5.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

This section discusses the agricultural and forest resources in El Dorado County and analyzes the impacts on those resources that would result from implementation of the four equal-weight alternatives.

The examination of agricultural and forestry resources in this section of the EIR is based on information obtained from reviews of land use diagrams and policies for the four equal-weight alternatives; literature, including documents published by city, county, state, and federal agencies, including the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), California Department of Conservation (DOC), and County Agricultural Commissioner's office; information on agricultural water demand that is described in more detail in Section 5.5, Water Resources; and various other texts dealing with agriculture and forestry in El Dorado County, which are listed in Chapter 8, References.

5.2.1 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Physical Environment and Background

Agriculture has long been an important element of life in El Dorado County. Agricultural influences and activities contribute to the economic stability of the county through crop production, serve as the foundation of the county's rural lifestyle, and serve as a key element in the sense of community of many rural regions. In 2000, the county had a crop production value of more than $24 million, excluding timber (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001). Total crop production including timber in that year was valued at $52.3 million. The overall contribution of agriculture to the county's economy (through employment, sales, tourism, and other related activities) totaled approximately $320 million in 2000 (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001).

Lands on the west slope of the county are considered the most valuable for agriculture because of the area's gentler slopes and richer soils. Historically, grazing of cattle and other livestock was the primary economic contributor in El Dorado County. Recently, production of fruit (including wine grapes) and nuts has become a major contributor to the county's agricultural production value (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001).

Agricultural acreage can be measured in two ways. The DOC monitors acreage of soils that are suitable for agricultural use (although not necessarily in use for agricultural activities).

El Dorado County takes an agricultural census every five years to track acreage in agricultural production.

El Dorado County has approximately 273,619 acres of soils suitable for agricultural uses, although not necessarily in agricultural production. This is approximately 24% of the county's 1,145,385 acres (45% of the 613,462 acres over which the County has jurisdiction). The DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection estimates that, in 2000 (the most current year for which data are available), 89,675 acres of this land (8% of the county) was classified as Important Farmland (California Department of Conservation 2002). Important Farmland, as used herein, includes the categories of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance as defined by the DOC. Much of the soil on the west slope—183,944 acres, or 16% of the county—is categorized as Grazing Land (California Department of Conservation 2002). Exhibit 5.2-1 displays the Important Farmland in El Dorado County (County of El Dorado 2003). Concentrations of Important Farmland are found in the areas near or around Cool (Market Area 10), Georgetown (Market Area 11), Pollock Pines (Market Area 6), Pleasant Valley (Market Area 7), and Somerset (Market Area 9). The deep, good-quality soils found in the foothills provide optimal growing conditions for various types of agricultural activities, ranging from cultivation of fruit, nut, and vegetable crops to viticulture and grazing.

Information from the most recent (1997) Agricultural Census for El Dorado County indicates that 763 farms encompassed 102,726 acres of farmland (excluding grazing land). This constituted 9% of the county. The percentage of agricultural land has shown a decreasing trend, down from 12% in the 1987 and 14% in the 1982 Agricultural Censuses (National Agricultural Statistics Service 1997).

Crop Production

El Dorado County produces a wide variety of crops, which contribute significantly to the county's economy. The leading crops by production value according to the DOC are apples, wine grapes, pasture and rangeland, Christmas trees, and cattle and calves. Timber, which is included as a crop in the county's calculation of production value but not in the DOC's, is discussed in Section 5.2.2, Forestry.

Table 5.2-1, developed from the El Dorado County Crop Production Reports, shows agricultural production trends from 1995 to 2000. Table 5.2-2 summarizes the amount and value of the various crops produced in the county. Table 5.2-3 shows available data on the acreage by market area of various crop types in active production. This data accounts for some, but not all area in crop production due to limitations on what is reported to the county.

Exhibit 5.2-1, Important Farmland (11x17)

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Table 5.2-1
El Dorado County Agricultural Production, 1995-2000

Year	Fruits and Nuts	Livestock and Poultry	Miscellaneous [1]	Apiary	TOTAL
1995	$4,921,000	$2,571,000	$7,141,000	$238,000	$14,871,000
1996	$11,246,000	$2,486,000	$7,301,000	$335,000	$21,368,000
1997	$12,346,000	$3,081,000	$7,396,000	$330,000	$23,153,000
1998	$8,659,000	$2,656,000	$7,074,000	$274,000	$18,663,000
1999	$8,311,000	$3,225,000	$7,873,000	$265,000	$19,674,000
2000	$10,690,000	$3,999,000	$9,237,000	$238,000	$24,164,000

[1] Miscellaneous includes hay and pasture, nursery products, Christmas trees, and truck gardens. Truck gardens include berries, nectarines, oranges, chestnuts, avocados, pumpkins, tomatoes, and persimmons.

Source: El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 1996-2001

Table 5.2-2
El Dorado County Crop Production Amounts and Values, 2000

Crop	Production Amount	Value
Fruit and nuts	15,990 tons	$10,690,800
Apiary products	2,800 colonies	$238,000
Cattle, sheep, and hogs	5,790 head	$2,739,100
Miscellaneous livestock [1]	N/A	$1,260,000
Hay	610 tons	$59,200
Pasture and rangeland	246,100 acres	$3,077,500
Nursery products	47 acres	$2,879,000
Christmas trees	88,200	$2,933,000
Minor and miscellaneous crops [2]	N/A	$289,700
Total	**N/A**	**$24,166,300**

[1] Miscellaneous Livestock includes turkeys, ducks, geese, chickens, eggs, llamas, goats, emu, ostrich, and sheep (wool).
[2] Minor and Miscellaneous Crops includes truck crops, berries, nectarines, oranges, chestnuts, avocados, pumpkins, tomatoes, and persimmons.

Source: El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001

Tables 5.2-1 through 5.2-3 are based on information compiled from records of the County Department of Agriculture. Those records show only agricultural operations that are required to obtain restricted materials permits. Therefore, the numbers in these tables do not include organic farming operations, family farms, and grazing lands.

Table 5.2-3
Acres of Land in Agricultural Production by Crop Type and Market Area[1]

Crop Type	Market Area 2	Market Area 3	Market Area 4	Market Area 5	Market Area 6	Market Area 7	Market Area 8	Market Area 9	Market Area 10	Market Area 11	Market Area 14	Total
Alfalfa		6										6
Apple	2	1	262	30	204	26		4	0.6	5		534.6
Apricot				0.02								0.02
Blackberry			1		0.5							1.5
Blueberry			0.2		5							5.2
Bushberry				0.6								0.6
Cantaloupe									0.1			0.1
Cherry	0.2		37	15	0.6	29			0.1			81.9
Chestnut			4									4
Christmas tree		3	103		37	40	5	5		25		218
Citrus				16								16
Grape, wine	37	44	235	171	13	197	49	735	97	53	8	1,639
Hops					2							2
Nectarine		0.3	9	15	4	10						38.3
Oat				48								48
Olive			0.5									0.5
Orange				3								3

Table 5.2-3
Acres of Land in Agricultural Production by Crop Type and Market Area[1]

Crop Type	Market Area 2	Market Area 3	Market Area 4	Market Area 5	Market Area 6	Market Area 7	Market Area 8	Market Area 9	Market Area 10	Market Area 11	Market Area 14	Total
Peach	0.2	2	47	19	6	18		0.6	0.1			92.9
Pear			132	74	38	3				1		248
Persimmon			0.3	1	0.1							1.4
Plum			29	10	0.3	4						43.3
Pumpkin			8	3	1			2				14
Raspberry			4		1							5
Strawberry	5											5
Tomato			0.4									0.4
Vegetable				0.7								0.7
Walnut		18	22	2	4	16		132				194
Total Agricultural Acreage	44.4	74.3	894.4	408.32	316.5	343	54	878.6	97.9	84	8	3,203.42
Total Acreage in Market Area	40,703	29,940	25,303	25,726	27,214	42,891	35,255	47,854	45,489	134,735	15,082	470,192
Agriculture % of Total	0.01%	0.2%	3.5%	1.6%	1.2%	0.8%	0.2%	1.8%	0.2%	0%	0%	0.7%

[1] Numbers based on county data for restricted materials permits; does not include organic farms, family farms, or timber.
Note(s): Numbers may not total due to rounding.
No crop data were provided for Market Areas 1,12, or 13. These market areas have little, if any, agricultural activity requiring restricted materials permits.
Source: El Dorado County Agricultural Commission 2002

Grazing

El Dorado County has a substantial amount of grazing land, with the DOC reporting more than 184,000 acres (16% of the county) classified as land with soils suitable for grazing in 2000 (California Department of Conservation 2002). Grazing lands are concentrated primarily in the southwest and south-central portions of the county, in the areas around Latrobe (Market Area 8), Diamond Springs (Market Area 3), and Somerset (Market Area 9), as well as in the northwestern portion of the county around Coloma (Market Area 5), Cool and Pilot Hill (Market Area 10), and south of Greenwood and Georgetown (Market Area 11). Grazing is generally established on soils of moderate to low productivity that have few trees. According to the Agricultural Commissioner for El Dorado County, these grazing lands are used in winter for calf survival; in summer, when the grasses become too dry, the livestock are taken to the mountains or Oregon for cooler weather and richer forage (Snodgrass, pers. comm., 2002).

Agriculturally Related Activities

El Dorado County is famous for the historic Apple Hill area, the climate and elevation of which make for an ideal growing season for many crops. The first orchard in Apple Hill was established in 1951, and since that time the industry has grown to include 56 ranches, including Christmas tree farms and vineyards. Apple Hill attracts an active tourist trade, primarily from Labor Day weekend through Christmas (although wineries and some ranches are open year round), with its apples, berries, grapes and wine, Christmas trees, and related products such as pies, cider, candied apples, and crafts (El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce 2003). It is a major contributor to the county's agriculture economy and tourism industry. An estimated 550,000 people come to Apple Hill each year (Findley, pers. comm., 2003).

El Dorado County also has an active and growing wine industry, with more than 40 wine grape–producing vineyards. Wine grapes have been grown in El Dorado County since 1849; by 1900, the area cultivated in wine grapes had grown to 5,000 acres (El Dorado Wine Grape Growers' Association 2002). The unique combination of elevation, climate, soil, and geology in El Dorado County is suitable for growing many popular varieties of grapes, including Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Petite Syrah, Syrah, Viognier, Barbera, and Sangiovese (El Dorado County Visitor's Authority 2002). The value of wine grapes produced in El Dorado County increased by 5% in 2000 (from $3.88 million to $4.06 million), and the acreage planted in wine grapes increased by 16%, from 1,349 acres in 1999 to 1,565 acres in 2000 (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001).

The crop production and wine processing industries of the county not only attract visitors for wine tasting and purchasing, but also encourage additional tourism by combining wine-tasting with trips for hiking, rafting, and sightseeing. Through employment, economic stimulation, and tourism, El Dorado County wineries contributed $87 million to the local economy in 2001 and the growers and ranchers of Apple Hill contributed $58 million (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001).

Development Pressures

As the population of Northern California has grown and urban development has spread into El Dorado County, economic and logistical pressures have increased for rural landowners to convert agricultural land to nonagricultural uses. As stated in the County Zoning Ordinance (County Code §17.36.150[C]), "the success and stability of agricultural enterprises can be profoundly influenced by the zoning and use of immediately adjacent lands." Development pressures usually result from several causes:

- the increasing expense and operational complexity of maintaining an agricultural lifestyle in an increasingly residential area,
- the discrepancy between the value of land in agricultural use and the value of the same land for other uses, and
- the conflicts resulting from differing land use expectations (e.g., tolerance of pesticide use, noise levels, odors, light, use of heavy machinery) as semi-rural/suburban residencies are established in agricultural areas.

