

3.14 Agricultural Resources

Environmental Setting

This section provides an evaluation of potential impacts to Carlsbad’s agricultural resources as a result of the proposed General Plan.

PHYSICAL SETTING

The City of Carlsbad’s agricultural and horticultural resources are considered a valuable part of the city’s open space heritage. Various levels of farming and cultivation of agricultural crops have occurred in the city historically. In the late 1880s agricultural development consisted of citrus fruits, avocados and olives, and by the early 1900s dry farming was the town’s principal industry. By 1914 farming was expanded to include flowers. Currently, flower and strawberry production constitute a large portion of the city’s remaining agricultural uses.

Existing Farmland

Agricultural land use is approximately 4 percent of the city’s existing land use. SANDAG mapped agricultural lands within the city, categorized as intensive agriculture (184 acres) and extensive agriculture (672 acres), for a total of 856 acres of agricultural land, as shown in Figure 4-5 of the proposed General Plan. The Department of Conservation’s Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) identified a combined total of 615 acres¹ of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (collectively, “Important Farmland”), as shown in Table 3.14-1. Figure 3.14-1 shows existing agricultural land by category.

As mentioned above, the Flower Fields and strawberry fields constitute a large portion of the city’s existing agricultural uses. The Flower Fields are located at Carlsbad Ranch, east of Interstate 5 and north of Palomar Airport Road. For more than 85 years the Flower Fields have been used for floral cultivation, and today, approximately 50 acres are used for the cultivation of Giant Tecolote Ranunculus flowers, and approximately five acres are used to cultivate other specialty flowers. The Flower Fields are preserved “in perpetuity” by a development agreement and deed restriction.

¹ As the FMMP uses a minimum mapping unit of 10 acres, smaller parcels of agricultural land are excluded, resulting in lower total acreage than SANDAG results

The Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor consists of a large area of protected farmland within the city. The corridor is located east of Interstate 5, and south and north of Cannon Road, and is applicable to:

- 172 acres north of Cannon Road and south of Agua Hedionda Lagoon owned by San Diego Gas & Electric. Most of this property is cultivated as strawberry fields.
- 46 acres south of Cannon Road and north of the Flower Fields. Although not part of the Flower Fields, this property is frequently cultivated with flowers.
- 26 acres on the southeast corner of Cannon Road and Legoland Drive, which is also often cultivated with flowers or other agricultural crops.

A portion of agricultural land currently cultivated as strawberry fields lies east of Interstate 5 and adjacent to (but outside the boundary of) farmland within the Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor.

In addition to the Flower Fields and the Cannon Road corridor, there are two large areas (over 100 acres) identified by SANDAG as “extensive agriculture;” one area is south of Tamarack Avenue and north of El Camino Real (Robertson Ranch), and the other is on either side of College Boulevard, north of El Camino Real and south of Canon Road (includes Cantarini Ranch, Holly Springs and Dos Colinas). The majority of these two areas have been approved for development and environmental impacts to these agricultural resources were previously analyzed consistent with CEQA.

There are smaller agricultural sites scattered throughout the city, primarily west of El Camino Real, and north of Tamarack Avenue and south of Poinsettia Lane.

