

4.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

This section includes an explanation of the criteria and methods used to evaluate the significance and quality of agricultural land in Yuba County, a description of the existing agricultural resources, and an evaluation of how implementation of the 2030 General Plan would affect agriculture and forestry resources.

4.2.1 REGULATORY SETTING

FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

Federal Farmland Protection Act

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is the agency primarily responsible for implementing the federal Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). The purpose of the FPPA is to minimize federal contributions to the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural land uses by ensuring that federal programs are administered in a manner compatible with state government, local government, and private programs designed to protect farmland. The FPPA established the Farmland Protection Program (FPP).

The FPP is a voluntary program that provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural use. This program provides matching funds to state, local, and tribal government entities and nongovernmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. Participating landowners agree not to convert the land to nonagricultural land uses and retain all rights to the property for future agriculture production. A minimum 30-year term is required for conservation easements and priority is given to applications with perpetual easements. NRCS provides up to 50% of the fair market value of the easement.

STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, administers the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). Land is rated based on its soil characteristics and irrigation status. These ratings are then used to help prioritize farmland conservation efforts. The FMMP uses the term “Important Farmland” to describe parcels that meet certain criteria.

In Yuba County, three Important Farmland types have been identified: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland. According to the FMMP:

- ▶ **Prime Farmland** is “farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.”
- ▶ **Unique Farmland** is “farmland of lesser quality soils used for the 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. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.”
- ▶ **Farmland of Statewide Importance** is “farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater 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.”

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act (California Government Code Section 51200 et seq.), enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of promoting 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. Upon establishment of such preserves, the locality may offer to agricultural landowners 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 following 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.

California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982

The California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982 (CTPA) describes the powers and duties of local government in protecting timberlands. The law is designed to maintain an optimum amount of timberland ensuring its current and continued availability by establishing Timberland Preserve Zones (TPZ) on all qualifying timberland, which restrict land use to growing and harvesting timber and other compatible uses. The act discourages premature or unnecessary conversion of timberland to urban or other uses and expansion of urban services into timberland, and encourages investment in timberlands based on reasonable expectation of harvest. The CTPA also provides that timber operations conducted in accordance with California forest practice rules (Z’Berg-Nejedly Forest Practices Act of 1973) shall not be or become restricted or prohibited due to land uses in or around the location of those timber operations.

Timberland Production Zones

Under the Z’berg-Warren-Keene-Collier Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976 (California Government Code - Section 51110-51119.5: Article 2), counties must provide for the zoning of land used for growing and harvesting timber as TPZ. A TPZ is a 10-year restriction on the use of timberland and is similar to the Williamson Act for agricultural lands. Land use under a TPZ is restricted to growing and harvesting timber, and to compatible uses approved by the county (or city). In return, taxation of timberland under a TPZ will be based only on such restrictions in use.

The Z’berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973

The FPA established a nine member Board of Forestry whose mandate is the control over forest practices and forest resources in California. The Board of Forestry is the policy arm of the enforcement branch of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). CAL FIRE ensures that landowners abide by these laws when harvesting trees.

The FPA assures that productivity of timberlands is restored, enhanced, and maintained, and that the goal of maximum sustained production of high-quality timber products is achieved in consideration of values relating to watershed, fisheries and wildlife, range and forage, recreation and aesthetics, and employment and the regional economy. It requires that a Timber Harvest Plan (THP) be prepared by a Registered Professional Forester (RPF) for timber harvest on virtually all non-federal land. Article 7 of the Forest Practice Rules covers conversion of timberland to non-timberland uses.

The FPA is implemented by the Forest Practice Rules, consistent with other laws, including but not limited to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970. The provisions of these rules are followed by RPFs in

preparing THPs. The THP process substitutes for the EIR process under CEQA because the timber harvesting regulatory program has been certified pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.5. The THPs are required to adopt feasible mitigation measures or alternatives from the range of measures set out or provided for in FPA rules which would substantially lessen or avoid significant adverse impacts the activity may have on the environment.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