For these and other reasons, including the attractiveness of the rural lifestyle for people wishing to leave the crowded urban environment, agricultural lands in the county decreased by approximately 58% from 1960 to 2000 (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 2001).

Increased residential and commercial development in an agricultural area can cause the value of adjacent, agricultural land to increase and can lead to an increase in the cost and difficulty of maintaining economically viable agricultural operations, sometimes to the point where they become no longer profitable for agriculture. Higher land prices cause difficulties in acquiring more land for agriculture and increase the farmer's incentive to sell land. The County has intentionally worked to protect agricultural lands from these types of development pressures by participating in the State of California's Williamson Act program (described under "Regulatory/Planning Environment" below) and enacting a Right to Farm Ordinance and Ranch Marketing Ordinance that provide incentives for farmers to remain in business.

Conversion of agricultural land is monitored by the DOC, which maps the acreage of various types of farmland statewide. (The monitoring and mapping process is described in more detail under Regulatory/Planning Environment below.) The DOC classifications within the Important Farmland Inventory System as follows:

- **Prime Farmland:** 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.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. This land still has a good combination of physical and chemical features for the production of agricultural crops.
- **Unique Farmland:** 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.
- **Farmlands of Local Importance:** Lands that do not qualify for the Prime, Statewide, or Unique designation but that are considered "existing agricultural lands" or "potential agricultural lands." In El Dorado County, all Williamson Act lands are classified as Farmlands of Local Importance or a higher classification.
- **Grazing Land:** Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.
- **Urban and Built-Up Land:** Land 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. This land is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administration, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.
- **Other Land:** Land not included in any other mapping category.
- **Water:** Perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

The Important Farmland Maps are updated every 2 years by comparing new aerial photographs, obtained from the private sector or governmental agencies, of a given area with previous photographs to identify changes in land use during the intervening period. The resulting maps are field checked and cross-referenced with other relevant geographic

information system (GIS) data, such as Williamson Act land databases (California Department of Conservation 2003).

According to the DOC's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, from 1998 to 2000, El Dorado County gained 190 acres of soils classified as suitable for various types of agricultural use (Table 5.2-4). This increase was primarily a result of land being reclassified to Farmland of Local Importance in areas where the boundaries of Williamson Act land parcels were updated or refined. Overall, the acreage designated as Important Farmland in the county increased during that period by 1,529 acres as a result of areas redesignated from the Grazing Land and Other Land classifications to Farmland of Local Importance because they were converted to irrigated agriculture (primarily vineyards). The area classified as Grazing Land decreased by 1,339 acres. These data indicate that, in recent years, the County has been relatively effective in providing some level of protection for its agricultural land in spite of development pressures.

Table 5.2-4
Summary of Agricultural Land Use Conversion, 1998-2000

Land Use Category	Total Acreage Inventoried		Acreage Changes, 1998-2000		Net Acreage Changed
	1998	2000	Lost	Gained	
Prime Farmland	1,201	1,117	85	1	-84
Farmland of Statewide Importance	1,042	1,016	41	15	-26
Unique Farmland	4,621	4,406	230	15	-215
Farmland of Local Importance	81,282	83,136	184	2,038	1,854
Important Farmland Subtotal	**88,146**	**89,675**	**540**	**2,069**	**1,529**
Grazing Land	185,283	183,944	1,372	33	-1,339
Agricultural Land Subtotal	**273,429**	**273,619**	**1,912**	**2,102**	**190**
Urban and Built-Up Land	25,691	26,132	60	501	441
Other Land	230,404	229,777	715	88	-627
Water Area	6,880	6,876	0	4	-4
Total Area Inventoried	**536,404**	**536,404**	**2,691**	**2,691**	**0**

Source: California Department of Conservation 2002

The same DOC data indicate, however, that during 1998-2000, 374 acres of agricultural land were converted to Urban and Built-up Land, including 137 acres of Farmland of Local Importance. In similar fashion, 85 acres of Prime Farmland, 41 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 230 acres of Unique Farmland were converted to Farmland of Local Importance (primarily as a result of updating and refining the boundaries of Williamson

Act parcels). A 2000 field report from the DOC's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program identified several areas where such downgrading has occurred (California Department of Conservation 20001). Although no areas were identified in which Prime Farmland, Farmland of State Importance, or Unique Farmland had been reclassified to Urban and Built-up Land, several areas were downgraded from prime, statewide, or unique farmland to Farmland of Local Importance or Grazing Land and several others from local farmland, grazing land, or other land to urban or built-up land.

These data indicate that the DOC is tracking a gradual downgrading of soil suitability for the highest quality of agricultural uses. The loss or reclassification of Important Farmland and other agricultural acreage shows that farmland with high-quality soils is shifting activities away from intensive agriculture and toward grazing or toward other, more developed uses.

REGULATORY/PLANNING ENVIRONMENT

A broad range of policies, regulations, and laws affect agricultural operations in El Dorado County. The most prominent of these are described below.

Federal Regulatory Programs

Farmland Protection Policy Act

NRCS, a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the agency primarily responsible for implementation of the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). The purpose of the FPPA is to minimize federal programs' contribution to the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses by ensuring that federal programs are administered in a manner that is compatible with state, local, and private programs designed to protect farmland. NRCS provides technical assistance to federal agencies, state and local governments, tribes, or nonprofit organizations that desire to develop farmland protection programs and policies. NRCS summarizes FPPA implementation in an annual report to Congress. The FPPA also established the Farmland Protection Program and the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA), which are discussed below.

Farmland Protection Program

NRCS administers the Farmland Protection Program (FPP), which is a voluntary program aimed at keeping productive farmland in agricultural uses. Under the FPP, NRCS provides matching funds to state, local, or tribal government entities and nonprofit organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. The goal of the

program is to protect between 170,000 and 340,000 acres of farmland per year (U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service 2002). Participating landowners agree not to convert the land to nonagricultural use and retain all rights to use the property for agriculture. A conservation plan must be developed for all lands enrolled based upon the standards contained in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. A minimum of 30 years 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 being conserved (U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service 2002).

To qualify for a conservation easement, farmland must meet several criteria. The land must be:

- Prime, Unique, or other productive soil, as defined by NRCS based on factors such as water moisture regimes, available water capacity, developed irrigation water supply, soil temperature range, acid-alkali balance, water table, soil sodium content, potential for flooding, erodibility, permeability rate, rock fragment content, and soil rooting depth;
- included in a pending offer to be managed by a nonprofit organization, state, tribal, or local farmland protection program;
- privately owned;
- placed under a conservation plan;
- large enough to sustain agricultural production;
- accessible to markets for the crop that the land produces; and
- surrounded by parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production (U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service 2002).

In El Dorado County, the FPP is supplemented by the DOC's Important Farmland Inventory System and Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, which is discussed in further detail under "State Regulatory Programs" below.

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment

The LESA system ranks lands for suitability and inclusion in the FPP. LESA evaluates several factors, including soil potential for agricultural use, location, market access, and adjacent land use. These factors are used to numerically rank the suitability of parcels based on local resource evaluation and site considerations (U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service

2002). The LESA system has spawned many variations, including the California LESA model, described below.

State Regulatory Programs

California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act, monitored by the DOC, was enacted when population growth and rising property taxes were recognized as a threat to the viability of valuable farmland in California. John Williamson authored legislation in 1965 that proposed developing a contract between landowners and local governments to voluntarily restrict the use of property in exchange for lower tax assessments (California Department of Conservation 2001).

Under a Williamson Act contract, the property owner is guaranteed that the property will be taxed according to its potential agricultural income, as opposed to the maximum valued use of the property (e.g., residential or commercial development). Although most Williamson Act contracts protect land in agricultural production, the act also provides for contracts to preserve open space (recreational, scenic, and natural resource) areas. Contracts have a 10-year term that is renewed annually. Contracts can be terminated by cancellation or nonrenewal. Cancellation, which immediately terminates the contract, must be approved by the local government; if cancellation is requested by the landowner, the landowner must pay fees of up to 12.5% of the property value. Filing for nonrenewal, which can be done unilaterally by either the property owner or the local government, initiates a gradual increase in the property tax rate over the 10-year nonrenewal period until it reaches the market rate by the end of the term (California Department of Conservation 2001). During the nonrenewal period, the property continues to be limited to Williamson Act-allowed uses.

In 2000, approximately 16.3 million acres of land statewide were enrolled under Williamson Act contracts and similar farmland restriction programs, such as Farmland Security Zones. Enrollment in agricultural protection programs has held relatively steady at about 16 million acres over the last decade (California Department of Conservation 2002). In 1998, El Dorado County had 43,704 acres of agricultural land protected under Williamson Act contracts (Exhibit 5.2-2), with only 1,986 acres of that total being Prime Farmland (California Department of Conservation 2000). According to 2000 data, the total acreage of Williamson Act lands had dropped to 41,853 acres, a decrease of 1,851 acres (4.2%).

Exhibit 5.2-2, Williamson Act Parcels (11x17)

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Farmland Security Zones

Farmland Security Zones (FSZs) were established by the legislature in 1998. FSZs are meant to protect participating Important Farmland from development pressure. An FSZ must be located within an agricultural preserve (area designated as eligible for a Williamson Act contract) and designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance. The agricultural and open space lands enrolled in the program are protected for a minimum of a 20-year term under an FSZ and are offered an even greater property tax reduction than land under a Williamson Act contract. Land protected in an FSZ cannot be annexed by a city or county government or school district (which would result in cancellation of a Williamson Act contract) (California Department of Conservation 2001). Nonrenewal and cancellation procedures are similar to those for Williamson Act contracts. In El Dorado County, 185 acres of land previously restricted by Williamson Act contracts were enrolled in FSZs in 2001, an increase from 19 acres in 2000 (California Department of Conservation 2002).

Important Farmland Inventory System and Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

As discussed above, the Important Farmland Inventory System initiated in 1975 by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS) classifies land based on 10 soil and climatic characteristics. The DOC started another similar system of mapping and monitoring for California in 1980, known as the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). The DOC system was designed to document how much agricultural land in California was being converted to nonagricultural land or transferred into Williamson Act contracts. The DOC's definitions of Important Farmland types are provided under "Development Pressures" above.

To be shown on the FMMP's Important Farmland Maps as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, a piece of land must meet both of the following criteria:

< **Land Use:** The land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the 4 years before the Important Farmland Map date, as determined by FMMP staff during examination of current aerial photos, local comment letters, and field verification; and

< **Soil:** The soil must meet the physical and chemical criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance as determined by NRCS.

The DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection estimates that El Dorado County has 1,117 acres classified as Prime Farmland; 1,016 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance; 4,406

acres of Unique Farmland; and 83,136 acres of Farmland of Local Importance (California Department of Conservation 2001). The vast majority of soils on the west slope of the county are classified as Grazing Land and Other Land. Concentrations of Unique and Locally Important Farmlands can be found in the Cool, Gold Hill, Georgetown, and Buffalo Hill areas. Exhibit 5.2-1 displays the Important Farmland in El Dorado County from DOC 2001 data.