Table 3.14-1: City of Carlsbad Important Farmland Classification

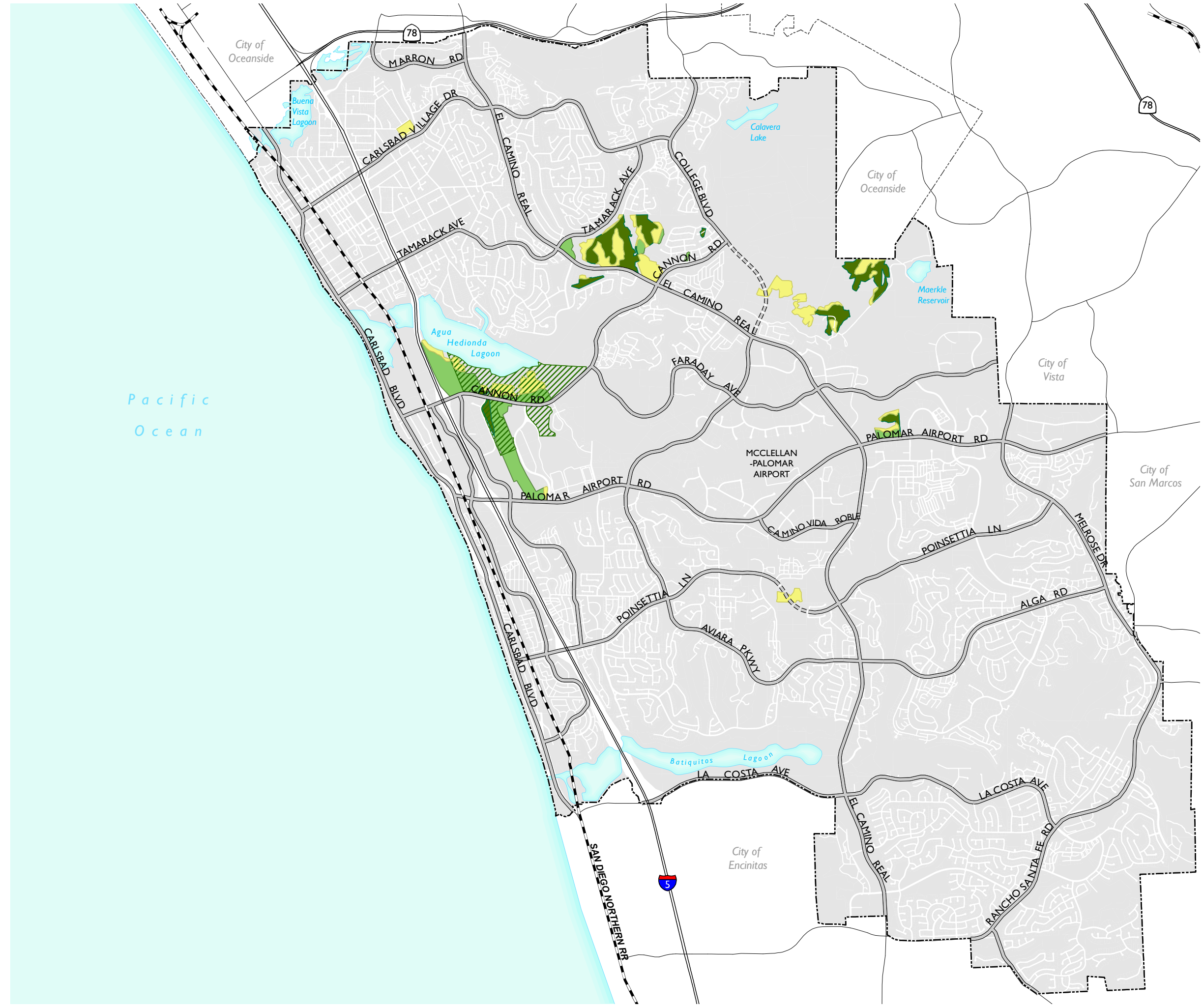
Type	Existing Acres	Percent of Study Area	Acres at		
			General Plan Buildout	Percent of Study Area	Acreage Change
Prime Farmland	186	0.7%	122	0.5%	-64
Farmland of Statewide Importance	158	0.6%	23	0.1%	-135
Unique Farmland	271	1.1%	96	0.4%	-175
<i>Total Important Farmland</i>	<i>615</i>	<i>2.4%</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>1.0%</i>	<i>-373</i>
<i>Total City Area</i>	<i>25,021</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>25,021</i>	<i>100%</i>	

Sources: Department of Conservation, 2010; Dyett & Bhatia, 2012.

Soils

A full discussion of soil types and characteristics is found in Section 3.7: Geology, Soils, and Seismicity.

Figure 3.14-1
PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN
Existing Agricultural Resources



Farmland Type

- P (Prime Farmland)
- S (Farmland of Statewide Importance)
- U (Unique Farmland)
- Cannon Road Open Space, Farming, and Public Use Corridor

Highways
 Major Street
 Planned Street
 Railroad
 City Limits

500
ACRES

100
ACRES

0 0.5 1 2
Miles

Source: Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, Department of Conservation, State of California, 2010; City of Carlsbad, 2013; SANDAG, 2013; Dyett & Bhatia, 2013.

