conflicts can be mitigated. Typical land uses allowed include crop production, orchards and vineyards; grazing, pasture, rangeland, and hobby farms; other resource extraction activities; facilities that directly support agricultural operations, such as processing of agricultural products; and necessary public utility and safety facilities. Allowable residential development in areas designated Agriculture includes one principal dwelling and one secondary dwelling per lot, caretaker/employee housing, and farmworker housing.



Source: California Department of Conservation 2004

Land Use Designations in the Project Vicinity

Exhibit 4-1

- ▶ **Timberland (T) (40-acre minimum).** This designation is applied to mountainous areas of the county where the primary land uses relate to the growing and harvesting of timber and other forest products, and limited, low-intensity public and commercial recreational activities. Typical land uses allowed include all commercial timber production operations and associated facilities; agricultural operations, where soil and slope conditions permit; mineral and other resource extraction operations; recreational uses such as incidental camping and private, institutional, and commercial campgrounds (but not recreational vehicle parks); and necessary public utility and safety facilities. Allowable residential development in areas designated Timberland includes one principal dwelling and one secondary dwelling per lot and caretaker/employee housing.

PLACER COUNTY ZONING

In the County Zoning Ordinance the Spears Ranch portion of the Park consists of 20 separate parcels all zoned open space (see Exhibit 4-2).

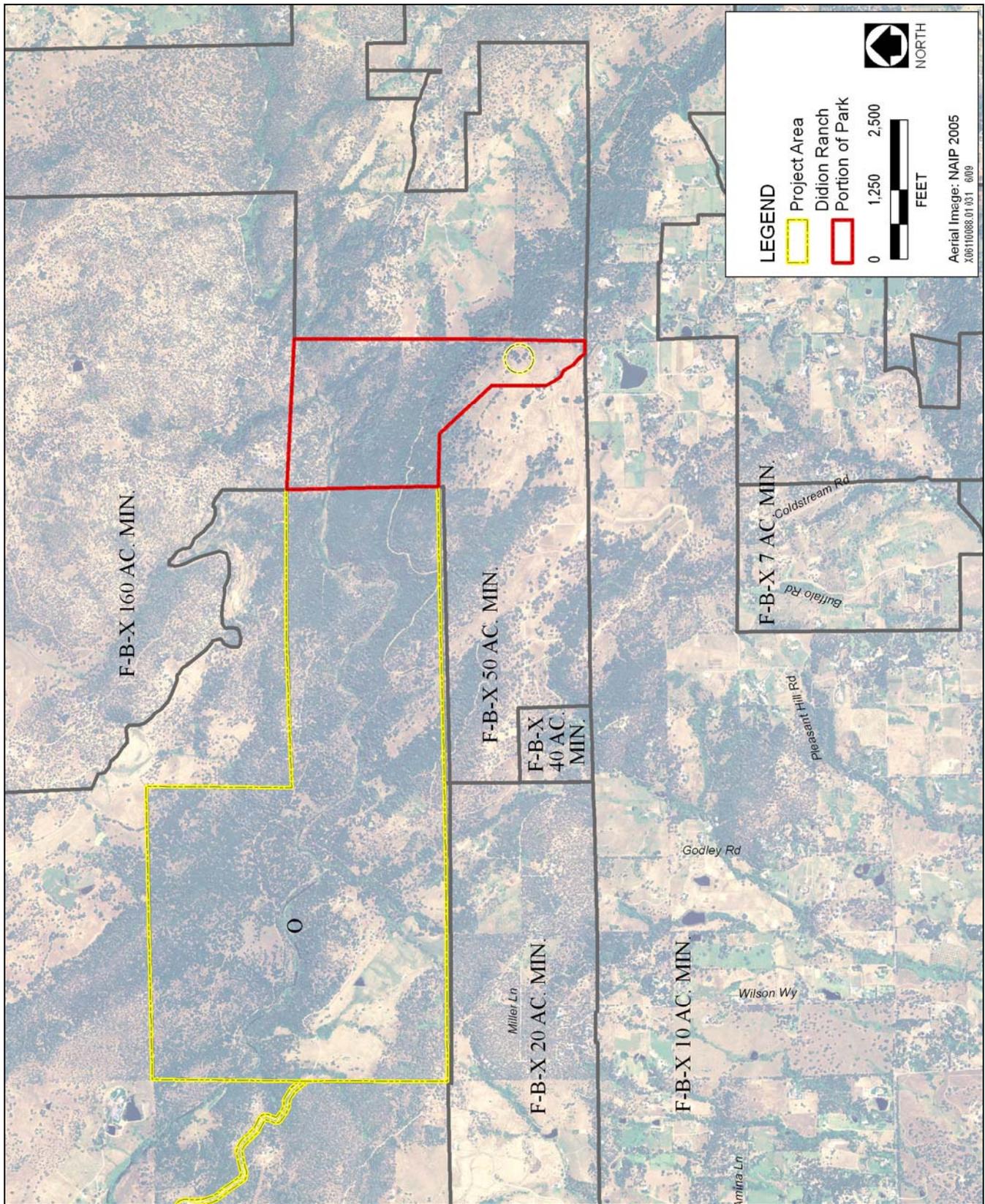
Zoning districts are used to address special needs or characteristics of the areas of the county to which they are applied, such as potential hazards and/or land use conflicts created by aircraft overflight, flooding, unique community character, or visual quality. The zoning district applicable to the Park is open space, which is designated as O. Section 17.14.010 of the County Zoning Ordinance describes the purpose of the open space district as follows:

The purpose of the open space district is to protect important open space lands within Placer County by limiting allowable land uses to low intensity agricultural and public recreational uses, with development restricted to accessory structures necessary to support the primary allowed uses, and critical public facilities. Allowable land uses in the open space district include agricultural (including accessory structures), grazing, forestry, equestrian facilities, recreational uses, mining, campgrounds, shooting ranges, and temporary events.

4.1.2 ADJACENT LAND USES

The project area is surrounded by private agricultural lands in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Adjacent land uses include cattle grazing and scattered rural residences. The project area is adjacent to the 221-acre, County-owned Didion Ranch portion of the Park. Approximately 7 miles of trails exist on the Didion Ranch portion of the Park. Both the Didion Ranch and Spears Ranch portions of the Park have been used in the past for grazing. The Didion Ranch portion of the Park is currently used for passive recreation and includes multiple-use trails, a small picnic area, handicapped accessible trail, and parking area. The Didion Ranch portion of the Park is open to the public from sunrise to sunset, year-round. There is parking for approximately 50 cars and 6 equestrian trailers. Access to this portion of the Park is provided via Mears Drive. Other Didion Ranch Park amenities include watering facilities for equestrian use, a double cell restroom facility, a public well, an entry gate, an informational kiosk, 12,000-gallon emergency water storage tank, fire hydrant, security lighting, and two drinking fountains. The Didion Ranch portion of the Park also contains an emergency water supply storage tank, a helistop, and an emergency vehicle bridge crossing over Deadman Canyon Creek. No hunting is currently allowed on the property; however, fishing is allowed according to California Department of Fish and Game regulations.

An existing residence is located approximately 1,600 feet from the northwest corner of the Spears Ranch portion of the Park, and several rural residences are located to the south off Miller Lane and Johnson Drive at a distance ranging from 800 to 1,400 feet from the southwestern project boundary. Additional land uses to the southwest consist of cattle grazing and forested areas lie to the south of the property. North of the project area is wooded forest with agricultural uses and land to the northeast is used for grazing.



Source: Placer County 1994

Zoning Designations in the Project Vicinity

Exhibit 4-2

Some of the access to the Spears Ranch portion of the Park would be from Garden Bar Road, a rural two-lane roadway. Garden Bar Road would require phased upgrades to support proposed traffic to the project area. The area surrounding Garden Bar Road is largely rural with scattered residences and agricultural uses in the vicinity. Approximately 50 residences are accessed from Garden Bar Road between Mt. Pleasant Road and the project area, with approximately 10 residences within 500 feet of Garden Bar Road. Garden Bar Road becomes increasingly rural as it approaches the proposed entrance to the Park, and residences are much more widely dispersed in this area.

The General Plan land use designations for lands adjacent to the Park are the same as the project area. They are listed below and described in detail above. The County zoning for the lands adjacent to the Park is Farm with Building Site, which is described below:

- ▶ The land use designations in the General Plan for land adjacent to the project area are Agriculture, 10-, 20-, 40-, and 80-acre minimum lot area; Timberland, 10-, 20-, 40-, and 80-acre minimum lot area; and Rural Residential 1-10-acre minimum lot area (Exhibit 4-1).
- ▶ Land adjacent to the project area is zoned as Farm with Building Site ranging from 10 to 160 acre minimums (Exhibit 4-2). The purpose of the Farm (F) district is to provide areas for commercial agricultural operations that can also accommodate necessary services to support agricultural uses, together with residential land uses at low population densities. Allowable land uses in the Farm district are agriculture, forestry, grazing, mining, community centers, libraries, museums, parks, playgrounds, golf courses, rural recreation, schools, and single-family dwellings. Rural recreational uses require a minor use permit in the F district.

4.2 REGULATORY SETTING

4.2.1 FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws related to land use or agricultural resources are applicable to the proposed project.