Yuba County Consumer Disclosure Ordinance

In response to the need to protect agricultural land and operations, the Yuba County Board of Supervisors has adopted a consumer disclosure ordinance (Chapter 11.55 of the Yuba County Ordinance Code) that declares it to be in the public interest to preserve and protect agricultural land and operations for agricultural use. The ordinance finds that “residential development adjacent to such land and operations often leads to restrictions on such operations to the detriment of these uses and economic viability of the County’s...agricultural industries as a whole.” The ordinance’s purposes are to promote the general health, safety, and welfare; protect those lands zoned, designated or used for agriculture; support and encourage agricultural operations; and previously notify prospective purchasers adjacent to or near agricultural operations of the inherent problems associated with such purchases, including sounds, dust, odor, fertilizers, pesticides, smoke, and vibrations. To accomplish its purposes, the ordinance requires that property sellers disclose to residential users of the land, at the point building permits are issued by the County, the potential inconveniences agricultural operations may present.

Yuba County Zoning Ordinance

The zoning ordinance includes two zoning district designations that specify agriculture as an ongoing allowable use, including Agriculture/Rural Residential Zone and Exclusive Agriculture Zone. The Exclusive Agricultural Zone covers much of the western portion of the County, while the Agriculture/Rural Residential Zone covers much of the eastern portion of the County. The County’s zoning ordinance includes a TPZ, which is intended to accommodate planned timber harvest and provide tax benefits to property owners of timberland.

4.2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Agriculture is the most prevalent land use in Yuba County and the most significant single component of the County’s economy. Cropland and pasture accounts for approximately 55% of the total County land area. Agriculture not only contributes to the local economy, but also helps define the County’s visual and social character, maintains land in open space, supports wildlife habitats and migration corridors, separates urban land uses from surrounding developed areas, and provides access to a local food source.

Croplands are found in the areas of prime agricultural soil and soils with unique suitability to certain crops in the western Valley floor area of the county along the historic floodplain of the Yuba and Feather rivers due to the relatively flat topography, water supply and soil conditions. Grazing lands are found primarily in the central and eastern portions of the county, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, although grazing also occurs on uncultivated portions of the Valley floor. Livestock grazing also occurs in the Plumas and Tahoe National Forests.

In 2008, there were 226,588 acres of agricultural land in Yuba County, making up approximately 55% of the County’s entire land area (Department of Conservation 2010). Prime Farmland accounted for approximately 41,369 acres or 10% of total county land, Farmland of Statewide Importance made up approximately 10,975 acres or 3% of total county land, and Unique Farmland made up approximately 32,605 acres or 8% of total county land. The bulk of these agricultural lands are located on the valley floor along historic floodplains. Grazing land occurred on 141,639 acres, or 34% of total county land. Most of the County’s grazing lands are located in the foothills.

The FMMP of the California Department of Conservation monitors agricultural farmland loss. Table 4.2.1 below shows the change in acreage of farmland from 1992 to 2008. Overall, a total of 12,000 acres of agricultural land have been converted between 1992 and 2008. Approximately 4,104 acres of Prime Farmland have been lost during this time. During this same time, roughly 2,800 acres were added to the “urban and built-up land” category and 9,600 acres were added to the “other land” category. Other Land” includes low-density rural development, as well as vacant and non-agricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development.

Table 4.2-1 Change in Farmland Acreage, 1992-2008¹										
Land Use Category ²	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004 ⁽²⁾	2006	2008	1992-2008 Net Acreage Changed
Prime Farmland	45,473	45,919	46,491	45,785	44,484	43,618	42,676	41,993	41,369	(4,104)
Farmland of Statewide Importance	10,918	10,973	11,011	11,032	10,991	11,293	11,094	11,020	10,975	57
Unique Farmland	37,271	37,527	37,845	36,928	34,698	34,267	33,109	32,371	32,605	(4,666)
Important Farmland Subtotal	93,662	94,419	95,347	93,745	90,173	89,178	86,879	85,384	84,949	(8,713)
Grazing Land	144,922	144,198	142,225	143,224	144,519	144,502	143,533	142,727	141,639	(3,283)
Agricultural Land Subtotal	238,584	238,617	237,572	236,969	234,692	233,680	230,412	228,111	226,588	(11,996)
Urban and Built-Up Land	10,833	10,952	11,110	11,180	11,544	11,837	12,082	13,083	13,669	2,836
Other Land	155,434	155,659	156,953	157,476	159,292	160,011	163,034	163,993	165,127	9,693
¹ Figures are generated from the most current version of the geographic information system data. Files dating from 1984 through 1992 were reprocessed with a standardized county line in the Albers equal-area projection, and other boundary improvements. ² Because of the incorporation of digital soil survey data (SSURGO) in 2002, acreages for farmland, grazing and other land categories may differ from those published in the 2000-2002 farmland conversion report. ³ “Other Land” includes low-density rural development; 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. Vacant and non-agricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is also mapped as Other Land. Source: California Department of Conservation 2010.										