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Regulatory Setting

FEDERAL REGULATIONS

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) maps soils and farmland uses to provide comprehensive information necessary for understanding, managing, conserving, and sustaining the nation's limited soil resources. In addition to many other natural resource conservation programs, the NRCS manages the Farmland Protection Program, which provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA joins with state, tribal, or local governments to acquire conservation easements or other interests from landowners.

The NRCS also classifies soils according to their suitability for agricultural use, as follows:

- Class I Soils have few limitations that restrict their use.
- Class II Soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices.
- Class III Soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices, or both.
- Class IV Soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both.
- Class V Soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use.
- Class VI Soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation.
- Class VII Soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation.

STATE REGULATIONS

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) uses the Important Farmlands Inventory to classify farmland into five different categories based on soil type and current land use: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land. The minimum mapping unit is 10 acres, with the exception of grazing land, which is 40 acres. Two additional categories, Urban and Built-up Land and Other Land, are used for mapping purposes.

- *Prime Farmland* is 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 managed (including water management) according to current farming methods. Prime Farmland must have been used for the production of crops within the last three years.
- *Farmland of Statewide Importance* is land other than Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It must have been used for crop production within the last three years.
- *Unique Farmland* is that which does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, but which is currently used for the production of specific high economic value crops (as listed in the last three years of *California Agriculture*, produced by the California Department of Food and Agriculture). It has the special combination of location, soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply to produce sustained high quality or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming practices. Examples may include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers.
- *Farmland of Local Importance* is either currently producing crops or has the capability to do so. It is land other than Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland, but it may be important to the local economy due to its productivity.
- *Grazing Land* is that on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for livestock grazing. This category does not include land previously designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local importance, or other lands where the terrain restricts the access and movement of livestock.
- *Urban and Built-up Land* is occupied by structures with a building density of at least one unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately six structures to a 10-acre parcel.
- *Other Land* includes 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 forty acres; and vacant and non-agricultural land larger than 40 acres and surrounded on all sides by urban development.

California Farmland Conservancy Program

The California Farmland Conservancy Program (Public Resources Code Section 10200 et seq.) supports the voluntary granting of agricultural conservation easements from landowners to qualified nonprofit organizations, such as land trusts, as well as local governments. Conservation easements are voluntarily established restrictions that are permanently attached to property deeds, with the general purpose of retaining land in its natural, open-space, agricultural, or other condition while preventing uses that are deemed inconsistent with the specific conservation purposes expressed in the easements. Agricultural conservation easements define conservation purposes that are tied to keeping land available for continued use as farmland. Such farmlands remain in private ownership and the landowner retains all farmland use authority, but the farmland is restricted in its ability to be subdivided or used for nonagricultural purposes, such as

urban uses. Potential impacts on conservation easements would be addressed in subsequent project-level documents.

Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zone Contracts

The California Land Conservation Act (Government Code Section 51200 et seq.) of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act, provides a tax incentive for the voluntary enrollment of agricultural and open space lands in contracts between local government and landowners. The contract restricts the land to agricultural and open space uses and compatible uses defined in state law and local ordinances. An agricultural preserve, which is established by local government, defines the boundary of an area within which a city or county will enter into contracts with landowners. Local governments calculate the property tax assessment for lands under contract based on the actual use of the land rather than the potential land value assuming full development.

Williamson Act contracts are effective for periods of 10 years and longer. The contract is automatically renewed each year, maintaining a constant, 10-year contract, unless the landowner or local government files to initiate non-renewal. Should that occur, the Williamson Act would terminate 10 years after the filing of a notice of non-renewal. Only a landowner can petition for a contract cancellation. Tentative contract cancellations can be approved only after a local government makes specific findings and determines the cancellation fee to be paid by the landowner.

The State of California has the following policies regarding public acquisition of and locating public improvements on lands in agricultural preserves and on lands under Williamson Act contracts (Government Code Section 51290–51295):

- Avoid locating federal, state, or local public improvements and improvements of public utilities, and the acquisition of land, in agricultural preserves.
- Locate public improvements that are in agricultural preserves on land other than land under Williamson Act contract.
- Any agency or entity proposing to locate such an improvement, in considering the relative costs of parcels of land and the development of improvements, give consideration to the value to the public of land, particularly prime agricultural land, in an agricultural preserve.