4.2.2 STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

CALIFORNIA IMPORTANT FARMLAND INVENTORY SYSTEM AND FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM

The California Department of Conservation, Office of Land Conservation, maintains a statewide inventory of farmlands. These lands are mapped by the Division of Land Resource Protection as part of the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). The maps are updated every 2 years with the use of aerial photographs, a computer mapping system, public review, and field reconnaissance. Farmlands are divided into the following five categories based on their suitability for agriculture:

- ▶ **Prime Farmland**—land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for crop production. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed.
- ▶ **Farmland of Statewide Importance**—land other than Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for crop production.
- ▶ **Unique Farmland**—land that does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, but that has been used for the production of specific crops with high economic value.

- ▶ **Farmland of Local Importance**—land that either is currently producing crops or has the capability of production, but that does not meet the criteria of the categories above.
- ▶ **Grazing Land**—land on which the vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

These categories are sometimes referred to as Important Farmland. Other categories used in the FMMP mapping system are “urban and built-up lands,” “lands committed to nonagricultural use,” and “other lands” (land that does not meet the criteria of any of the other categories).

Exhibit 4-3 shows the designated farmland within the project area, according to the latest data available from the FMMP. The majority of the project area is categorized as Farmland of Local Importance, and a smaller portion in the southwest area of the Park is categorized as Farmland of Statewide Importance.

WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACT LAND

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act, enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners to promote the continued use of the relevant land in agricultural or related open-space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments that are based on farming and open-space uses instead of full market value. Local governments receive an annual subvention (subsidy) of forgone property tax revenues from the state via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971.

The Williamson Act empowers local governments to establish “agricultural preserves” consisting of lands devoted to agricultural uses and other compatible uses. When such preserves are established, the locality may offer owners of included agricultural land the opportunity to enter into annually renewable contracts that restrict the land to agricultural use for at least 10 years (i.e., the contract continues to run for 10 years after the first date upon which the contract is not renewed). In return, the landowner is guaranteed a relatively stable tax rate, based on the value of the land for agricultural/open space use only and unaffected by its development potential.

Exhibit 4-4 shows the existing Williamson Act contracts in the project vicinity. The project area is not currently under Williamson Act contract. Lands to the north of the project area and adjacent to Garden Bar Road are currently under Williamson Act contracts.

4.2.3 LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

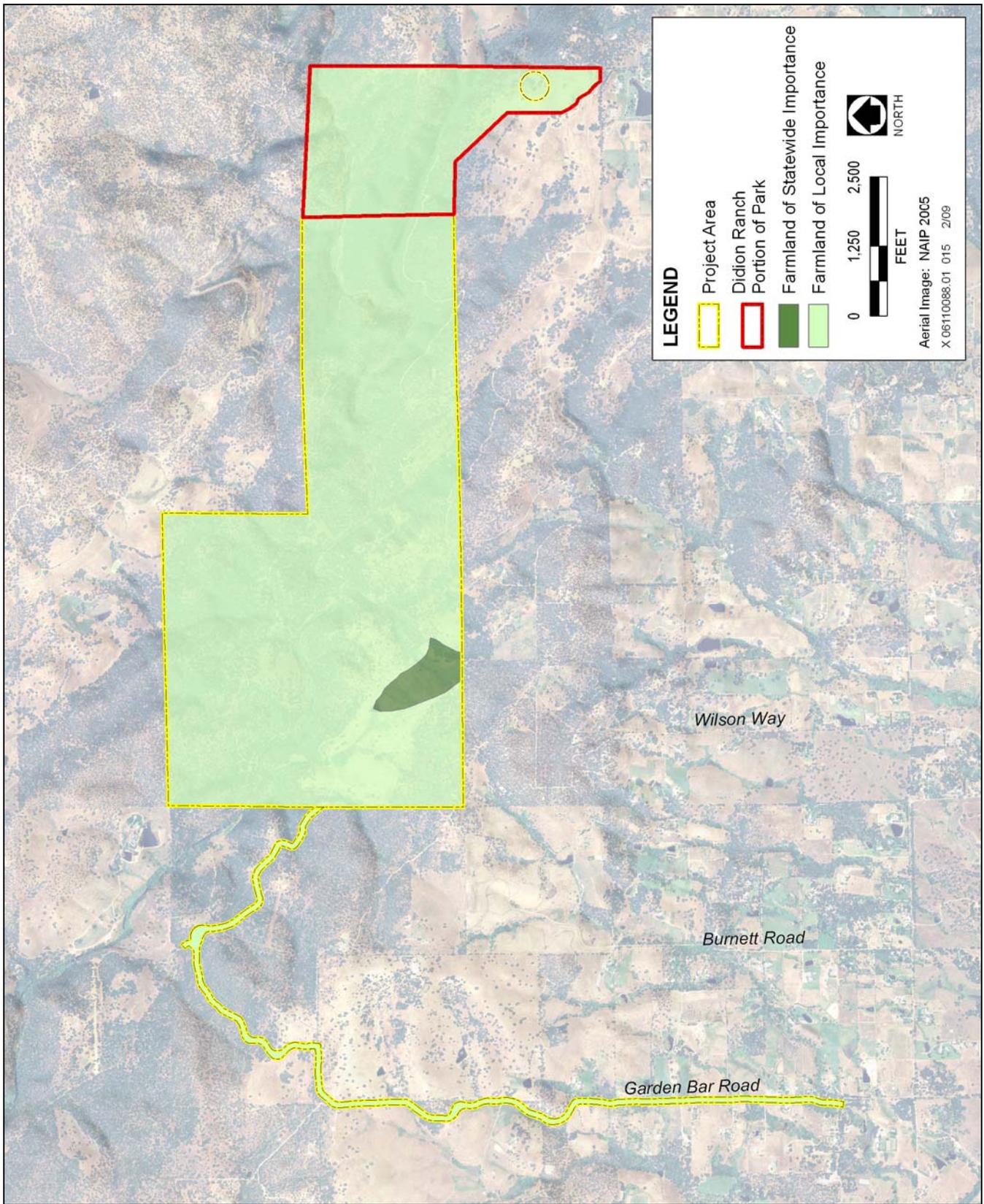
PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan (1994) describes assumptions, goals, and planning principles that provide a framework for land use decisions throughout the county. It is based on the assumption that the County will experience continued growth and economic development, because of its desirable climate, physical setting, plentiful resources, and proximity to the Sacramento metropolitan area.

