

4.2 Agriculture Resources

<i>Issues (and Supporting Information Sources):</i>	<i>Potentially Significant Impact</i>	<i>Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporation</i>	<i>Less Than Significant Impact</i>	<i>No Impact</i>
2. AGRICULTURE RESOURCES				
Would the project:				
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland of Statewide Importance, to non-agricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

4.2.1 Setting

To characterize the environmental baseline for agricultural resources, the Important Farmland Maps (2002 Series) produced by the Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) for Nevada County were reviewed. Important Farmland maps show categories of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, Urban and Built-up Land, Other Land, and Water. Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance map categories are based on qualifying soil types, as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), as well as current land use (irrigated agriculture). The farmland map categories are defined by the Department of Conservation's FMMP as follows:

- **Prime Farmland**: Land which has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to current farming methods.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance**: Land that is similar to *Prime Farmland* but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture.
- **Unique Farmland**: Land of lesser quality soils used for the production of specific high economic value crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. It is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Examples of crops include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grape, and cut flowers.

- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Land of importance to the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county’s board of supervisors and local advisory committees. Examples include dairies, dryland farming, aquaculture, and uncultivated areas with soils qualifying for *Prime Farmland* and *Farmland of Statewide Importance*.
- **Grazing Land:** Land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock.
- **Urban and Built-up Land:** Land used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administrative purpose, railroad yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment plants, water control structures, and other development purposes. Highways, railroads, and other transportation facilities are also included in this category.
- **Other Land:** Land which is not included in any of the other mapping categories. Common examples include low-density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing, confined livestock, poultry or aquaculture facilities, strip mines, borrow pits, and water bodies smaller than 40 acres.
- **Water:** Water areas with an extent of at least 40 acres.

Table 4.2-1 shows the acres of farmland in Nevada County, as well as the amount of recent farmland conversions. The 2002 farmland map for Nevada County indicates that the project site is classified as *Urban and Built-Up Land* and *Other Land* (Department of Conservation, 2003).

**TABLE 4.2-1
 FARMLAND CONVERSION FROM 1990–2002 IN NEVADA COUNTY**

Land Use Category	Total Acres Inventoried		1990–2002 Acreage Changes		
	1990	2002	Acres Lost	Acres Gained	Net Change
Prime Farmland	395	435	170	210	+40
Farmland of Statewide Importance	948	1,789	226	1,067	+841
Unique Farmland	198	547	68	417	+485
Farmland of Local Importance	33,186	18,423	18,930	4,167	-14,763
Grazing Land	125,400	130,425	4,639	9,664	+5,025
Agricultural Land Subtotal	160,127	151,619	24,033	15,525	-8,508

SOURCE: California Department of Conservation (2005)

4.2.2 Regulatory Context

State

California Land Conservation Act

Under the provisions of the Williamson Act (Section 51200 of the California Land Conservation Act of 1965), landowners contract with the County to maintain agricultural or open space use of their lands in return for a reduced property tax assessment. In 1994, the Williamson Act was amended to include specific language regarding “conditional compatibility” (Government Code Section 51238.1), mining compatibility (Section 51238.2) and grandfather provisions (Section 51238.3). Nevada County currently participates in the Williamson Act; however, the project sites are not located within a Williamson Act contract.

California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the FMMP. The FMMP monitors the conversion of the state’s farmland to and from agricultural use. The map series identifies eight classifications and uses a minimum mapping unit size of 10 acres. The FMMP also produces a biannual report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use. The FMMP maintains an inventory of state agricultural land and updates its “Important Farmland Series Maps” every two years (Department of Conservation, 2006).

The FMMP is an informational service only and does not have regulatory jurisdiction over local land use decisions. Three categories of farmland (*Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, and *Unique Farmland*) are considered valuable and any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered to be an adverse impact. None of the project sites are located on land designated as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, or *Unique Farmland*.

Local

Nevada County General Plan¹

The Nevada County General Plan designates the New Brunswick site for *Industrial* uses and the Idaho-Maryland site for *Business Park* uses. Agricultural uses are not considered appropriate for these land use designations (Nevada County, 1996).

Nevada County Zoning Ordinance

The New Brunswick site is currently zoned *Light Industrial – Site Performance Combining District* and the Idaho-Maryland site is currently zoned *Business Park* by the Nevada County

¹ Under the proposed project, Nevada County plans and policies would only apply to the New Brunswick site, which would not be annexed into the City of Grass Valley as part of this proposed project.

Zoning Map. Agricultural uses are not considered appropriate for these land use designations (Nevada County, 2005).

City of Grass Valley General Plan

The City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan designates the Round Hole site for *Business Park* uses, the New Brunswick site for *Manufacturing-Industrial* uses, and the Idaho-Maryland site for *Business Park* and *Urban Medium Density* residential uses. Agricultural uses are not considered appropriate for these zoning designations (City of Grass Valley, 1999).

City of Grass Valley Zoning Ordinance

The Round Hole site is currently zoned Specific Plan (SP1-A) in the City's Whispering Pines Corporate Community Specific Plan. The City's existing Zoning Map currently does not identify zoning designations for the Idaho-Maryland or New Brunswick sites since neither site is currently located within the City's jurisdiction (although they are within the City's existing sphere of influence). The SP1-A designation does not provide for agricultural uses (City of Grass Valley, 1993).

4.2.3 Impacts Discussion

Methods

The effort to identify potential impacts to designated agricultural resources included a review of the Nevada County Important Farmland Map, and the City of Grass Valley General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Information available on the California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection's website was also reviewed to obtain existing agricultural resources conditions at the project sites.

Results

The proposed project would not result, directly or indirectly, in any conversion of land designated by the Department of Conservation FMMP as *Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland*, nor would it conflict with existing agricultural zoning, or a Williamson Act contract. There would be no impact to agricultural resources.

As stated above in the Setting, the project sites are designated by the FMMP as *Urban and Built-Up Land* and *Other Land*. Thus, proposed project activities would not result in conversion of land designated as *Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland* (Department of Conservation, 2002). None of the project sites, or immediately surrounding sites, are zoned for agricultural uses and, while Nevada County does have a Williamson Act Contract program, the project sites are not located within a Williamson Act Contract.

4.2.4 Data Gaps

No data gaps.

References – Agricultural Resources

California Department of Conservation, 2004. Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, www.consrv.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/index.htm, accessed February 10, 2006.

California Department of Conservation, 2005. *Table A-19, Nevada County, 1990-2002 Land Use Conversion*, April 14, 2005.

California Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), 2002. *Nevada County Important Farmland 2002*, map published October 2003.

City of Grass Valley, 1999. *City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan*, November 23, 1999.

City of Grass Valley, 1993, *City of Grass Valley Zoning Ordinance*, as amended November 23, 1993.

Nevada County, 1996. *Nevada County General Plan*, 1996.

Nevada County, 2005. *Nevada County Zoning Ordinance*, May 10, 2005.