Overall, the total gross valuation for all agricultural commodities produced in Yuba County in 2009 was approximately \$198 million, with fruit and nut crops making up about 46% of the total value of agricultural commodities. Total agricultural commodities increased in value by approximately 9% compared to 2008 values. Increases in the value of prunes, dried plums, peaches, and walnuts explain this increase (Yuba County 2010).

There are large forested areas of Yuba County that provide habitat, surface water supply, visual resources, and timber resources. Most forests are in the foothills and mountain areas of eastern and northeastern Yuba County, which include portions of Tahoe National Forest and Plumas National Forest. In 2005 there was a total of 95,000 acres of forested land in Yuba County; 55,000 acres were in private ownership and 40,000 acres was public owned (TSS Consultants 2010). Timber production and harvesting is a major component of the local economy, and the County has an interest in maintaining timber harvesting as a viable industry, along with the other open space co-benefits of the County’s forest lands.

4.2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

METHODOLOGY

The environmental analysis in this section is based, in part, on a review of FMMP Important Farmland maps. As part of the analysis, this EIR examines the Important Farmland classifications that are used by FMMP to determine the agricultural significance of the lands (i.e., Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance) in the unincorporated county.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact on agricultural resources is considered significant if the proposed project would:

- ▶ Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as determined by the FMMP Important Farmland criteria, to non-agricultural use; or
- ▶ conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or conflict with a Williamson Act contract; or
- ▶ conflict with existing zoning or cause rezoning of forest land or timberland; or
- ▶ result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; or
- ▶ involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to a non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

Yuba County does not participate in the Williamson Act program, so there are no parcels within the County under Williamson Act contract. Thus implementation of the 2030 General Plan would not convert any land under Williamson Act contract to urban use, and this issue is not addressed further.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 4.2-1 **Loss of Important Farmland and Conversion of Agricultural Land to Non-Agricultural Uses.** *Buildout of the 2030 General Plan could result in the conversion of as many as 5,682 acres of Important Farmland and 44,901 acres of grazing land to nonagricultural uses. This impact is considered **potentially significant**.*

In 2008, there were 84,949 acres of Important Farmland in Yuba County and 141,639 acres of grazing land, for a total of 226,588 acres of agricultural land. Under the 2030 General Plan, more than 50,000 acres of agricultural land could be converted to non-agricultural use, assuming maximum buildout of the General Plan. Of this acreage, roughly 3,900 acres is Prime Farmland, 170 acres is Farmland of Statewide Importance, 1,600 acres is Unique Farmland, and 45,000 acres is grazing land. Most of the grazing land that is potentially subject to development under the 2030 General Plan is in the foothills.

The 2030 General Plan includes policies and actions to balance the need for development with the need to protect the County's ongoing agricultural heritage and economic base. The 2030 General Plan Land Use Diagram calls for development to be focused within the Valley Growth Boundary, with limited development outside of the boundary. This Valley Growth Boundary effectively establishes long-term agricultural areas within valley portions of the unincorporated County to be conserved for ongoing agricultural activities (see Policy CD1.1, Policy CD1.2, and Policy CD1.3). The Land Use Diagram also maps Rural Community boundaries for the unincorporated communities, which are mostly located in the foothill and mountain portions of the County. The Rural Community boundaries will serve a similar function in directing any development to areas within Rural Community Boundary

Areas the boundary and preserving open space areas, including areas serving an agricultural purpose, in areas outside the boundaries.

The County describes its general intent for land use change in the Community Development Element. The County has also developed an Open Space Diagram (please refer to Exhibit Natural Resources-1) to illustrate the County's intent for important open spaces, including:

- ▶ Cropland,
- ▶ Forest,
- ▶ Grazing Land,
- ▶ Critical Habitat,
- ▶ Water and Groundwater Recharge Areas,
- ▶ Mineral Resources,
- ▶ Private Recreation, and
- ▶ Public Open Space.