The General Plan’s land use designations for the project area are described in Section 4.1.1 above. The following are the relevant goals and policies identified by the General Plan for land use:

GOAL 1.G: To designate land for and promote the development and expansion of public and private recreational facilities to serve the needs of residents and visitors.

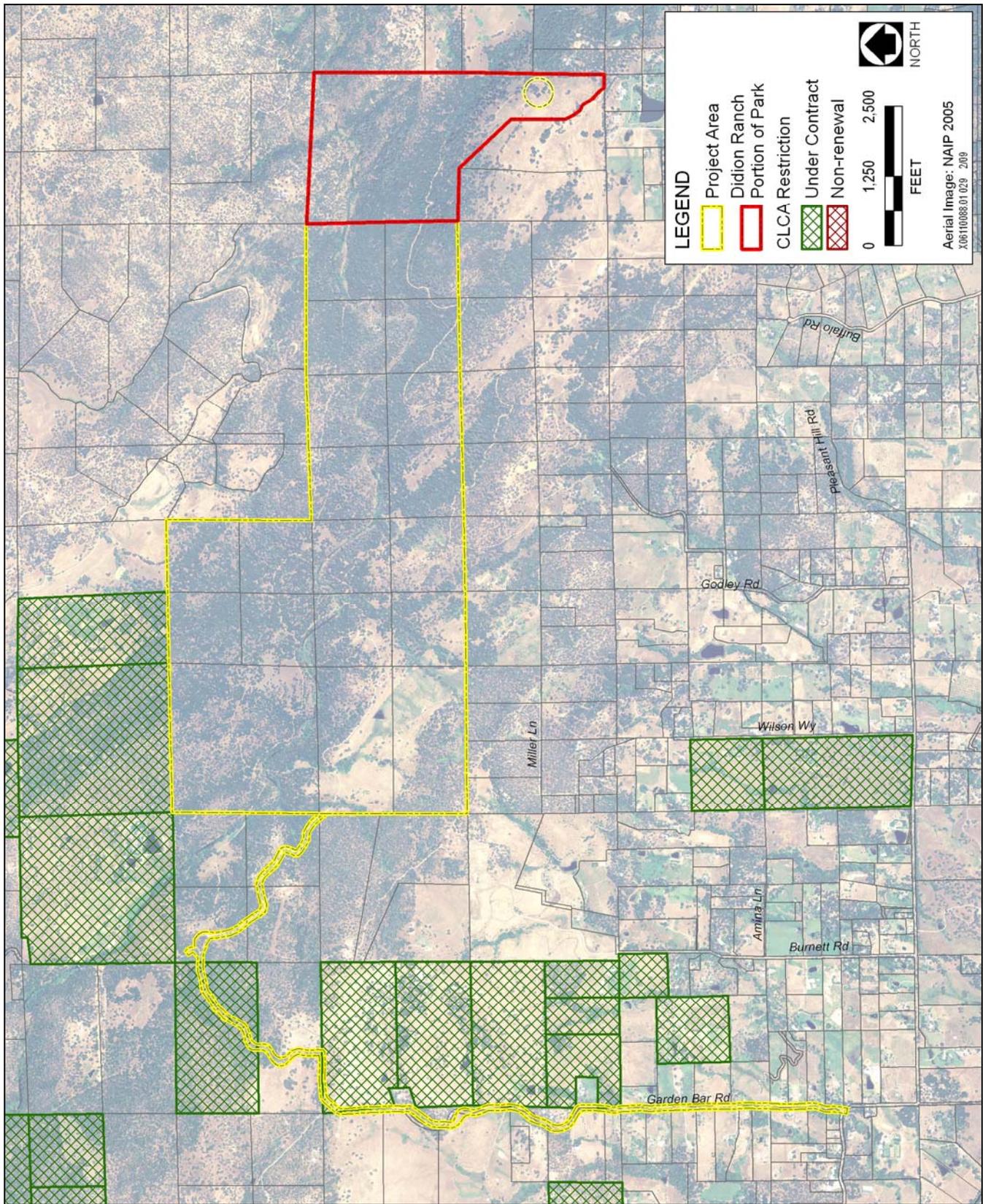
- ▶ **Policy 1.G.2.** The County shall strive to have new recreation areas located and designed to encourage and accommodate non-automobile access.
- ▶ **Policy 1.G.3.** The County shall continue to require the development of new recreational facilities as new residential development occurs.