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model

The California LESA model was developed in 1997 and was designed based on the federal LESA system and can be used to rank the relative importance of farmland and the potential significance of its conversion on a site-by-site basis. The California LESA model considers the following factors: land capability, Storie index, water availability (drought and non-drought conditions), land uses within 1/4 mile, and "protected resource lands" (e.g., Williamson Act lands) surrounding the property. A score can be derived and used to determine if the conversion of a property would be significant under CEQA. The LESA model provides a broad range of scores and other factors that can be considered in determining impact significance.

El Dorado County Regulatory Programs

Williamson Act

Although the DOC coordinates and monitors implementation of the Williamson Act, each county regulates the criteria for participation and administers the program. Subdivision of lands under Williamson Act contracts is limited by the state and the County, and adjacent lands are required to incorporate a 200-foot setback to prevent encroachment of incompatible adjacent uses (El Dorado County Planning Department 2002).

In El Dorado County, the minimum contract size is 20 acres, although existing parcels of 10 to 20 acres may be considered if they meet additional criteria. All properties must be reviewed by the Agricultural Commission in accordance with the Procedure for Evaluating the Suitability of Land for Agricultural Use and achieve a score of 80 or higher according to the procedure's rating system (El Dorado County Planning Department 2002).

Owners who want to enter into a Williamson Act contract must rezone their land to Exclusive Agriculture (AE). Lands in this zoning district have specific development standards to protect agricultural practices and uses; these include a requirement that adjacent uses establish a 200-foot setback for residential structures as a buffer. Development in this zoning district is

limited to one residential unit per contract, regardless of the number of parcels (County Zoning Ordinance, El Dorado County Planning Department 2002).

The County Department of Agriculture has established criteria relating to capital outlay, minimum acreage, profit-making capability, and annual gross income for Williamson Act lands under its jurisdiction to ensure that they retain economic viability (El Dorado County 1999). For the 2000 tax year, El Dorado County had 430 Williamson Act contracts comprising 41,852 acres of farmland, compared to 43,704 acres enrolled in 1998. Forty-five Williamson Act contracts, comprising 6,865 acres, were in the nonrenewal process in 2000 (El Dorado County 2001). Exhibit 5.2-2 shows the lands currently under Williamson Act contracts in El Dorado County.

County Land Use and Zoning Designations

The County's Zoning Ordinance includes provisions for various types of agricultural lands. Although the Zoning Ordinance will be updated to conform to the policies of the General Plan adopted by the County, the following discussion of the key agriculture-related aspects of the current Zoning Ordinance is provided as background information.

The zoning districts related to agriculture are Agriculture (A), Exclusive Agriculture (AE), Planned Agriculture (PA), and Select Agriculture (SA-10). Each of these zoning designations applies to various agricultural uses in the county, including livestock grazing, timber growth, fruit and vegetable production, processing, and packaging, and each includes an allowance for one single-family dwelling. All of these districts except Agriculture permit ranch marketing, winery, and wine tasting, either by right or with a special use permit.

Agriculture (A) zoning districts have a minimum parcel size of 10 acres. Acceptable uses include a single-family dwelling; raising and grazing of livestock; growing of trees, fruit, vegetables, flowers, grains, and other crops; and the packing and sale of agricultural products. Exclusive Agriculture (AE) districts are intended primarily for lands under Williamson Act contract and have a minimum parcel size of 20 acres (10-20 acres with special criteria). Before a parcel can be entered into a Williamson Act contract, it must first be rezoned AE. Certain restrictions apply to the AE zone, including the allowance of only one residential dwelling, even if the contracted land contains more than one parcel. In addition, land zoned AE cannot be subdivided unless each separate parcel is eligible for and is entered into a separate Williamson Act or FSZ contract upon parcel map approval (El Dorado County Planning Department 1999).

Planned Agriculture (PA) districts and Select Agriculture (SA-10) districts are based on the suitability of land, using the criteria of soil type, existing agriculture use, and location in or adjacent to an agricultural area. PA parcels have a 20-acre minimum size except for lands designated rangeland or woodland, which have a 60-acre minimum size; SA-10 parcels have a 10-acre minimum size and limitations on land coverage by residential and accessory uses (El Dorado County Planning Department 2001).

The Suitability Evaluation for Agricultural Lands (SEAL) is applicable to lands located within Agricultural Districts and Williamson Act contracts. SEAL was developed through a collaborative effort between the County Agricultural Commission, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, and the County Planning Department and is administered by the Agricultural Commission. SEAL established criteria for evaluating the suitability of agricultural lands using five categories: soils, climate, water, parcel size, and land use. Specific criteria were developed for each category and assigned quantitative point values. The final point values are used to assign the level of suitability of the parcel for agricultural use (El Dorado County Board of Supervisors 1999).

Choice Agricultural Soils

As described above, the County has identified land that contains soils it considers "choice" as being worthy of protection. These lands are all state-designated Important Farmlands and other land classifications that are or have the capability to be in active agricultural production. The mapped extent of choice agricultural soils includes lands that are at least 50% choice soils as identified by NRCS (Exhibit 5.2-3). Protections provided to agricultural activities on choice soils include land use restrictions and tax incentive programs to encourage the establishment and continuation of viable agricultural operations on these high-quality soils.

Right to Farm Ordinance

The County Right to Farm Ordinance (County Code §17.13), adopted in 1988, was established to conserve and protect agriculturally zoned, commercially viable land within the county and protect agricultural landowners from nuisance complaints related to cultivation, irrigation, spraying, fertilizing, and other activities that are a part of normal agricultural operations. The Right to Farm Ordinance is intended to protect future agricultural operations and the expansion of existing operations in areas zoned for agricultural use (A, AE, PA, and residential agriculture [RA] zones on parcels 20 acres [RA-20] or larger) from nuisance complaints caused by changing uses on adjacent lands and encroaching development. The focus is to remove

Exhibit 5.2-3, Choice Soils (8.5x11)

barriers that keep new farmers from entering into the field of agriculture in addition to preventing existing farms from curtailing or ceasing operations (El Dorado County Planning Department 2001).

Ranch Marketing Ordinance

The County adopted the Ranch Marketing Ordinance (County Code §17.14.190) in 1986, amending the ordinance in January 2001 to provide agricultural landowners with the right to sell agricultural products and conduct agriculture-related activities on site. Under this ordinance, ranch owners may engage in activities such as food stands, promotional events, tours, hiking, and picnicking. To be eligible, a ranch marketing operation must be inspected by the Agricultural Commissioner to certify that produce is sold directly to the consumer by the farmer. The Ranch Marketing Ordinance can only be applied to land zoned SA-10, PA, and AE (as described above). The parcel must be at least 10 acres, with a minimum of 5 acres in permanent crop production as determined by the Agricultural Commissioner (El Dorado County Planning Department 2001).

Once certified, a ranch marketing operation may develop and operate permitted activities with no discretionary review, including structures up to 500 square feet for the sale of agriculture-related promotional items, gift items, or prepackaged goods; parking areas; food stands and bake shops; special commercial events; and marketing of promotional events. Special events permitted by right may involve up to 125 people and may take place up to six times per year for a parcel of less than 20 acres, with the frequency and maximum attendance limits increasing as parcel size increases.

Wineries Ordinance

The Wineries Ordinance (County Code §17.14.200) was also adopted in January 2001 to provide for the development of wineries and encourage agricultural and tourism industries within the county. Wineries were previously regulated under the 1986 provision of the Ranch Marketing Ordinance. Wineries are permitted by right within the agricultural zone districts SA-10, SA, PA, AE, and all commercial zones except Professional Office Commercial (CPO) zoning. The wineries must be located on parcels of 20 acres or more, with a minimum of 5 acres of planted grapes. Tasting rooms and other accessory uses (such as tours, promotional events, and special events involving up to 250 people) are permitted by right within the commercial and agricultural zone districts. Outdoor amplified music is permitted by right until 10 p.m. in commercial zone districts, subject to County noise standards. Specific criteria and development standards must be met in order to comply with this ordinance (El Dorado County Planning Department 2001).

Role of Agricultural Commission

The County Agricultural Commission is an advisory board to the County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. This group provides advice and recommendations related to agricultural land use issues and "right to farm" issues, as well as advising on Williamson Act issues. The commission makes recommendations for protection of agricultural soils and operations within the county on a case-by-case basis, covering areas including the grape and wine industry, cattle, timber, and fruits.

The Agricultural Commission is composed of the Agricultural Commissioner and seven representatives of the agricultural industry. The Agricultural Commissioner is appointed by the chairman of the Board of Supervisors, with approval from the entire Board, and serves a 4-year term. The members of the commission include individuals involved in interests throughout the agricultural industry, including forestry, livestock, and fruit and nut farming.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Thresholds of Significance

The General Plan would result in a significant impact if development would:

- convert a substantial amount of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Farmland of Local Importance (including land identified by the County as "choice agricultural land"), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the DOC, to nonagricultural uses;
- convert a substantial amount of land currently in agricultural production to nonagricultural use;
- convert a substantial amount of grazing land, as defined by the County Agricultural Commission, to nongrazing uses in such a manner that it would substantially reduce the viability of grazing resources in the county; or
- conflict with, or result in cancellation of, a Williamson Act contract.

Impact **5.2-I**

Potential for Conversion of Important Farmland, Grazing Land, Land Currently in Agricultural Production, or for Conflict that Results in Cancellation of a Williamson Act Contract. General Plan policies establish a suitability review by the Agricultural Commission for discretionary projects adjacent to or in areas suitable for agricultural operations. However, the broad range of land uses permitted by right under the equal-weight alternatives exempts many development projects from the review process. The limitations on subdivision with the No Project and Roadway Constrained Six-Lane "Plus" alternatives would restrict the density of development in Community Regions and Rural Centers, forcing a greater percentage of residential development into the Rural Regions, density of development in these areas would also be restricted under these alternatives. Development in rural areas and possible incompatibility of adjacent uses would affect all types of agricultural land. Overlapping Mineral Resource and Agricultural District overlay designations could lead to conflicts between these uses and to conversion of farmland. As development intensifies throughout rural areas from 2025 to buildout, conflicts with high-intensity land uses would become more likely. This impact is considered **significant** for all four alternatives. The severity of this impact would be greatest under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, followed by the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus," No Project, and Environmentally Constrained alternatives. Impact significance before and after mitigation is shown in the table below.

Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
Impact 5.2-1: Potential for Conversion of Important Farmland, Grazing Land, Land Currently in Agricultural Production, or for Conflict that Results Cancellation of a Williamson Act Contract	S_3	S_3	S_2	S_2	S_4	S_4	S_1	S_1

Mitigation	Significance After Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.2-1(a), Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a); 5.2-1(b), Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(b); 5.2-1(c), Identify Acceptable Mitigation for Loss of Agricultural Land; and 5.2-1(d), Provide Additional Protection of Agricultural Use; 5.2-1(e), Provide Adequate Agricultural Setbacks; 5.2-1(f), Require Agricultural Fencing on Adjacent Residential Property.	SU_3	SU_3	SU_2	SU_2	SU_4	SU_4	SU_1	SU_1

* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.