The open space designations depicted on the Open Space Diagram is intended to accommodate multiple values (recreational, aesthetic, habitat, etc). The Open Space Diagram identifies large areas of the County for Cropland and Grazing lands. The Natural Resources Element provides the County's intent for land use in this area:

- ▶ **Cropland.** To provide for growing, processing, transporting, and selling cultivated crops, dairy operations, and other types of agricultural and agriculture-related uses. In these areas, the County's standards will be applied in a way that is protective of agricultural operations. Other beneficial uses provided on Croplands, such as habitat preservation, habitat mitigation, agricultural and ecological tourism, levees and other public facilities, recreation, and other public purposes are also consistent with the General Plan.
- ▶ **Grazing Lands.** To provide for grazing, viticulture, livestock management, and a variety of other agriculture-related uses. Other beneficial uses, such as habitat preservation, habitat mitigation, ecological tourism, recreation, public facilities, and other public purposes would also be consistent with the General Plan.

New development, particularly residential development, can make farming more difficult or costly due to conflicts between non-agricultural and agricultural activities. For example, residents may complain about noise, dust, odors and low-flying aircraft used to dust or spray crops. Increased restrictions on agriculture processes and other aspects of encroachment on agricultural areas can lower productivity, increase costs, and otherwise impair agricultural operations.

Non-agricultural development could create soil erosion, but this impact is reduced through application of General Plan policies and actions, as well as Regional Water Quality Board regulations to reduce erosion and runoff. Development in the Valley Growth Boundary and Rural Community Boundary Areas would add vehicular traffic in areas where agricultural equipment uses roads. This could make it somewhat more difficult to move agricultural equipment. Urban development could generate air pollution that could be harmful to crops, in certain instances. Urban activities can result in vandalism and the introduction of domestic animals that may disturb certain agricultural activities. Non-agricultural development can drive up the potential value of properties, creating pressure to convert agricultural land to urban use. One or a combination of these conflicts could limit agricultural activities or encourage farmers to take their land out of agricultural production, resulting in adverse impacts to agricultural resources in unincorporated parts of the County.

The 2030 General Plan includes policies that are intended to reduce conflicts between agricultural operations and adjacent uses, including policies requiring buffering of agricultural uses and supporting right-to-farm policies. In addition to geographic limitations on the location of new development provided by the Valley Growth Boundary and Rural Community boundaries, the General Plan includes policies intended to reduce indirect pressure on existing agricultural lands to prematurely convert to urban use. The General Plan also includes a policy supporting a Consumer Disclosure Ordinance, currently contained in Chapter 11.55 of the Yuba County Ordinance Code,

which requires that property sellers disclose to purchasers and residents of nearby agricultural operations and the potential inconveniences that those agricultural operations may present to residences. This protects the rights of agricultural property owners and farmers to continue agricultural operations on their land, even if it is adjacent to other land uses.

However, the 2030 General Plan would result in the outward expansion of non-agricultural development from the existing developed areas, which could potentially conflict with ongoing agricultural uses. This conflict could directly or indirectly cause or hasten conversion of these agricultural lands to a non-agricultural use.

Relevant Policies and Actions of the 2030 General Plan

The 2030 General Plan incorporates the following policies and implementation program aimed at protecting agricultural land, including Important Farmland, from premature conversion in Yuba County.