Source: California Department of Conservation 2004

Farmland Map

Exhibit 4-3



Source: National Agriculture Imagery Program 2005

Williamson Act Contract Map

Exhibit 4-4

The following are the relevant goals and policies identified by the General Plan for agricultural resources:

GOAL 7.A: To provide for the long-term conservation and use of agriculturally-designated lands.

- ▶ **Policy 7.A.1.** The County shall protect agriculturally-designated areas from conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- ▶ **Policy 7.A.3.** The County shall encourage continued and, where possible, increased agricultural activities on lands suited to agricultural uses.
- ▶ **Policy 7.A.7.** The County shall maintain agricultural lands in large parcel sizes to retain viable farming units.
- ▶ **Policy 7.A.13.** The County shall encourage multi-seasonal use such as private recreational development, agricultural lands, and timberlands to enhance the economic viability.

GOAL 7.B: To minimize existing and future conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses in agriculturally-designated areas.

PLACER COUNTY ZONING ORDINANCE

The County Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 17 of the County Code, was adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in July 1995 (Edition No. 1). The Zoning Ordinance, Ninth Edition, was revised in January 2005. The County Zoning Ordinance, which is consistent with the General Plan, regulates the use of land, buildings, and structures and establishes minimum regulations and standards for the development of land within the county. Zoning designations for the project area is described in Section 4.1.1 above.

4.3 IMPACTS

4.3.1 ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The focus of this analysis is on land use impacts that would result from project implementation. Evaluation of potential land use impacts of the proposed project was based on a review of existing planning documents pertaining to the project area (the General Plan, the County Zoning Ordinance); and field review of the project area and surroundings.

Specific impacts and project consistency issues associated with biological resources; cultural resources; visual resources; transportation and circulation; air quality; noise; soils, geology, and seismicity; hydrology and water quality; public services and utilities; and recreation are addressed in the respective chapters of this EIR as appropriate.

4.3.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on the Placer County CEQA checklist and the State CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project would result in a potentially significant impact on land use if it would:

- ▶ convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use;
- ▶ conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;
- ▶ involve other changes in the existing environment that, because of their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use;

- ▶ physically divide an established community; or
- ▶ conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project.

The proposed project would not conflict with an applicable environmental plan or policy adopted by an agency with jurisdiction over the project. The area is undeveloped except for an existing ranch house and several smaller support structures and the surrounding vicinity consists of scattered rural residences and agricultural grazing lands; therefore, the project would not divide an established community. Consistency with habitat conservation plans is discussed in Chapter 12.0, “Biological Resources.” For these reasons, these topics will not be discussed further.

4.3.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 4-1 Land Use and Agricultural Resources—Adverse Effect on Agricultural or Timber Resource Operations or Conversion of Important Farmland to Nonagricultural Uses. *The proposed project would increase use of the project area by the public where grazing activities currently take place, and the project area is designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance and Farmland of Local Importance. Grazing would continue on the property and is included as a component of the County’s vegetation, fuels, and range management plan for the Park. Therefore, the property’s agricultural use would be sustained as part of the project.*

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

Land use in the Spears Ranch portion of the Park is designated by the General Plan as Agriculture, 20-acre minimum lot area, and Timberland, 20-acre minimum lot area, and is zoned as open space. The project area is also designated as Farmland of Local Importance and Farmland of Statewide Importance (Exhibit 4-1). Currently, grazing takes place on the property and on adjacent properties.

For the past 100 years, the western 979-acre (Spears Ranch) portion of the Park was used for livestock grazing. The stocking rate has fluctuated between 75 and 100 cows over the past 20 years. The former owner has retained grazing rights in the project area until 2014, at which point the County will take over these rights. The County also intends to continue managed grazing as part of its vegetation, fuels, and range management plan for the Park (Placer County 2007). This plan recommends grazing up to 75 cows year round for fire fuel reduction purposes, which is similar to the stocking rate that has been used historically for the project area.