Since 1998, another option in the Williamson Act Program has been established with the creation of Farmland Security Zone contracts. A Farmland Security Zone is an area created within an agricultural preserve by a board of supervisors upon the request of a landowner or group of landowners. Farmland Security Zone contracts offer landowners greater property tax reduction and have a minimum initial term of 20 years. Like Williamson Act contracts, Farmland Security Zone contracts renew annually unless a notice of non-renewal is filed. Potential cancellation of Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zone contracts would be addressed in subsequent project-level documents.

Under the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971, the state has provided annual subvention payments to counties for foregone property tax revenue due to Williamson Act contracts. The Budget Act of 2009 virtually eliminated these payments for the 2009-10 fiscal year. While partial funding was restored for the 2010-11 fiscal year, long-term state support to counties for agricultural land conservation is uncertain. Despite the elimination of most payments from the state, the California Department of Conservation has continued to release status reports of lands under Williamson Act contracts, with the most recent release occurring in 2012, covering 2010 and 2011. The Flower Fields are the only property in Carlsbad subject to Williamson Act contracts.

California Civil Code Section 3482.5 (Right to Farm Act)

In accordance with California Civil Code Section 3482.5, if a commercial agricultural use operates according to proper and accepted customs and standards (i.e., in compliance with all applicable state and federal statutes and regulations), has existed in its present location for three or more years and was not considered a nuisance when it began operations, the operations cannot become a private or public nuisance due to any changed condition in the locality, such as encroaching urban development.

LOCAL REGULATIONS

Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor

The area along the Cannon Road corridor east of the Interstate 5 freeway presently consists primarily of open space and existing farming operations including the Flower Fields located to the south of Cannon Road and the existing strawberry fields located to the north of Cannon Road. In 2006, Carlsbad voters approved Proposition D, which encourages the continuation of agriculture on the lands (described in the Physical Setting section as being within the Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor) for as long as such use is financially feasible. Following voter approval of Proposition D, the lands were designated as open space on the city's land use and zoning maps and the City Council adopted the Cannon Road Agricultural and Open Space Zone to implement the proposition. The new zone will become effective when the California Coastal Commission approves the associated Local Coastal Program amendment. Once effective, the new zone will specify that if the landowners choose to discontinue agricultural use of the land, only open space uses or development associated with permitted agricultural or open space uses is allowed.

Carlsbad Agricultural Conversion Mitigation Fee Grant Program

Chapter 21.202 of the Carlsbad Municipal Code establishes provisions for the conversion of agricultural land within the coastal zone to urban uses. To convert agricultural land within the coastal zone to urban uses, the loss of agriculture must be mitigated. One of the mitigation options specified is the payment of an Agricultural Conversion Mitigation Fee (ACMF). The fees are deposited into the ACMF fund, and the expenditures of the fund are subject to the recommendations of the ACMF Ad Hoc Citizen's Committee. ACMF funds may be used for purchasing and improving agricultural lands, restoring coastal environments, restoring beaches and lagoon environments, and improving lagoon nature centers.

Impact Analysis

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

For the purposes of this Program EIR, a significant adverse impact to agricultural resources would occur if the proposed General Plan would:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Important Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- Conflict with an existing Williamson Act contract; or
- Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS

Farmland resource acreages were assessed based on the California Department of Conservation's FMMP, a biennial report and mapping resource on the conversion of farmland and grazing land. Williamson Act contract lands were identified by the Department of Conservation and by the City of Carlsbad. Using these sources, the proposed General Plan was analyzed for potential conversion of Important Farmland, conversion of Williamson Act contract lands, and other changes resulting from the proposed General Plan that may result in the conversion of farmland from agricultural production to urban uses.