Implementation of the General Plan can result in conversion of farmland (Important Farmland, land currently in agricultural production, grazing land, or land under Williamson Act contract) to nonagricultural uses both directly and indirectly. Direct conversion can occur by designating farmlands for nonagricultural (e.g., residential or commercial) uses. Indirect conversion can occur by allowing incompatible uses, either near or directly on land designated for agricultural uses, without adequate safeguards in place to protect the farmlands from conversion. Table 5.2-5 shows the acreage of various categories of agricultural land that would be designated for medium- or high-intensity, nonagricultural uses with each alternative. This analysis discusses the potential of all four equal-weight alternatives to result in direct and indirect conversions.

No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)

Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative

The relevant policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.2.1.2, 2.2.2.2, 2.2.2.7, 2.2.5.10, 7.1.1.1, 7.2.1.1 through 7.2.1.3, 7.6.1.1

and 7.6.1.2, 7.6.1.3, 8.1.1.1 through 8.1.1.6, 8.1.2.1 and 8.1.2.2, 8.1.3.1 through 8.1.3.5, 8.1.4.1 and 8.1.4.2, 8.1.5.2, 8.2.2.1 through 8.2.2.4, and 8.2.4.1 through 8.2.4.3.

Table 5.2-5
Agricultural Land Subject to Medium or High Conversion Potential[1]

Agricultural Land Category	No Project/1996 General Plan Alternatives[2] (acres)	Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (acres)	Environmentally Constrained Alternative (acres)
Important Farmland			
Prime	78	50	70
Statewide Importance	37	27	27
Unique	757	604	632
Local Importance	21,082	11,990	15,984
Subtotal	21,954	12,671	16,713
Grazing Land	40,783	28,715	21,689
Choice Soils	36,658	30,788	24,663
Agricultural District/Agricultural Land	172	287	0
Williamson Act Contract	4,582	216	242
Total	**104,149**	**72,677**	**63,307**

[1] For the purposes of this analysis, land with medium or high conversion potential is designated to be land defined in the General Plan for nonagricultural land uses: High-Density Residential, Medium-Density Residential, Low-Density Residential, Multifamily Residential, Commercial, Tourist Recreational, Research and Development, Adopted Plan, and Public Facility.

[2] Although the No Project and 1996 General Plan alternatives have the same land use designations, development intensity would differ. Under the No Project Alternative, development would be restricted to one dwelling unit per parcel regardless of size. Subdivision would be allowed under the 1996 General Plan Alternative.

Sources: El Dorado County Planning Department 2002, 2003; EDAW 2003

No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Under this alternative, no discretionary residential development would be allowed except that already under development agreements (DAs) or tentative maps (14,565 units). Ministerial actions such as residential building permits would continue; such projects are not typically subject to General Plan policy review. As a result, the development pattern identified for the No Project Alternative would result in single-family dwelling units dispersed throughout the county, including areas designated primarily for agricultural uses. The prohibition of subdivision would result in a low-density rural development pattern throughout the Rural

Regions. However, the combination of these two factors (broadly distributed residential development and inapplicability of General Plan policies) would still somewhat increase the potential for conflicts between agricultural operations and adjacent land uses. Tables 4-6 and 4-7 in Chapter 4, Land Use Forecasts and Development Estimates, show a detailed comparison of development forecasts for all four equal-weight alternatives.

By 2025, the county would have an estimated 21,434 new housing units. Most of this growth would take place in El Dorado Hills (Market Area 1) (13,104 housing units), with a much smaller but still substantial amount taking place in the Cameron Park/Shingle Springs/Rescue area (Market Area 2) (3,134 housing units) and the Placerville area (Market Area 4) (1,385 housing units). A total of 14,565 dwelling units would be within existing commitments, the remainder, 6,869 units, would be dispersed to legal parcels that would be prohibited from subdivision. Countywide, 15% of land would be designated for high- or medium-intensity uses (i.e., those uses with medium or high conversion potential [Table 5.2-5]) and 85% would be designated for low-intensity rural uses (i.e., Rural Residential, Natural Resources, Open Space). Community Regions would encompass 70,699 acres under the No Project Alternative; Rural Centers would cover 8,469. This would leave 1,030,935 acres in Rural Regions. In Market Areas 7-14, more than 70% of the land is designated for rural uses. Market Areas 4-7 and 9, with the largest amount of cropland, vary: in Market Area 4, 33% of the land has rural designations; in Market Area 5, 49%; and in Market Area 6, 66%.

Agricultural districts are a key element in the County's approach to protecting agricultural resources. El Dorado County has established seven agricultural districts (Gold Hill, Coloma, Garden Valley, Camino/Fruitridge, Pleasant Valley, Oak Hill, and Fairplay/Somerset) (see agricultural district overlay on the No Project Alternative land use map). There are currently efforts underway to expand these district boundaries. The purpose of the agricultural districts is to provide orderly development of the land most suitable for agriculture, which includes having sufficient space and hydrology, suitable soil conditions, and existing or adjacent agricultural uses. Through parcel size requirements and strategic location on suitable agricultural land, establishment of agricultural districts has provided a way to preserve and enhance the economic viability of the county's agricultural lands, as well as protect land from encroaching uses that are incompatible (El Dorado County Planning Department 2001). Uses permitted in agricultural districts include single-family residences, raising and grazing of livestock, growing of crops (including timber), and packaging and sale of agricultural products.

Because subdivision would be precluded with the No Project Alternative, the intent of the General Plan to focus medium- and high-intensity development in the Community Regions and Rural Centers could not be implemented. As a result, property owners would be more likely to build a house on a parcel in a rural area than would be the case if subdivision were

allowed. In addition, because any property owner may be allowed to construct a single-family residential unit on an existing parcel, regardless of its location or adjacent uses, many of the intended agricultural protections that are the stated purpose of agricultural districts could be circumvented. For the No Project Alternative, 49,460 acres of land in the county would be included in agricultural districts. Table 5.2-5 shows that the land use map assigns land use designations with medium or high conversion potential to 172 acres of land within agricultural districts.

Important Farmland

The protections provided for Important Farmland, based on a review of the land use map for the No Project Alternative and the policies identified above, include the establishment of agricultural districts (Policies 2.2.2.2, 8.1.1.1, 8.1.1.2, and 8.1.1.4) that are limited to agricultural and agriculture-related uses and have minimum parcel sizes, implementation and strengthening of the Right to Farm Ordinance (Policies 8.1.3.3 requires deed restrictions that new owners sign an acknowledgment of adjacent agricultural activities when new parcels are created, and 8.2.2.4, which protect farms from incompatible uses), the requirement for 200-foot setbacks to avoid or reduce the potential for conflicts with nonagricultural land uses (Policy 8.1.3.2), and tax benefits to enhance the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches (Policy 8.2.4.1). However, policies may not be fully applied to residential development under the No Project Alternative, and the 200-foot setback (Policy 8.1.3.2) may not be sufficient.

The Right to Farm Ordinance is part of the zoning code and the zoning code is applicable to ministerial development. Nevertheless, there are no provisions in the zoning code that would "attach" the Right to Farm Ordinance to a building permit or otherwise require a new resident adjacent to agriculture to be made aware of its existence (such as attaching the provisions of the ordinance to a deed). Therefore, while the ordinance would be in effect, without this informing mechanism it would likely not reduce nuisance complaints. In fact, this is the provision of Policy 8.1.3.3 that would not be applied to ministerial development.

As shown in Exhibit 5.2-1, Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) is widely scattered and, for the most part, consists of small areas surrounded by grazing land or other land suitable for agricultural use. These areas correspond fairly closely with the six agricultural districts described above.

As shown in Table 5.2-5, medium- and high-intensity land uses are designated for 21,954 acres of Important Farmlands under the No Project Alternative. However, residential development could take place in any area throughout the county. Although the land use map identifies

High- and Medium-Density Residential areas, housing units are likely to be widely distributed across the rural areas of the county because restrictions on subdivision preclude these high-intensity uses, which are concentrated in Community Regions and Rural Centers. As a result, the potential for conflict with agricultural operations and development on land suitable for agricultural production would be potentially widespread.

Land in Agricultural Production

Land use designations for the No Project Alternative define Medium-Density Residential as applicable only in Community Regions and Rural Centers and Low-Density Residential, Rural Residential, and Natural Resource designations as being intended for application in Rural Regions. As a result of the prohibition of residential subdivision, landowners in rural areas are more likely to build a houses on rural parcels than would otherwise be the case because the lack of subdivisions reduces the overall availability of buildable lots. As described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing and further above, residential development on 5-acre parcels scattered throughout an agricultural area would have the potential to increase conflicts between neighboring residential and agricultural uses, because of differing land use expectations and potential complaints regarding such issues as noise, odor, pesticide/herbicide use, traffic, and use of heavy machinery. This potential increase in conflicts could lead indirectly to increased conversion to nonagricultural uses.

The No Project Alternative designates land uses in the categories of Natural Resources and Open Space as being compatible with and conducive to the protection of continued agricultural operations. Rural Residential and Industrial land uses are described as being acceptable buffer uses that are not actively in conflict with agricultural uses. Land uses designated High-Density Residential, Medium-Density Residential, Low-Density Residential, Multifamily Residential, Commercial, Tourist Recreational, Research and Development, Adopted Plan, and Public Facility are higher intensity uses, some of which (LDR, MDR) may provide acceptable buffers for agricultural land. These uses are defined for this analysis as having medium or high conversion potential because nonagricultural activities permitted in these designations could result in development pressure and conflicts with active agricultural operations that could lead landowners to convert agricultural land to other uses.

As shown in Table 5.2-5, the No Project Alternative designates 104,149 acres of agricultural land as subject to medium or high conversion potential (i.e., with nonagricultural land uses). Table 5.2-3 (in Existing Conditions section above) shows the acreage by market area of various crop types in active production. As shown in Table 5.2-3, the market areas with the greatest acreages of active cropland are as follows:

- Market Area 4—894 acres, primarily apples, wine grapes, Christmas trees, and pears;
- Market Area 9—879 acres, the overwhelming majority of which is wine grapes;
- Market Area 5—408 acres, primarily wine grapes and pears;
- Market Area 7—343 acres, primarily wine grapes; and
- Market Area 6—317 acres, primarily apples, pears, and Christmas trees.

The land use map for the No Project Alternative shows that, for the most part, designated land uses correlate well with land in agricultural production. However, the map and policies might not exercise sufficient control over the suitability and location of future residential development in these areas.

In the Garden Valley/Greenwood area (Market Area 11) and along State Route (SR) 49 south to Plymouth (Market Area 3), mining district overlays are indicated in Rural Residential areas where agricultural activities may take place. Although General Plan Policies 2.2.2.7 and 7.2.1.1-7.2.1.3 state that these activities are often compatible, the potential exists for conflicts stemming from the nature of these types of activities, such as dust creation affecting use and productivity.

In the broader context of development approval throughout El Dorado County, the No Project Alternative requires that the Agricultural Commission review requested rezones of discretionary development applications that would affect parcels of agricultural land on choice agricultural soils (Policies 8.1.1.5 and 8.1.3.5) and that the Agricultural Commission determine, for any agricultural parcels of 10 or more acres, whether a discretionary permit would diminish or impair existing or potential agricultural use. The Board of Supervisors or other approving authority is required to make findings regarding the compatibility of agricultural district or Williamson Act lands and adjacent lands under review for discretionary projects (Policy 8.1.4.1). None of these policies would apply to residential development under this alternative, however, limiting the effectiveness of their intent to protect agricultural operations from encroachment by conflicting uses.