- ▶ **Policy NR1.4715:** The County will support the establishment and expansion of ecological and agricultural tourism and recreation activities, consistent with the General Plan.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.1:** The County’s zoning and development standards will be designed to support and avoid conflict with ongoing viable agricultural operations, as well as agriculture-related economic activities.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.2:** New developments adjacent to ongoing agricultural operations shall provide written notice to landowners and residents regarding potential noise, dust, odors, and other effects of adjacent agriculture.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.3:** The County will not consider agricultural operations to be a nuisance in cases where new development occurs in areas near ongoing agricultural operations.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.4:** New developments adjacent to ongoing agriculture shall incorporate design, construction, and maintenance techniques to minimize conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses, including, but not limited to the use of agricultural buffers.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.5:** Agricultural buffers are only required at the edges of Rural Community Boundary Areas and the Valley Growth Boundary where there are adjacent ongoing agricultural operations. Buffers are not required in areas adjacent to planned urban development shown on the General Plan Land Use Diagram.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.6:** Agricultural buffers are not required for portions of developments adjacent to existing rural residential development or other types of development on parcels of primarily 5 acres or less.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.7:** Agricultural buffers should be designed to accommodate drainage, trails, roads, other facilities or infrastructure, community gardens, native landscaping, and other uses that would be compatible with ongoing agricultural operations and provide valuable services or amenities.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.8:** The County will support small-scale farming on Valley Neighborhood properties, where such operations are compatible with surrounding uses.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.9:** The County will support agricultural tourism, small-scale agriculture and agricultural processing, such as olive oil production and wineries, in Rural Community Boundary Areas, where compatible with surrounding uses.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.10:** Cropland and grazing land may be used for habitat conservation and mitigation purposes, consistent with the Yuba-Sutter County Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan, once adopted.

- ▶ **Policy NR3.11:** Residential dwellings developed in cropland areas shall be secondary to, and supportive of ongoing agricultural operations.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.12:** The County will support the incorporation of renewable energy generation and distribution projects into agricultural operations.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.13:** The County’s Economic Development Strategy and Work Plan should include as a focus the expansion of existing agriculture and agriculture-related industries and development of new value-added activities, agricultural processing, distribution, marketing and sales, and other agriculture-related economic activities.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.14:** The County’s entitlement process for agricultural operations and improvements will be designed and managed in a way that is efficient and predictable.
- ▶ **Policy NR3.15:** The County will support efforts to agree on a regional approach in the Yuba-Sutter area among counties and cities to protect local agricultural resources and the local agricultural economic base.
- ▶ **Action NR3.1:** Agricultural Zoning. As a part of the comprehensive Zoning Ordinance update that will follow adoption of the General Plan, the County will establish minimum parcel sizes on Cropland and Grazing Land designed to promote their long-term viability for agricultural use. In general, higher per-acre value agricultural operations could accommodate relatively smaller long-term viable parcel sizes, depending on the crop type. Lower per-acre value types of agricultural activity, such as grazing, would need larger parcel sizes in order to be viable on a long-term basis. Determining the minimum viable agricultural parcel size depends on several factors that are subject to change over time. A recent study by the UC Davis Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics does not establish minimum viable parcel size, but suggests that for walnuts in Yuba and Sutter counties, the minimum viable parcel size is more than 20 acres.¹ County staff will collaborate with local experts from UC Cooperative Extension, the Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau, and other organizations, as well as local farmers for guidance on minimum parcel sizes required to support ongoing viable operations within the context of local crop types and grazing operations. The County’s Zoning Ordinance will be revised to regulate land use and parcel size on Cropland and Grazing Lands outside the Valley Growth Boundary and Rural Communities, based on this guidance.

- Related Goals: Goal NR3
- Agency/Department: Community Development and Services Agency; Agricultural Commissioner
- Funding Source: General Fund and/or permit fees
- Time Frame: The County’s zoning and development standards will be revised following the General Plan Update. The target date for approving a revised zoning code is 2013.

- ▶ **Action NR3.2:** Agricultural/Urban Interface. The County will develop and approve guidelines for the required location and design of agricultural buffers (Exhibit Natural Resources-4). Allowed land uses within buffer areas would include drainage swales, trails, roads, other facilities and infrastructure, community gardens, native landscaping, linear parkland, and other uses that are compatible with ongoing agricultural operations. Buffer guidelines will illustrate methods to avoid conflicts between ongoing agricultural uses and encroaching urban development. Buffers will be designed to avoid nuisance complaints related to dust, spraying, noise, and other relevant issues. The County’s guidelines will provide guidance on the appropriate width of buffers. The width will depend on such factors as prevailing winds, crop types, agricultural practices,

¹ [Karen Klonsky, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, UC Davis. Economically Viable Parcel Size. August 28, 2006.](#)

and other relevant factors. The width of roads, trails, drainage ways, other rights-of-way, and easements may count as part of the buffer.

- Related Goals: Goal NR3, Goal HS1
- Agency/Department: Community Development and Services Agency and Agricultural Commissioner
- Funding Source: General Fund and/or fees
- Time Frame: The target date for approving guidelines for agricultural buffers is 2014.