Public use of the project area would consist of outdoor recreation, amenities including hiking, biking, and equestrian trails, and other recreational facilities. Proposed major recreational facilities and structures would be located in a previously disturbed area (i.e., the facility development zone), where several structures are currently located and the land has been heavily grazed in the past (See Exhibit 3-3 in Chapter 3.0, “Project Description.”). Trails would be located in areas used previously for grazing as well as throughout in more natural areas, and would utilize newly constructed trails as well as existing roadways. Minor facilities such as bridges, viewing platforms, picnic pavilions, benches, and interpretive signage would be placed throughout the Park to accommodate use. The Didion Ranch portion of the Park is developed and is currently open to the public.

Expansion of the existing parking area and relocating the adjacent helistop within this part of the Park would not introduce any new land uses.

Restoring farmland to non-agricultural uses, such as a regional park, is consistent with the property's original (or natural) condition. In addition, long-term natural functions and values of habitat would be maintained or improved particularly in the areas where restoration would take place. The project allows restoration actions including fish passage amenities vegetation enhancement and includes protective measures to direct visitors away from sensitive resources.

Native riparian habitat has been reduced due to past land uses on the project area. Restoring riparian habitat along Coon Creek and Deadman Creek.

Changes in land uses pursuant to the proposed zoning code could also indirectly affect adjacent agricultural operations, including agricultural uses on Important Farmland and lands under Williamson Act contracts, if proposed facility development and resource management efforts conflict with or interrupt surrounding agricultural-based land uses.

However, the proposed project would include several agricultural components, such as continuation of current agricultural activities, including grazing; farm management practices (e.g., maintenance of fences, potential expansion of irrigated pastureland); agricultural research projects conducted by qualified institutions; agricultural education programs; and potential leases for grazing and/or agricultural uses. Perimeter fencing around the property would be repaired in kind or replaced with barbless wire as needed. Cross fencing and exclusionary fencing would be constructed in riparian and other sensitive areas throughout the Park.

Constructing recreational facilities in the project area would not result in or encourage the conversion of any surrounding farmland to nonagricultural use. Outdoor recreation is noted as being compatible with agriculture in Williamson Act documentation and in the Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA) model, which is a model that evaluates and rates potential impacts to agricultural lands. In addition, the project area has not previously been used for timber resource operations and is not expected to be used for this purpose in the future. Therefore, there would be no change in timber resource operations as a result of the proposed project.

Because the property would continue to be used for livestock grazing, and outdoor recreation uses are considered compatible with agricultural uses, this impact would be less than significant.

IMPACT 4-2 **Land Use and Agricultural Resources—Alteration of Land Use and Potential Conflicts with Existing or Future Land Uses Adjacent to the Project Area.** *Use of the project area for open space and grazing would be consistent with surrounding land uses; however, outdoor recreation would be a new land use for the project area. The proposed project would add trails and recreational facilities and would increase the use of the project area by the public. Although this change in use would be different from surrounding uses, project facilities are included that would ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses adjacent to the project area.*

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

The surrounding land uses are primarily rural residential and cattle grazing. An existing residence is located approximately 1,600 feet from the northwest corner of the property, and several rural residences are located between 800 to 1,400 feet from the southwestern project boundary. Additional land uses to the southwest consist of cattle grazing lands. Land uses to the south consist of forested areas and agricultural uses. North of the project area uses include wooded forest with agricultural and grazing uses to the northeast.

Residences are located primarily in the vicinity of Garden Bar Road. Approximately 50 residences are accessed from Garden Bar Road between Mt. Pleasant Road and the project area, with approximately 10 residences within 500 feet of Garden Bar Road. Garden Bar Road becomes increasingly rural as it approaches the proposed entrance to the Spears Ranch portion of the Park, and residences become much more widely dispersed in this area. Similarly, many of the existing grazing areas are associated with the residences in the area, and become increasingly dispersed approaching the project area.

The project vicinity is largely rural in nature, surrounded by agricultural lands consisting of various habitats such as grazing lands, oak woodlands, grassland, chaparral, wetlands, and riparian habitat associated with Coon and Deadman Creeks. The Didion Ranch portion of the Park is also located in the project vicinity and is currently being used by the public for passive recreation.

Land uses adjacent to the project area are designated by the General Plan as Agriculture, 20-acre minimum lot area, and Timberland, 20-acre minimum lot area, and zoned as Farm with Building Site (F-B-X 20-acre minimum, F-B-X 40, F-B-X 50, and F-B-X 160) by the County Zoning Ordinance. Compatible land uses for these zoning and land use and designations are discussed above in Section 4.1.2.