Aside from the various departmental reviews required for discretionary development applications, General Plan Policy 8.1.3.4 requires the County to establish a threshold of significance for the conversion of agricultural land. No requirement is included in this policy, however, for mitigation to be identified that would compensate for the loss of agricultural land. The establishment of a threshold of significance alone would not prevent or protect against the conversion of land from agricultural to nonagricultural uses. Setting an acreage threshold below which the conversion of agricultural land would be acceptable would indirectly contribute to the conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses by allowing conversion without mitigation below that threshold. Because the basis of the threshold is not

described and no mitigation is identified in the policy, the potential exists for this type of indirect conversion.

Planning Department and Agricultural Commission review are required before permits can be granted for discretionary projects in agricultural areas. However, many uses are permitted by right in the County Zoning Ordinance in agricultural zoning districts, and some of these uses could conflict with or detract from the preferred agricultural uses of the land. Land uses that have high potential to cause conversion and that are identified as being permitted in agricultural production areas include agricultural support uses, visitor-serving uses, ranch marketing and winery uses, and mining and water projects. Each of these uses has the potential to displace productive farmland. As described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing, the current system of uses permitted by right would allow most vacant parcels in the county to be developed without any type of consistency review. This process would not protect against the establishment of land uses that have high conversion potential.

Grazing Lands

The No Project Alternative contains several policies intended to protect grazing lands from conversion pressure that might lead to reduced viability, including policies to protect parcels 40 acres or larger for grazing and rangeland. Because single-family residential uses and other ministerial development would be unaffected by these policies, they would not protect grazing land from fragmentation by encroaching, scattered residential uses. However, this is balanced against the prohibition on subdivision, so if a parcel is 40 acres or larger, it would remain so with the No Project Alternative.

Grazing lands are subject to the same development and conversion pressures that threaten all types of agricultural lands. Because cattle and horses require large areas of grazing land to sustain a viable agricultural operation, grazing lands are particularly susceptible to fragmentation and land use conflicts that could make continued operations difficult to maintain. Under the No Project Alternative, the fact that residential subdivision is precluded in the areas appropriate for medium- and high-intensity development would increase the potential for fragmentation in grazing areas because developable land would become scarce near urban/suburban areas. To the degree these parcels are large enough to support grazing, a single home on such lands would not affect its viability for continued use. Thus, in this case, the prohibition on subdivision would beneficially affect long-term grazing.

In the overall context of development in El Dorado County, Policy 8.1.2.1 requires the Agricultural Commission to identify lands suitable for grazing. This policy would have no

tangible effect on long-term grazing because the subdivision of potential grazing land would be prohibited.

Williamson Act Contracts

Table 5.2-6 shows the land use designation and acreage of lands that are currently under Williamson Act contract for each equal-weight alternative.

Table 5.2-6
Land Use Designations of Williamson Act Contract Lands by Equal-Weight Alternative

General Plan Designation	No Project/1996 General Plan (acres)	Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" (acres)	Environmentally Constrained (acres)
Agricultural Land [1]	N/A	N/A	32,768
Adopted Plan	N/A	0	2
Low-Density Residential	4,168	107	135
Medium-Density Residential	309	3	0
Natural Resources	5,480	34,551	7,458
Open Space	87	87	867
Rural Residential/Rural Lands [2]	31,704	6,999	1,297
Tourist Recreational [3]	105	105	105
Total	**41,853**	**41,853**	**41,853**

[1] The Agricultural Lands designation is used only in the Environmentally Constrained Alternative.

[2] The Rural Lands designation is used in the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" and Environmentally Constrained alternatives; the Rural Residential designation is used in the No Project and 1996 General Plan alternatives.

[3] The Bacchi Ranch, which is under Williamson Act contract, includes a 98-acre portion that is separated from the bulk of the property by SR 49 and, in addition to being used as grazing land during winter, is used by river rafting companies under special use permits. For this reason, this portion of the property and the adjoining portion of SR 49 are designated Tourist Recreational.

Notes: Numbers may not total due to rounding. N/A = This designation is not used with this alternative.

Source: EDAW 2003

Under the No Project Alternative, no mechanism is available to restrict development from taking place in land use designations suitable for or compatible with lands under Williamson Act contract (particularly the Rural Residential and Natural Resource designations). Although the Agricultural District overlay designation is intended to protect agricultural lands on Important Farmland and under Williamson Act contract, residential development can occur throughout the county by right and no suitability review by the Agricultural Commission would take place.

Summary

Under the No Project Alternative at 2025, the county would have grown by 21,434 residential units, 6,869 of which would be dispersed outside of subdivisions, and 36,188 jobs from 1999 levels. According to the land use map for the No Project Alternative, this growth would be distributed throughout the county but would be focused primarily in Market Areas 1, 2, and 4. More than 70% of the land in Market Areas 7 through 11 is in rural land use designations; agricultural districts are located in Market Areas 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 11.

Because residential subdivision is not allowed and one residential unit is permitted by right on any legal lot, the land use map and the General Plan policies under this alternative would not be effective at guiding residential development. Residential development would not be reviewed for consistency General Plan policies, and density of development would be determined solely on the basis of parcel size. While this would result in, on balance, retaining larger parcel sizes adjacent to agriculture, it would not avoid land use conflicts. At the same time it would disperse development to rural areas where conflicts would occur. For these reasons, this impact is considered significant.

No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

If the No Project Alternative were to reach full buildout, development pressures could continue to create the potential for conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses. An additional, 8,056 residential units could be built after 2025, for a total of 29,520 new units. The most intensively developed areas at buildout are expected to be Market Areas 1, 2, 4, and 5, all of which would be designated 50% or more for medium- or high-intensity uses. This would particularly affect agricultural lands in the Coloma/Gold Hill and Placerville/Camino areas, where the high percentage of residential development is likely to present pressures for the conversion of agricultural uses to less rural, more urban uses. However, the subdivision restrictions imposed by the Writ would restrict the size of residential parcels to their current size, reducing the number of potential parcels that would be too small for adequate buffers, and too small to farm.

Land in Agricultural Production

At buildout, the impact of the No Project Alternative on conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses could be similar to, but more intensive than, that discussed for 2025. The land use map and policy concerns identified for 2025 are expected to remain. Housing units in the county could increase by 29,250; as property in urban and suburban areas became fully developed at the levels permitted under this alternative, residential development would take

place in many areas that are predominantly agricultural. As a result, the likelihood of land use conflicts or conversion could increase. Thus, even with the policies identified for the No Project Alternative, the potential for conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural land uses could be greater at buildout than in 2025. This impact is considered significant.

Grazing Land

At buildout, the impact of the No Project Alternative on grazing land would be similar to 2025, as described above for land in agricultural production. A less-than-significant impact would be expected.

Williamson Act Contracts

The impact of the No Project Alternative on Williamson Act contract lands could be similar at buildout to that described for 2025. Development pressures would continue to create the potential for land use conflicts. The areas of greatest concentration of Williamson Act contract lands are primarily in Market Areas 3, 8, 9, 10, and 11 (Exhibit 5.2-2), and much of the Farmland of Local Importance that is located in designations with high conversion potential is Williamson Act land. In the rural areas around Cedar Grove/Pollock Pines, Somerset, Pleasant Valley, and Georgetown, increasing population and employment densities could result in development moving away from rural centers into rural regions. This dispersal of development could present pressures for the nonrenewal of surrounding Williamson Act lands as adjacent land uses present greater potential for conflicts with agricultural operations.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Alternative #2)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative are the definitions of land use designations and Policies AF-1a through AF-1g; Implementation Measures AF-A and AF-D through AF-G; and Policies CO-11a and CO-11b.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Unlike the No Project Alternative, this alternative allows each legal parcel to be subdivided into a maximum of four new parcels (to the extent authorized by the appropriate land use designation) and allows one residential unit to be constructed on each new parcel. Other residential development would be limited to that already under existing, approved DAs and tentative maps (14,565 units) and future tentative maps. Ministerial actions for residential

building permits would continue, but to a lesser degree than No Project given the ability for limited subdivision. Similar to the development pattern identified for the No Project Alternative, residential growth would be pushed into rural areas, contributing to dispersed development and creating the potential for conflicts between agricultural operations and adjacent land uses.

By 2025, the county would have an estimated 25,839 additional housing units, 11,274 more than the existing commitments, and 34,455 new jobs. Development under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative would be redistributed somewhat from that under the No Project Alternative. Community Regions would cover 50,678 acres under this alternative, compared to 70,699 acres under the No Project Alternative. The total area of Rural Centers would be 8,390 acres, compared to 8,469 acres under the No Project Alternative. The remaining area in Rural Regions would be 1,051,035 acres, compared to 1,030,935 acres under the No Project Alternative. The percentage of land in rural uses would increase in every market area. Market Areas 1, 4, and 2 would still have the highest percentages of medium- and high-intensity developed uses, but all of the Market Areas would have notably less acreage in these uses: in Market Area 1, 66% (compared to more than 80% under the No Project Alternative); in Market Areas 2 and 4, 55% (compared to 66% under the No Project Alternative). In Market Area 5, the balance would shift from 49% in rural uses to 57%, with a 2,632-acre increase in the amount of land designated Natural Resource. Market Area 6 would exhibit a large increase in rural land primarily resulting from a decrease in the High-Density Residential designation. Rural uses in Market Area 10 would increase to 84% (compared to 72% with the No Project Alternative), with an increase of 4,833 acres in Rural Land and Natural Resource accompanied by a 3,528-acre decrease in Medium-Density Residential.

Under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, 49,771 acres of land in the county would be included in agricultural districts. As shown in Table 5.2-5, nonagricultural land uses are identified on the land use map for 287 acres in these districts, creating the potential for conversion of or conflicts between existing agricultural operations and other, nonagricultural activities. This alternative includes policies that establish agricultural districts that are limited to agricultural and agriculture-related uses and have low development densities (Policy AF-1a) and require the Agricultural Commission to review the suitability of nonagricultural development in agricultural districts (Policy AF-1b); protect agricultural uses by revising the zoning ordinance to identify setbacks and maximum densities to avoid conflicts with nonagricultural land uses (Policy AF-1d); and implement the Right to Farm Ordinance (Policy AF-1e and Implementation Measure AF-A); and provide tax benefits to enhance the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches (Policy AF-1c).

Important Farmland

The Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative contains several policies that are intended to protect agricultural lands and operations on Important Farmland in the county by requiring the establishment in the Zoning Ordinance of land use densities and setbacks for lands adjacent to all agricultural uses (Implementation Measure AF-A), requiring the County Department of Agriculture to establish a procedure for evaluating the suitability of nonagricultural development in agricultural districts (Policy AF-1b), and requiring the Agricultural Commission to review the suitability of discretionary projects involving agricultural lands and make recommendations to the reviewing authority (Implementation Measure AF-E). As shown in Table 5.2-5, the land use map for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative assigns 12,671 acres of Important Farmland to land use designations with high conversion potential. The greatest potential for conflict occurs on Farmland of Local Importance, particularly in Market Areas 6, 7, and 11. These conflict areas are the same as those identified for the No Project Alternative. Agricultural districts overlap Low-Density Residential areas in Market Areas 6 and 9; are adjacent to Low- and Medium-Density Residential areas in Market Areas 4, 5, and 6; and abut Tourist Recreational areas in Market Area 11 (north of Pilot Hill), creating the potential for conflicts with medium- or high-intensity uses in these areas.