Conclusion

As shown, the 2030 General Plan includes policies that are intended to conserve agricultural land by maintaining zoning appropriate for agriculture, continuing the disclosure of agricultural operations and potential inconveniences to nearby residences, directing growth away from important agricultural lands, and use of agricultural buffers, as appropriate.

These policies and actions for agricultural zoning and buffers, along with the County's approach to directing growth within the Valley Growth Boundary and Rural Community Boundary Areas, would reduce potential impacts to agricultural lands. In addition, policies and actions to reduce indirect impacts, such as disclosure and nuisance policies would reduce impacts related to the indirect conversion of agricultural land, including Important Farmland. However, the purpose of the 2030 General Plan is to develop a framework for future long-term development, and it is inevitable that some conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use would occur in accommodating long-term growth needs. The impact is considered **potentially significant**.

Mitigation Measure

The policies and actions in the 2030 General Plan would not prevent the conversion of Important Farmland or areas currently zoned for agricultural use. Because no new farmland would be made available, compensation for losses of farmland would not be achieved and a net loss of Important Farmland would occur. No additional feasible mitigation is available to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

The 2030 General Plan includes policies that are intended to conserve agricultural land and reduce conflicts between agricultural operations and adjacent uses. However, the 2030 General Plan identifies areas for development that are currently used for agriculture and areas currently zoned for agricultural use. Implementation of the General Plan would result in the loss of agricultural land uses, including Important Farmland and lands zoned for agricultural use, to urban development. Any actions taken by the County, including policies contained within the proposed 2030 General Plan, would only extend the timeframe for conversion of Important Farmland associated with development, loss of Important Farmland would still occur. This impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT 4.2-2 *Loss of Forest Land or Conversion of Forest Land to Non-Forest Use. Implementation of the 2030 General Plan would not result in large-scale conversion of forest lands to non-forest uses, but some timberland areas in Rural Community Boundary Areas could be affected by implementation of the 2030 General Plan. This impact is considered **potentially significant**.*

Large areas of the County have forests that provide habitat, watersheds, visual resources, and timber resources. Most forests in Yuba County are in the foothills and mountain areas of eastern and northeastern Yuba County, including portions of Tahoe National Forest and Plumas National Forest. Timber production and harvesting is a major sector of the County's agricultural economy, and the County has an interest in maintaining timber harvesting as a viable industry, in addition to other natural resources provided by the County's forest lands. The desire to preserve these important open spaces is reflected in 2030 General Plan policy.

The County describes its general intent for land use change in the Community Development Element. The County has also developed an Open Space Diagram (please refer to Exhibit Natural Resources-1 in the 2030 General Plan) to illustrate the County's intent for important open spaces that include forest land, including:

- ▶ Cropland,
- ▶ Forest,
- ▶ Grazing Land,
- ▶ Critical Habitat,
- ▶ Water and Groundwater Recharge Areas,
- ▶ Private Recreation, and
- ▶ Public Open Space.

The General Plan's intent for these open spaces is described in the Natural Resources Element and the County's intent for open space land related to forests is provided below:

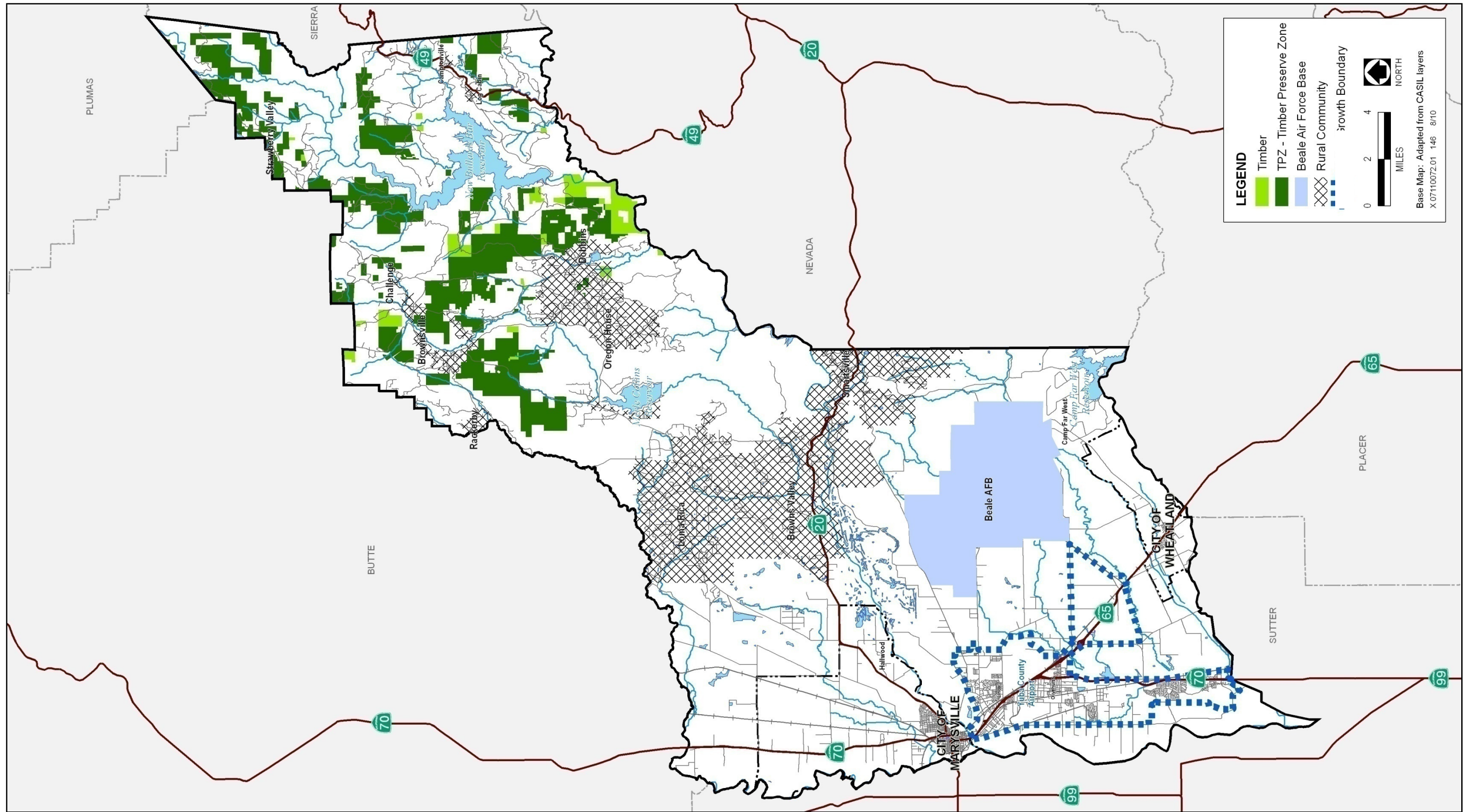
- ▶ **Forest.** To provide for growing and harvesting of timber and forest products, recreation, water supply protection, carbon sequestration, and other forest-related uses. Other beneficial uses, such as habitat mitigation, ecological tourism, recreation, watershed management, fish and wildlife habitat management, exploration and extraction of mineral resources, public facilities, and other public purposes are also consistent with the General Plan.
- ▶ **Public Open Space.** To remain under public ownership and provide hazard protection, habitat, water supply protection, recreation, and other important public open space functions. Many of these areas were acquired to provide for habitat preservation. Other areas provide habitat value, but are owned and managed for other purposes, such as timber harvest, recreational opportunities, or other resource-oriented use. The County anticipates that Public Open Space areas would continue to provide habitat, aesthetic, recreational, resource extraction, and other values through buildout of this General Plan.
- ▶ **Water and Groundwater Recharge Areas.** To protect water quality and habitat associated with rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and streams. Recreational uses and public access are appropriate along the County's waterways, so long as the design and use does not substantially and adversely affect groundwater recharge, scenic views, cultural resources, or natural habitat.

The County's application of the Land Use and Open Space Diagrams would reduce the potential for land use change in forested areas of the County.

Most of the forest resources in Yuba County are located in mountainous areas of northeastern Yuba County near the rural communities of Oregon House, Dobbins, Brownsville, Challenge, Log Cabin, Camptonville, and Strawberry Valley.