The project area would support outdoor recreation uses, which is noted as compatible with land under Williamson Act contract and in the LESA model. The proposed project would also include habitat restoration and continuation of agricultural uses within the Park, and the Didion Ranch portion of the Park is already open for passive recreation. Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with existing and future adjacent land uses and this would be a less-than-significant impact.

IMPACT 4-3 **Land Use and Agricultural Resources—Potential for Conflicts with Land Use or Agricultural Resource Plans, Policies, or Regulations.** *Construction and operation of outdoor recreational facilities in the project area is not included as a land use under the General Plan's Agriculture land use designation. However, the County determines allowable land uses at a parcel-level according to the zoning code, and outdoor recreational uses are allowed as specified in the open space zoning district. According to the Placer County zoning code, the project would be allowed in the project area with approval of a Conditional Use Permit. Further, the use of the property as a regional park is considered compatible with agricultural uses, would maintain the natural state of the area, and grazing activities would continue to occur after the project is implemented. Therefore, the land uses proposed by the project are consistent with existing plans, policies, and regulations. In addition, the project area is not enrolled in a Williamson Act contract.*

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

Zoning for the Spears Ranch portion of the Park is designated open space. The open space designation allows for agricultural operations, grazing, and outdoor recreational facilities. Lands zoned open space allows for outdoor

recreational uses, campgrounds, and temporary events with the approval of a Conditional Use Permit. The General Plan designates the land use in the Spears Ranch portion of the Park as Agriculture, 40-acre minimum lot area; and Timberland, 40-acre minimum lot area. The Timberland land use designation allows forestry uses, while also allowing open space, residential, and recreational land uses in these same areas. Although the Agricultural land use designation does not specifically state that recreational uses are allowed, it lists a broad range of typical uses that are allowed within this land designation area, which includes agriculture related uses, such as commercial agriculture, grazing, pasture, rangeland, and hobby farms; other resource extraction activities; and facilities that directly support agricultural operations. The General Plan Land Use section Part 1 refers to the County's zoning maps (Chapter 30 of the Placer County Code) for more detailed, parcel-specific allowable land uses. The proposed use is consistent with the County's zoning of the Spears Ranch portion of the Park, and with the acquisition of a Conditional Use Permit, the project would comply with the County's planning documents. The Didion Ranch portion of the Park is already developed and is open to the public. Expansion of the existing parking area and relocating the adjacent helistop within this part of the Park would not introduce any new land uses.

Major structures and amenities to be built or renovated would be limited to the facility development zone of the southwest portion of the property and include parking areas, permanent restrooms, a nature/cultural education center, bunkhouses, caretaker facility, and maintenance yard. Minor structures and amenities proposed throughout the property include hiking trails, which would include newly constructed trails, as well as existing maintenance roadways, associated foot bridges, an emergency vehicle bridge, equestrian amenities, picnic areas, permanent restroom facilities, fire suppression facilities, a disc golf course, designated fishing areas, and interpretive signage. Options being considered for parking include a surfaced parking area to accommodate anticipated uses and a gravel equestrian parking area, a gravel overflow parking area, and a parking area to accommodate the nature center. In addition, the existing parking area on the Didion Ranch portion of the Park would be expanded.

More intensive land uses, including the parking areas, maintenance facilities, caretaker residence, nature/cultural education center, bunkhouses, and restrooms with septic systems, are proposed to be limited to the southwest portion of the property, within the existing facility development zone (See Exhibit 3-4 in Chapter 3.0, "Project Description."). Less intensive land uses, including various benches and picnic tables, fitness/ropes courses, and bridge crossings, would be dispersed throughout the project area relative to the proposed trail network. A disc golf course would be designed to coincide with areas where vegetation management is desirable such as shaded fuel breaks and other non-sensitive upland areas.

The nearest residences are 1,600 feet to the northwest and over 800 feet to the south. With the more intensive proposed recreation uses limited to the portion of the property that already have existing buildings, the distance to the nearest homes from major structures would be increased to at least 1,500 feet. The proposed project also includes components such as, the continuation of grazing activities, fencing, and signage. Perimeter fencing around the property and access road would be constructed of barbless or woven wire to contain cattle. Signage would alert Park visitors to the Park boundaries. Park patrols would be implemented as conditions warrant. Considering the distance to the closest rural homes, fencing, trail placement, property boundary signage, and Park patrols, significant land use conflicts with nearby residences would not be expected.

The use of the Spears Ranch portion of the Park for preservation of open space would be consistent with the General Plan and County Zoning Ordinance. However, a Conditional Use Permit would be required to ensure the project would be compatible with the surrounding privately-owned properties. Approval of a Conditional Use Permit is required for certain land uses that are generally consistent with the zone's purposes but that could create compatibility issues for adjoining properties, the surrounding area, and their populations if not designed to avoid effects on surrounding land uses. The purposes of a Conditional Use Permit are to allow County Planning Department staff and the planning commission to evaluate one or more proposed uses to determine whether land use conflicts may occur, to provide members of the public with an opportunity to review the proposed project and express their concerns in a public hearing, to work with the project applicant to adjust the project through

conditions of approval to solve any potential conflicts that are identified, or to disapprove a project if identified conflicts cannot be acceptably corrected.