Land in Agricultural Production

Land use designations for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative define Medium-Density Residential as applicable only in Community Regions and Rural Centers. The Low-Density Residential, Rural Land, and Natural Resource designations are all defined as being intended for application in Rural Regions. The Low-Density Residential designation has a parcel size of one dwelling unit per 5-10 acres as discussed for the No Project Alternative, and allowing dispersed residential development in agricultural areas at this parcel size has the potential to result in conflicts between residential and agricultural uses.

This alternative contains policies intended to protect land currently in agricultural production from being converted to nonagricultural uses or being removed from production because of conflicts with adjoining nonagricultural land uses. These include policies that establish setbacks and maximum densities in the Zoning Ordinance to separate agricultural and other uses (Policy AF-1d) and continue enforcement of the Right to Farm Ordinance (Policy AF-1e and Implementation Measure AF-A), assign the County Department of Agriculture the role of determining what is and is not a suitable use and identify appropriate land use designations for preserving agricultural land for production (Policy AF-1b). These policies are intended to protect agricultural activities and related land uses in the county from encroachment. In

addition, Policy AF-1c would provide tax benefits for farms and ranches and Policy AF-1f is intended to discourage conversion of existing and suitable agricultural land through the establishment of a threshold of significance. Policies CO-11a and CO-11b identify Open Space lands as suitable for preservation of low-intensity uses such as Rural Land and Natural Resources, which are acceptable agricultural land uses, and for conservation of rangeland and cropland.

Land in or suitable for agricultural production would be assigned to 72,677 acres of land use designations that have medium or high conversion potential (Table 5.2-5). (The definitions of land uses with medium or high conversion potential and land suitable for agriculture are described in the table.) Policy AF-1d and Implementation Measure AF-E provide for Agricultural Commission review of discretionary projects involving agricultural land or land adjacent to agricultural uses, but no mechanism is provided to ensure compatibility of uses allowed by right in agricultural areas.

Table 5.2-3 shows the acreage by market area of various crop types in active production. As described for the No Project Alternative, the market areas with the greatest acreages of active cropland are Market Areas 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9; these market areas have substantial acreage designated for rural uses. Although Market Area 4 has 33% rural uses (6,468 acres of cropland), this includes Apple Hill, with some of the county's most active agricultural production.

Implementation Measure AF-F requires the County to "establish a threshold of significance for the loss of agricultural land, a procedure for evaluating a project's contribution to the loss, and means to mitigate losses so that the established threshold is not exceeded." Depending on how this measure is ultimately implemented it may help prevent substantial loss of agricultural land.

For the most part, the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative would provide adequate land use buffering and protections to prevent conflicts or conversion pressures for lands in agricultural production. In addition, Policy AF-1e reinforces the validity of the Right to Farm Ordinance and Implementation Measure AF-A, item 3, requires that the Right to Farm Ordinance be revised to "place a deed restriction on all new parcels created adjacent to agricultural lands requiring the new owner to sign a statement acknowledging that his/her parcel is adjacent to a parcel engaging in agricultural activities and to protect forest management activities." In these ways, the General Plan would ensure that landowners are aware of the restrictions placed on their property by the Right to Farm Ordinance. However, uses permitted by right in agricultural areas are not subject to the suitability review identified in Implementation Measure AF-E, which is intended to implement Policy AF-1f, "The County

shall discourage the conversion of existing or suitable agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses." As discussed above, Implementation Measure AF-F also applies only to discretionary projects that require environmental review. Therefore, although the wording of Policy AF-1f does not exclude ministerial projects, no measure is provided by which ministerial projects would be subject to this policy.

Grazing Lands

Policies that address protection of grazing lands include identification and official recognition of rangeland (Policy AF-1c) and incentive-based programs for continued maintenance of rangeland (Implementation Measure AF-1G), establishment of setbacks and maximum densities in the Zoning Ordinance for land uses adjacent to agricultural operations (Policy AF-1d and Implementation Measure AF-E), continued enforcement of the Right to Farm Ordinance (Policy AF-1e), identification and protection of grazing lands by the County Department of Agriculture during review of discretionary projects (Policies AF-1b and AF-1g; Implementation Measures AF-A, AF-D, AF-E, and AF-G), and identification of the Rural Land and Natural Resource land use designations to protect land for low-intensity uses (Policy CO-11a), as well as the appropriateness of Open Space, Natural Resource, and Rural Land designations to conserve rangeland. These policies provide a high level of protection against conversion or fragmentation for grazing lands in El Dorado County.

The DOC has a soil classification for lands suitable for grazing and pasture, as described in Existing Conditions above. Areas designated by the DOC as grazing land are identified in the land use map as having the Natural Resource, Rural Land, Open Space, or Low-Density Residential designations, all of which are described as being suitable for grazing, low-intensity land uses, or agricultural activities. The Low-Density Residential designation is defined in the Land Use Element as allowing "small-scale agricultural operations" and 5 acres per dwelling unit. No minimum parcel size is identified for viable grazing operations under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, but a typical minimum parcel size for these uses in the county is 20-40 acres. At this range of parcel sizes, Low-Density Residential is not an appropriate land use designation for or adjacent to grazing operations.

Table 5.2-5 identifies 28,715 acres of DOC-designated grazing land as being located in land use designations that have high conversion potential. The areas where land use conflicts could result under this alternative are portions of the Adopted Plan area south of Clarksville (Market Area 1) and the area south of U.S. Highway 50 (U.S. 50) near Camino (Market Area 4). In these areas, where grazing land is concentrated near developed areas, land use conflicts could result where grazing activities take place adjacent to higher intensity uses such as Low- and Medium-Density Residential development, which allow 5 acres and 1 acre per dwelling unit.

The Zoning Ordinance identifies special setbacks for parcels adjacent to grazing lands and high-density livestock areas, requiring 200 feet for grazing parcels of 10 acres or more but no setback if the parcel is less than 10 acres. Buffers do not necessarily mitigate the issue of harassment of livestock.

Policy AF-1g and the accompanying implementation measures require the County Department of Agriculture to identify areas used or suitable for grazing. Implementation Measure AF-E provides a mechanism for using the resulting list when considering discretionary approvals. However, these policies fail to provide a mechanism for implementing these protections for uses identified in the Zoning Ordinance as being allowed by right.

Development under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative would be redistributed somewhat from that under the No Project Alternative. Market Areas 1, 2, and 4 would still have the highest percentages of developed uses, but all of these areas would have notably less acreage in developed uses: in Market Area 1, 66% (compared to more than 80% under the No Project Alternative); in Market Areas 2 and 4, less than 60% (compared to more than 60% under the No Project Alternative). Grazing areas would be protected by appropriate land use designations, although Low-Density Residential is defined as an agricultural land use but is not appropriate for grazing areas. Policies would allow a higher level of review and control over discretionary land uses proposed for grazing lands, but uses allowed by right in agricultural zoning districts would not be subject to these tighter controls.

Williamson Act Contracts

The Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative includes policies that protect Williamson Act lands from encroachment by incompatible land uses, including designation within Agricultural Districts (Policy AF-1a), suitability review by the Agricultural Commission for adjacent land uses and designation in the Exclusive Agriculture zoning district (Policy AF-1b), and identification of Williamson Act lands as eligible for protection with the Open Space designation. These policies provide institutional protections for lands enrolled in Williamson Act contracts to ensure that adjacent land uses are not approved that might be incompatible with agricultural uses.

Lands that are presently enrolled in Williamson Act contracts have been assigned primarily within the Natural Resource designation (83% of Williamson Act lands), with some acreage assigned to the Rural Land (17%) designation. These two categories encompass 99% of Williamson Act lands in the county, indicating that the County has provided excellent protection for these lands. One small area remains where Williamson Act lands are adjacent to

Medium-Density Residential lands, near Diamond Springs (Market Area 3). The protections provided by the General Plan policies, however, are adequate to protect this area from fragmentation or conversion.

Summary

For the most part, the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative would provide adequate protections for farmlands in El Dorado County. A total of 12,671 acres of designated Important Farmland would be in land use designations with medium or high conversion potential, most notably in Market Areas 6, 7, and 11. Overall, 77,677 acres of land in or suitable for agricultural production would be in such designations. Policy AF-1d and Implementation Measure AF-E provide for Agricultural Commission review of discretionary nonagricultural projects for suitability in agricultural areas or adjacent to agricultural uses; ministerial projects are not typically subject to General Plan policy review.

The threshold of significance for loss of agricultural land and the accompanying mitigation to be identified under Implementation Measure AF-F are intended to prevent the loss of agricultural land. Because they apply only to discretionary projects, however, they would not fully meet this intent; the low intensity of residential development permitted with the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative would lead to the likelihood of residential development dispersing into rural areas at a higher rate than with the No Project Alternative.

Buffering protections and maximum density requirements established under this alternative would protect agricultural uses from conflict with discretionary nonagricultural projects but, once again, would not prevent encroachment by scattered residential development on existing parcels. However, the Right to Farm Ordinance would be in effect and would be revised to provide a mechanism for informing new property owners adjacent to agricultural operations that their property is subject to the ordinance.

Grazing land is well protected by policies of this alternative, but conflicts could arise because areas designated as suitable for grazing by the DOC in Market Areas 1 and 4 are designated Low-Density Residential. The Low-Density Residential designation (5-10 acres per dwelling unit) is defined as allowing "small agricultural operations," whereas grazing requires large parcel sizes (20-40 acres) to permit a viable operation. In addition, Policy AF-1g and Implementation Measure AF-E describe protections for rangeland but fail to provide a mechanism for implementing these protections for uses allowed by right. For the reasons described and summarized above, this impact is considered significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

At buildout the county could have an estimated 41,652 new housing units and up to 86,688 new jobs above 1999 levels, an increase of 15,813 housing units and up to 52,233 jobs from 2025. For the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, 49,771 acres of land in the county could be included in agricultural districts. As shown in Table 5.2-5, nonagricultural land uses are identified on the land use map for 287 acres of these districts, creating the potential for conversion of or conflicts between existing agricultural operations and other, nonagricultural activities. Policy AF-1d and Implementation Measure AF-E provide for Agricultural Commission review of all discretionary approvals, but no mechanism is provided to ensure compatibility of uses allowed by right in agricultural areas.

These policies and land use designations could provide strong protections for agricultural lands and the uses that are preferred in those areas. However, uses permitted by right in agricultural areas are not subject to a suitability review.

Important Farmland

The land use map assigns 12,671 acres of Important Farmland to land use designations with medium to high conversion potential (Table 5.2-5). The development allowed with this alternative could continue to increase conversion pressure on high-quality farmland because increasing numbers of residential units could be scattered throughout the county at densities up to four times greater than allowed with the No Project Alternative. The greatest potential for conflict remains on Farmland of Local Importance in Market Areas 6, 7, and 11; agricultural districts overlapping Low-Density Residential areas in Market Areas 6 and 9 and adjacent to Low- and Medium-Density Residential areas in Market Areas 4, 5, and 6; and agricultural districts abutting Tourist Recreational areas in Market Area 11 (north of Pilot Hill).

Land in Agricultural Production

The impact of the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative on agricultural lands could involve increased potential conflict with residential development on or adjacent to land in agricultural production, particularly in Market Areas 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9. Policy AF-1(d) and Implementation Measure AF-E provide for Agricultural Commission review of the suitability of discretionary nonagricultural projects in agricultural areas or adjacent to agricultural uses, but do not apply to ministerial projects.