The vast majority of the County's forest resources are located on protected federal lands outside of the Rural Community boundaries. Most of the growth anticipated under implementation of the 2030 General Plan would occur within the Valley Growth Boundary. Some development could occur in rural areas, as well. Similar to the approach in the valley, where development in the unincorporated County is directed to the Valley Growth Boundary, development within rural portions of the County would be directed to the Rural Community areas.

According to County Assessor classifications of existing land use, approximately 245 acres of land within Rural Community areas is characterized as either "timber" or "timber preserve zone" (see Exhibit 4.2-1). Although the General Plan does not require, and the County does not anticipate that Rural Community areas would be fully developed, the County has conservatively assumed for the purposes of this EIR that timberland within Rural Community areas could potentially be converted from forestry.



Source: Yuba County Assessor's Office 2007

Timber and Timber Preserve Zone within Rural Community Boundary Areas

Exhibit 4.2-1

New development, particularly residential development, could make timber harvest more difficult or costly due to complaints about noise or other components of forestry operations. However, the 2030 General Plan includes policies that are intended to reduce conflicts between forestry and adjacent uses.

Relevant Policies and Actions of the 2030 General Plan

The following policies from the 2030 General Plan are intended to protect Yuba County's forest resources from conversion to non-forest uses:

- ▶ **Policy NR4.1:** The County's zoning and development standards for Forest areas will be designed and implemented to support and avoid conflict with ongoing timber harvest operations and forestry-related economic activities.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.2:** Uses in Timberland Preserve Zones (TPZs) shall be compatible with ongoing forestry and timber harvest operations.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.3:** The County will generally defer to the State for timber harvest plan review, but will assist with efforts to address land use conflicts in the context of timber harvest plan review, where possible.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.4:** Any new residences constructed in or near timber harvest areas shall mitigate impacts on adjacent timber harvesting operations.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.5:** The County will discourage location of public improvements and utilities in Timberland Preserve Zones, where the public improvements or the land acquisition required for the improvements would have a substantial adverse affect on timber production.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.6:** The County will encourage conservation easement programs that combine sustainable forest management with timber production.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.7:** The County will support forest management and product certification, as well as new forestry related economic practices and product development, including renewable energy development and sawmills.
- ▶ **Policy NR4.8:** The County will support carbon offset programs within Yuba County's forests, according to established protocols, and will support local carbon sequestration programs as an important aspect of local and regional greenhouse gas reduction requirements.
- ▶ **Action NR4.1:** Carbon Sequestration Programs. The County will proactively coordinate with local and regional agencies to investigate the feasibility of setting up a carbon offset program. The County will coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Yuba County Water Agencies, and private timber companies and nonprofits to encourage local development of state-certified carbon sequestration projects. The County should encourage local application of regional greenhouse gas (GHG) offset fees, if feasible. If the County implements a GHG mitigation program tied to its GHG objectives, local GHG fees collected for projects that do not achieve GHG efficiency objectives on a per-capita, per-employee, or per-service population basis should be able to mitigate impacts using local, verified, GHG offset programs, if feasible.
 - Related Goals: Goal HS5, Goal NR4
 - Agency/Department: Community Development and Services Agency
 - Funding Source: Mitigation fees, grant funding, other available funding sources
 - Time Frame: Implement program, if feasible, by 2020

Conclusion

Much of the County's forest lands are located on protected federal lands, which would preclude major development from affecting those lands. Most of the development anticipated under implementation of the 2030 General Plan would occur within the Valley Growth Boundary rather than in the foothills and mountains, where the County's forest resources are located. Policies and actions in the 2030 General Plan would reduce adverse impacts to forest lands. Rural development under the 2030 General Plan would be focused within a series of Rural Community areas, which include a minor amount of timberland. As noted, there is the potential for the conversion of approximately 245 acres of timberland. This is considered a **potentially significant** impact.

Mitigation Measure

Other than the policies and actions included in the General Plan, there is no additional feasible mitigation available to address this potentially significant impact.

Project objectives include planning proactively for long-term development and conservation within the County's rural communities, in order to make them more environmentally and economically sustainable places. Another objective of this project is to maintain the existing Rural Community areas, which are reflected in the existing (1996) General Plan. The forest land areas that could potentially be affected by implementation of the General Plan are within the existing (1996) Rural Community areas. This impact is **significant and unavoidable**.