The project has been designed to be consistent with residences and agricultural activities in the surrounding area and includes components that would ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses and would be consistent with planning documents, policies, and regulations. In addition, the proposed project would be required to obtain a Conditional Use Permit. This impact would be less than significant.

IMPACT 4-4 **Land Use and Agricultural Resources—Roadway Improvements on Garden Bar Road and Potential Conflicts with Existing or Future Land Uses Adjacent to the Project Area.** *Garden Bar Road would be improved to meet demands of increased traffic related to Park use. Roadway improvements would include widening in certain areas that could impact existing properties, trees, environmentally sensitive areas, and utility poles located along Garden Bar Road. However, design features are included in the project design that would minimize impacts on properties, and other sensitive areas. Road widening would not result in a change in existing land uses adjacent to Garden Bar Road and the impacts would be primarily temporary during construction.*

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

Approximately 50 residences are accessed from Garden Bar Road between Mt. Pleasant Road and the project area, with approximately 10 residences within 500 feet of Garden Bar Road. Garden Bar Road becomes increasingly rural as it approaches the proposed Spears Ranch entrance, and residences become much more widely dispersed. Similarly, many of the existing grazing areas are associated with the residences in the area, and become increasingly dispersed approaching the project area. The use of the proposed Park is expected to generate approximately 128 vehicles per day during weekdays and 230 vehicles per day on weekends. It should be noted that traffic volume data from the Mears Drive entrance shows that traffic associated with the use of the Park peaks during mid-day hours outside of typical morning and evening commute hour peaks. Peak traffic trends would likely be similar for the Garden Bar entrance.

To meet the demands of increased traffic proposed for Phases 2 and 3 of the proposed project, upgrades would be required on Garden Bar Road. Roadway improvements would take into consideration right-of way availability, trees, environmentally sensitive areas, and utility poles. Roadway widening impacts would potentially require fill of wetlands and removal of a significant number of trees along the roadway (please refer to Section 12.0, “Biological Resources,” for a discussion of these wetland and tree removal impacts). Roadway widening would potentially impact as much as 5 acres of land that is outside of the existing Garden Bar Road right-of-way to accommodate improvements.

Planned improvements to Garden Bar Road are proposed in 3 phases. In Phase 1, the access road between Garden Bar Road and the Park would be fenced, cattle guards would be installed, and an improved gated connector between the access road and Garden Bar Road would be installed prior to allowance of classroom sized groups on site by reservation. Daily public automobile access would not be allowed into the Garden Bar Road entrance in Phase 1; County maintenance access and potential classroom sized groups with managed bus and automobile travel to the Park would be allowed via appointment. All vehicles entering and leaving the site during Phase 1 would be subject to opening and locking the access gate behind them. The improvements in Phases 2 are intended to provide a minimum 18-foot roadway width, where possible, and improve designated vertical curves and

signage along portions of Garden Bar Road. Public automobile, trucks without trailers, and bus access would be allowed into the Garden Bar Road entrance with Phase 2 improvements; however, horse trailer access would not be allowed. For Phase 3 of the project, Garden Bar Road would be widened to 20 feet, where possible, and parking that could accommodate horse trailers would be constructed. In areas along Garden Bar Road and the access road from Garden Bar Road to the Park entrance where the County determines that status trees, significant rock outcroppings, and other valuable natural features within the proposed widening corridor should be preserved or where adequate road right-of-way does not currently exist and is not obtainable through market value based willing seller negotiations, alternatives such as turnouts, striping, and/or signage may be considered and approved in lieu of full width widening for those discreet areas. Horse-trailer access to the Garden Bar Road entrance would be allowed with the implementation of Phase 3. Ultimately, in Phase 3, horizontal curve radii would be designed to 35 mph and 25 mph standards. While recognizing that the 25-mph design does not meet the County's requirements for a rural secondary road, the safety study notes:

Due to the nature of the existing roadway the standard for a rural secondary roadway is not considered appropriate for this setting and would result in unnecessary widening of the existing road and change in character of the roadway given the existing and future use levels. The County Fire Department's requirement is an 18 ft wide all-weather surface and is considered appropriate for Phase 2.

Existing roadside ditches would be reconstructed where the road would be widened; however, no existing structures adjacent to Garden Bar Road would be affected. Road widening would result in a change in land uses of approximately 5 acres of land adjacent to Garden Bar Road. However, the County would work with existing land owners to negotiate the purchase of additional right-of-way from willing sellers as needed for the proposed improvements. This would be a less-than-significant impact.

4.4 MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures are necessary.