Grazing Lands

Policy AF-1g and Implementation Measures AF-A, AF-D, AF-E, and AF-G provide for protection of grazing lands and Agricultural Commission review of all discretionary approvals, but no mechanism is provided to ensure suitability of nonagricultural uses allowed by right in areas identified as protected grazing areas. Uses permitted by right in agricultural areas would not be subject to a suitability review. Thus, the potential for conflicts could increase as residential development spreads.

Williamson Act Contracts

Lands that are presently enrolled in Williamson Act contracts have been assigned primarily within the Natural Resource (83% of Williamson Act lands) and Rural Land (17%) designations. These two categories encompass 99% of Williamson Act lands in the county, indicating that the County has provided excellent protection for these lands. A total of 80% of the county could be designated for rural land uses, but up to four residential parcels could be subdivided on this land where land use designations allow. Thus, the protections provided for Williamson Act lands may not protect these areas from fragmentation at the higher development densities anticipated at buildout.

Summary

Despite the limitations on residential development under this alternative, the increase in development pressure at buildout could continue to create the potential for land use conflicts. Development is likely to be spread more broadly throughout the county, rather than being concentrated in Community Regions and Rural Centers, and the protections provided by General Plan policies could be insufficient to adequately protect these lands from fragmentation or conversion. This impact is considered significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

For the relevant policies of the Environmentally Constrained Alternative, please refer to the policies listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

The policies and land use map for this alternative were developed on the basis of land use constraints, physical constraints, and natural resource/biological constraints. New residential subdivision would be permitted to the extent allowed by law, and applicability of General Plan policies would not be restricted as with the two equal-weight alternatives described above. Less total acreage would be devoted to Community Regions and Rural Centers under this alternative. The seven Community Regions would occupy 49,723 acres and the 20 Rural Centers would occupy 6,124 acres, leaving 1,054,257 acres in Rural Regions. Housing units are estimated to increase by 32,290 from 1999 levels. The reduced size of Community Regions and Rural Centers would balance with the increased density of permitted subdivision (which would be determined by land use designation) to fully implement the intent of the General Plan to focus development in urban areas and protect rural areas from high levels of development. Development density would be greater in the urban areas, and the protections provided by General Plan policies would ensure concentration of high-intensity development in Community Regions and Rural Centers.

The amount of land in the Agricultural Land designation under this alternative would be 59,363 acres, an increase of almost 10,000 acres of protected agricultural designations over the previous two equal-weight alternatives. The Agricultural Land designation is intended for lands currently in agricultural production, under Williamson Act contract, or with at least 50% choice soils. This designation provides a greater level of protection for agricultural operations because it is a base land use designation rather than an overlay on top of another designation. For this reason, no acreage designated Agricultural Land would be located in areas with medium or high conversion potential. (See additional discussion of this issue in Impact 5.2-3.)

Important Farmland

Table 5.2-5 identifies 16,713 acres of Important Farmland as being in areas of medium or high conversion potential. Most of this acreage is Farmland of Local Importance, large areas of which are concentrated near Georgetown and Garden Valley (Market Area 11), Gold Hill (Market Area 5), Camino (Market Area 4), Fairplay and Somerset (Market Area 9), Pleasant Valley (Market Area 7), and the areas surrounding Grizzly Flat and Omo Ranch (Market Area 13). The high-quality farmland near areas of medium or high conversion potential are primarily Market Areas 5, 6, 7, and 11.

Land in Agricultural Production

Land use designations for the Environmentally Constrained Alternative define Medium-Density Residential as applicable only in Community Regions and Rural Centers. The Low-Density Residential, Rural Land, and Natural Resource designations are applicable only in Rural Regions; unlike the definitions provided in the Land Use Element for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, no option is given for these designations to be used in Community Regions and Rural Centers if the area in question is surrounded by higher density land uses. This stricter delineation between developed and rural uses means that uses appropriate for rural designations (including agricultural uses) would be located only in areas appropriate for low-intensity uses. As a result, activities on land in or suitable for agricultural production would be protected from coming into conflict with more intensively developed adjacent uses, greatly limiting the potential for confusion regarding intensity of development and indirectly protecting against conversion to nonagricultural uses. The Low-Density Residential designation has a parcel size of one dwelling unit per 5-10 acres, which has the potential to increase conflicts between residential and adjacent agricultural uses.

The General Plan policies relating to agriculture for this alternative are similar to those identified for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. The description of the Agricultural Land designation (Policy AF-1a) provides more definition to this category, including a more specific range of appropriate uses and a requirement for parcels to be of a suitable size for viable agricultural operations. Policy AF-1b adds grazing to the categories of uses subject to the County Department of Agriculture's procedure for suitability review.

The setbacks and densities that would be established for various land uses in the Zoning Ordinance would be reinforced by the suitability review performed by the County Agricultural Commission for discretionary nonagricultural projects adjacent to agricultural uses or on agricultural land. These protections would ensure that new nonagricultural activities in agricultural areas are appropriate uses adjacent to agricultural operations. Policy AF-1e and Implementation Measure AF-A, Item 3, provide a mechanism for informing new adjacent property owners that their properties are affected by the Right to Farm Ordinance.

Areas of potential conflict between agricultural uses and the more developed uses of Community Regions and Rural Centers would be smaller under the Environmentally Constrained Alternative than with the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative because growth in these urbanized areas would be denser and some areas designated Agricultural Lands are placed to avoid conflicts. The area occupied by Community Regions and Rural Centers would be smaller and the intensity of development permitted in those urban/suburban areas would be greater, increasing the likelihood that more land in or suitable for agricultural

production would remain in rural uses. Small interface areas between rural and urban land uses present the potential for land use conflicts at the edges of Placerville with Market Area 5 and in Market Area 4; near Pollock Pines (Market Area 6); south of SR 193 near Georgetown (Market Area 11); and west of Pleasant Valley (Market Area 7). The protections provided by the Agricultural Lands designation and the applicable policies (especially the suitability review) would ensure that, even in these small areas of potential conflict, agricultural lands would remain in or suitable for agricultural use.

Implementation Measure AF-F requires the County to establish a threshold of significance for the conversion of agricultural land, identify a process for assessing a project's impact, and establish mitigation to ensure that project impacts do not exceed the threshold. Because (given the ability to subdivide as the market demands) most development projects are likely to be discretionary with this alternative, the policy would have a greater likelihood of fulfilling its intent than under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. Ministerial projects would still occur and would not be subject to the threshold or any identified mitigation, however, and the large number of uses permitted by right in the County's Zoning Ordinance leads to the likelihood of a substantial amount of unmitigated agricultural conversion taking place outside the bounds of Policy AF-1f.

Grazing Land

The Environmentally Constrained Alternative contains policies that provide enhanced protection of grazing lands. Policy AF-1a is expanded to include grazing land as a category eligible for designation as Agricultural Land, as well as including sufficient size of the operation and location in Rural Regions as qualifiers for designating Agricultural Land. Policy AF-1b specifically includes grazing land as a category appropriate for the suitability review procedure established by the County Department of Agriculture and conducted by the Agricultural Commission. These policies provide a high level of protection against conversion or fragmentation for grazing lands in El Dorado County.

Areas designated by the DOC as grazing land are identified in the land use map as being in the Agricultural Lands, Natural Resource, Rural Lands, Open Space, or Low-Density Residential designations, all of which are described as being suitable for grazing, low-intensity land uses, or agricultural activities. A total of 21,689 acres of DOC-designated grazing land are located in areas of medium or high conversion potential, notably less than under the No Project and Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" alternatives (Table 5.2-5). In addition, the Environmentally Constrained Alternative designates 997,377 for agricultural protection (Agricultural Lands, Rural Lands, Natural Resource, Open Space), an increase of 50,879 acres

from the No Project Alternative and 122,483 acres from the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative.

Setbacks and possible conflicts are similar to those described for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, including the potential for livestock harassment, although the actual potential for conflict would be reduced because of the stronger policy language with regard to grazing, the more controlled development pattern (e.g., more intensive development focused in urban/suburban areas, less likely to occur in rural areas), and the added protection of the Agricultural Lands designation.

Policy AF-1g requires that the County Department of Agriculture identify areas used or suitable for grazing. In addition, grazing land is added to the Agricultural Lands designation. Implementation Measure AF-G provides a mechanism for using the resulting list of grazing lands when considering discretionary approvals but, as is true with other policies, fails to provide a mechanism for implementing these protections for uses identified in the Zoning Ordinance as being approved by right.

Williamson Act

Policies for the Environmentally Constrained Alternative provide protection to Williamson Act lands by their assignment to the Agricultural Lands designation rather than simply an overlay designation. Countywide, 78% of Williamson Act lands would be assigned to that designation with this alternative and would benefit from suitability review of adjacent discretionary nonagricultural projects by the Agricultural Commission. Overall, 99% of the Williamson Act lands in the county would be located in the compatible Agricultural Lands, Natural Resource, and Rural Lands designations.

The Environmentally Constrained Alternative also identifies Williamson Act lands as eligible for protection with the Open Space designation. These policies establish institutional protections for lands enrolled in Williamson Act contracts to provide suitability review for adjacent land uses that might be incompatible with agricultural uses.

Summary

The Environmentally Constrained Alternative at 2025 would provide greater protections against conflicts or conversion for agricultural operations than would the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative.

The Agricultural Land designation provides a greater level of protection for agricultural operations because it is a base land use designation rather than an overlay on top of another designation. A total of 16,713 acres of Important Farmland are located in areas of high conversion potential, primarily in Market Areas 5, 6, 7, and 11.

The description of the Agricultural Lands designation (Policy AF-1a) provides more definition to this category, including a more specific range of appropriate uses and a requirement for parcels to be of a suitable size for viable agricultural operations. Policy AF-1b adds grazing to the categories of uses subject to the County Department of Agriculture's procedure for suitability review.

Setbacks, if sufficient, and maximum density requirements would ensure that new nonagricultural activities in agricultural areas are found to be appropriate adjacent to agricultural operations. Policy AF-1e and Implementation Measure AF-A, Item 3, provide a mechanism for informing new adjacent property owners that their properties are subject to the Right to Farm Ordinance.

The area occupied by Community Regions and Rural Centers would be smaller and the intensity of development in those urban/suburban areas would be greater, increasing the likelihood that more land in or suitable for agricultural production would remain in rural uses. The protections provided by the Agricultural Lands designation and the applicable policies (especially the suitability review) would ensure that, even in these small areas of potential conflict, agricultural lands would remain in or suitable for agricultural use.

Ministerial projects would still not be affected by the threshold or mitigation established by Policy AF-1f, however, and the large number of uses permitted by right in the County's Zoning Ordinance leads to the likelihood that a substantial amount of unmitigated agricultural conversion would take place outside the bounds of Policy AF-1f.

Policy AF-1a is expanded to include grazing land as a category eligible for designation as Agricultural Land, as well as including sufficient size of the operation and location in Rural Regions as qualifiers for designating Agricultural Land. Policy AF-1b specifically includes grazing land as a category appropriate for the suitability review procedure established by the County Department of Agriculture and conducted by the Agricultural Commission.