To analyze the significance of each impact, the proposed General Plan goals and policies were considered to determine if significant impacts would still remain with development of the General Plan and full implementation of all policies.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The proposed General Plan is not expected to produce an adverse environmental impact concerning the conversion of Important Farmland to urban or other uses. There are no proposed land use changes that would affect the status of the Flower Fields, the sole property subject to Williamson Act contracts. Therefore, this impact is not discussed further. As agricultural lands within Carlsbad are largely surrounded by urbanized area and are generally fragmented, the proposed General Plan would not involve other changes in the existing environment resulting in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact 3.14-1 Buildout of the proposed General Plan would 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. (Less than Significant)

Agricultural land use, at approximately 4 percent of total, represents a small portion of Carlsbad's overall land use. Table 3.14-1 shows the existing inventory of Important Farmland by category. Buildout of the proposed General Plan may result in the conversion of farmland to urban uses. The single largest parcel of agricultural use is found in the Cannon Road Open Space, Farming, and Public Use Corridor, which will remain as farmed land or agricultural support use, as long as such use is financially feasible. Outside of the Cannon Road Open Space, Farming, and Public Use Corridor, the largest areas of important farmland are generally east of El Camino Real, north of Faraday Avenue, and south of Tamarack Avenue. Land use changes and the conversion of the majority of these agricultural lands is addressed in the Robertson Ranch Final EIR (certified 2006), the Cantarini/Holly Springs Final EIR (certified 2004), and the Ranch Milagro Mitigated Negative Declaration ([MND], approved 2012). The Mandana area, west of Maerkle Reservoir, is outside of the project areas addressed in the MND and EIRs. Other agricultural lands include a parcel along Carlsbad Village Drive, a parcel on Poinsettia Lane, and a parcel adjacent to Palomar Airport Road east of El Camino Real. These areas are largely not designated as Open Space under the proposed General Plan. If a project proposes urban uses on these sites, then the project might result in conversion of agricultural lands. However, individual projects under the proposed General Plan would be required to undergo subsequent environmental review pursuant to CEQA, and as part of this review effort, projects requiring discretionary approval would be required to address impacts to agricultural lands.

As agricultural preservation is an issue of concern in Carlsbad, the City has developed the ACMF Program. As described above, the program requires a fee for the conversion of agricultural land within the coastal zone to urban uses. The fees may then be used for purchasing and improving agricultural lands, among other uses. Overall, the proposed General Plan policies provide a framework to permit existing agricultural uses, and ensure that the Flower Fields and Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor remains as farming or other related agricultural support uses, for as long as such use is financially feasible. Therefore, this impact is less than significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

Land Use and Community Design Element Policies

- 2-P.32 Allow for agricultural uses throughout the city.
- 2-P.33 Ensure the existing Flower Fields remain in flower production by utilizing all available methods and programs, including grants and other outside financial assistance.
- 2-P.34 Encourage soil and water conservation techniques in agricultural activities.

Land Use and Community Design Element Policies: The Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor

- 2-P.60 In coordination with land owners, provide for the protection and preservation of environmental and agricultural resources in the corridor area by permitting only:

- a. Open space
- b. Farming and other related agricultural support uses, including flower and strawberry production and commercial support uses.
- c. Public trails
- d. Active and passive parks, recreation and similar public and private facilities (except on the existing Flower Fields)
- e. Electrical Transmission Facilities

2-P.61 Prohibit residential uses. Commercial and industrial uses are also prohibited in the corridor area, unless such uses are normally associated with or in support of farming operations and open space uses.

2-P.63 Allow farming to continue in the area for as long as economically viable for the landowner.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.14-2 Buildout of the proposed General Plan would result in changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. (Less than Significant)

Agricultural lands within Carlsbad are largely surrounded by urbanized area, and are generally fragmented, with the exception of the Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor. Urban development can cause a direct threat to agricultural resources, but growth can have indirect, negative impacts on agricultural resources as well. Urban development has the potential to result in conflicts with adjacent agricultural practices, and lead to restrictions on the use of agricultural chemicals, complaints regarding noise, dust and odors, trespassing, and vandalism. These conflicts may increase costs of agricultural operations, and together with other factors, encourage the conversion of additional farmland to urban uses. However, the Cannon Road Open Space, Farming and Public Use Corridor and outside parcels (described above in Impact 3.14-1) are currently adjacent to, surrounded by, and compatible with urban uses. The proposed General Plan policies allow for agricultural uses throughout the city. In addition, the city's ACMF provides a source of funding to prevent further conversion of agricultural land through purchasing and improving agricultural lands. Therefore, this impact is less than significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Reduce the Impact

See policies listed under Impact 3.14-1

Mitigation Measures

None required.