A total of 21,689 acres of DOC-designated grazing land are located in areas of medium to high conversion potential. The Environmentally Constrained Alternative designates a larger acreage for agricultural protection (Agricultural Lands, Rural Lands, Natural Resource, Open Space) than the other equal-weight alternatives (Rural Residential or Rural Lands, Natural

Resource, Open Space). The potential for conflict would be reduced because of the stronger policy language with regard to grazing, the increased level of control over development (e.g., more intensive development in urban/suburban areas, less intensive development in rural areas), and the added protection of the Agricultural Lands designation. Greater protection is provided to Williamson Act lands by their assignment to the Agricultural Lands designation rather than simply an overlay designation. Although one residential unit could still be constructed on each parcel, the policies and land use map for this alternative provide a greater incentive for discretionary development, which would likely reduce the amount of ministerial development in rural areas.

Although the Environmentally Constrained Alternative protects land in and suitable for agricultural production better than either the No Project or the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" alternatives, the potential remains for conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses. This impact is considered significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

If the Environmentally Constrained Alternative were to reach full buildout, El Dorado County could have 55,078 new housing units and up to 67,709 more jobs compared to 1999 levels. This represents an increase of 44,709 housing units and 30,434 jobs from 2025. As discussed above, Community Regions and Rural Centers would occupy less acreage under this alternative than under the others—49,723 acres in Community Regions and 6,125 acres in Rural Centers—leaving approximately 1,054,254 acres of land defined as Rural Regions. This shift in the development pattern is also indicated by the fact that 82% of the county would be designated for rural land uses, the highest percentage of any equal-weight alternative. The policies identified for this alternative are intended to focus development primarily in the developed portions of the county and allow rural areas to continue at relatively low development densities. The distribution of development and the potential for residential subdivision would reinforce this pattern, but the increased amount of development that could occur by full buildout would still result in broad dispersal of residential development throughout rural areas.

<u>Important Farmland</u>

Development pressures on Important Farmland could continue to create the potential for land use conflicts, but to a lesser degree than under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. Housing is anticipated to increase countywide by 123% over 2025 levels. In the areas of medium and high conversion potential, housing growth could increase as follows: Market Area 5, 61%; Market Area 6, 191%; Market Area 7, 123%; and Market Area 11, 420%.

Although General Plan policies, including continued implementation of the Right to Farm Ordinance, would protect rural land (and specifically land in or suitable for agricultural production) from encroachment or conversion, the increasing density of residential development could bring more residential uses into closer contact with agricultural operations and result in the conversion of some of this acreage to residential uses.

Land in Agricultural Production

Land use designations for the Environmentally Constrained Alternative would continue to focus residential and commercial development in urban/suburban areas and allow rural areas to remain at relatively lower densities. Implementation Measure AF-E provides for Agricultural Commission review of all discretionary approvals, but no mechanism is provided to ensure compatibility of uses allowed by right in agricultural areas. Implementation of this alternative would encourage Community Regions and Rural Centers to build out at the densities indicated in the land use map. As a result, landowners in the Rural Regions are less likely to have the same level of economic incentive for widespread, low-intensity residential development, although ministerial development would still be permitted and could take place. Activities on land in or suitable for agricultural production could be protected from coming into conflict with more developed adjacent uses, greatly limiting the potential for conversion to nonagricultural uses more appropriate to developed areas. Also, as stated for 2025, the General Plan provides a mechanism for informing new adjacent property owners that their properties are subject to the Right to Farm Ordinance.

Although Policy AF-1f (relating to a threshold of significance for loss of agricultural land) would be more likely to fulfill its intent than under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, ministerial projects still would not be affected, and the large number of uses permitted by right in the County's Zoning Ordinance leads to the likelihood of a substantial amount of unmitigated agricultural conversion taking place outside the bounds of Policy AF-1f.

Grazing Land

Policies AF-1a and AF-1b could protect grazing land at parcel sizes intended to maintain viable operations. Grazing land would be included in the Agricultural Lands designation, providing a higher level of conversion protection. Implementation Measure AF-G, although it requires identification of grazing lands and programs to maintain and protect them, still does not encompass ministerial projects. Thus, some of the 21,689 acres of grazing land in areas of medium and high conversion potential are likely to be converted to residential and other urban/suburban uses.

Williamson Act Contracts

The land use map for this alternative designates 99% of Williamson Act lands in the compatible Agricultural Lands, Natural Resource, and Rural Lands designations. The protections provided and the placement of land use designations under the Environmentally Constrained Alternative ensure that development pressures would not induce substantial conversion of Williamson Act lands.

Overall, the increased intensities and amount of development in all areas that could result at full buildout make it likely that productive agricultural land would continue to be converted to nonagricultural uses. For the reasons described above, this impact is considered significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)

Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative

The relevant goals and policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the 1996 General Plan Alternative are Policies 2.2.1.2, 2.2.2.2, 2.2.2.7, 2.2.5.10, 7.1.1.1, 7.2.1.1 through 7.2.1.3, 7.6.1.1 and 7.6.1.2, 7.6.1.3(A) and 7.6.1.3(B), 8.1.1.1 through 8.1.1.6, 8.1.2.1 and 8.1.2.2, 8.1.3.1 through 8.1.3.5, 8.1.4.1 and 8.1.4.2, 8.1.5.2, 8.2.2.1 through 8.2.2.4 and 8.2.4.1 through 8.2.4.3 (please refer to the No Project Alternative above). In addition, Policy 8.1.5.1 is applicable to this alternative.

1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Development patterns under the 1996 General Plan Alternative would follow the same land use map used for the No Project Alternative. Growth would be the greatest of the four equal-weight alternatives, with an overall increase of 32,491 housing units (72% increase from 1999 levels) and 42,196 jobs (137% increase from 1999 levels). Unlike the No Project Alternative, the 1996 General Plan Alternative allows residential subdivision; however, the ministerial development permitted under the Zoning Ordinance remains broad. Because subdivisions are allowed under this alternative, land use patterns at 2025 may be somewhat less dispersed than under the No Project or Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" alternatives, but the total amount of development countywide would be greater than under any of the other alternatives.

Community Regions would encompass 70,699 acres and Rural Centers 8,469 acres under this alternative, leaving approximately 1,030,935 acres in Rural Regions. Countywide, 15% of the acreage would be designated for developed land uses and 85% would be designated for rural

uses. Although implementation of General Plan policies would allow more intensive development to be focused in urban/suburban areas, the increased amount of development would lead to the likelihood that more intensive uses would still be distributed throughout the county, including both urban/suburban and rural market areas.

The area in agricultural districts for the 1996 General Plan Alternative is 49,460 acres, the same as those for the No Project Alternative (see Table 3-6). The six identified districts have a minimum 20-acre parcel size, except that existing parcels of 10 acres or more may be included. As shown in Table 5.2-5, land uses with medium or high conversion potential are identified on the land use map for 172 acres within these districts, creating the potential for conflicts between existing agricultural operations and other, nonagricultural activities, possibly leading to conversion.

Important Farmland

The protections provided for Important Farmland, based on a review of the land use map for the 1996 General Plan Alternative and the policies identified above, include the establishment of agricultural districts (Policies 2.2.2.2, 8.1.1.1, 8.1.1.2, and 8.1.1.4) that are limited to agricultural and agriculture-related uses and have minimum parcel sizes, implementation and strengthening of the Right to Farm Ordinance (Policies 8.1.3.3, 8.2.2.4), the requirement for setbacks to avoid or reduce the potential for conflicts with nonagricultural land uses (Policy 8.1.3.2), and tax benefits to enhance the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches (Policy 8.2.4.1).

As shown in Exhibit 5.2-1, Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) is widely scattered and, for the most part, consists of small areas surrounded by grazing land or other land suitable for agricultural use. The greatest concentrations of Important Farmland is located near Georgetown and Garden Valley (Market Area 11), Gold Hill (Market Area 5), Camino (Market Area 4), Fairplay and Somerset (Market Area 9), Pleasant Valley (Market Area 7), and the areas surrounding Grizzly Flat and Omo Ranch (Market Area 13). These areas correspond fairly closely with the six agricultural districts described above.

As shown in Table 5.2-5, medium- and high-intensity land uses are designated for 21,954 acres of Important Farmland under the 1996 General Plan Alternative. For the most part, the areas of potential conflict are on soils designated as Farmland of Local Importance. Market Areas 7 and 11 have the greatest areas of conflict, with much of the Important Farmland in these areas being in land use designations with medium or high conversion potential.

Even with the protections provided by these policies, the broadly distributed residential development that would take place under this alternative would create potential conflicts in the rural areas around Cedar Grove/Pollock Pines, Somerset, Pleasant Valley, and Georgetown. In particular, in these areas, some of the county's largest concentrations of Important Farmland are designated Rural Residential but are adjacent to areas designated Medium-Density Residential and Tourist Recreational, producing the potential for conflicts between agricultural and adjacent uses and pressure to use land in or suitable for agricultural production for more intensive uses.

Land in Agricultural Production

Development in El Dorado County with the 1996 General Plan Alternative would be broadly dispersed, as under the No Project Alternative, but at higher densities. The countywide population would increase by 81,241 people over 1999 levels, compared with 53,610 people under the No Project Alternative. Residential subdivision would be permitted, which would allow implementation of General Plan policies such as Policy 8.1.5.1 (clustered development shall be placed to minimize loss of choice agricultural lands). However, a broad range of ministerial development would be permitted with the 1996 General Plan Alternative, facilitating wide dispersal of residential development, both with and without clustering.

New housing units would increase by 72% over 1999 levels, compared with an increase of 48% under the No Project Alternative. Similarly, new jobs would increase by 137% over 1999 levels, compared with an increase of 119% under the No Project Alternative. As can be seen from Table 4-6, the 1996 General Plan Alternative would have the greatest number of new housing units in 2025 and would distribute those units more broadly throughout the county, regardless of the development character of the various market areas. Thus, development pressures and the potential for land use conflicts and conversion of agricultural uses to nonagricultural uses would greatly intensify with the 1996 General Plan Alternative in 2025.

Land use designations for the 1996 General Plan Alternative define Medium-Density Residential as applicable only in Community Regions and Rural Centers, except where existing nonconforming uses fall within the Platted Lands overlay designation in accordance with Policy 2.2.1.3. The Low-Density Residential, Rural Residential, and Natural Resource designations are all defined as being intended for application in Rural Regions. Low-Density Residential, however, is identified as a transitional use between Rural Regions and more intensive development; it is also permitted in Community Regions and Rural Centers without infrastructure to support high-intensity development. This flexibility in the Low- and Medium-Density Residential designations means that uses appropriate for rural designations (including agricultural uses) could be located adjacent to higher density land uses on smaller

parcels that are more appropriate for urban/suburban areas because the land use designations do not preclude such siting. As a result, activities on land in or suitable for agricultural production could be in conflict with more developed uses, leading to the potential for conversion to nonagricultural uses more appropriate to these more developed areas. In addition, the Low-Density Residential designation has a parcel size of one dwelling unit per 5-10 acres; allowing dispersed residential development in agricultural areas at this parcel size has the potential to result in conflicts between residential and agricultural uses.

This alternative contains a wide variety of policies intended to protect land currently in agricultural production from being converted to nonagricultural uses or being removed from production because of conflicts with adjoining nonagricultural land uses. These include policies that address buffers between agricultural and other uses, allowable uses in agricultural areas, and the role of the Agricultural Commission in determining what is and is not a compatible use.

The County's Right to Farm Ordinance protects active agricultural operations from conflicts with adjacent land uses (e.g., noise, nuisance, dust) regardless of whether they are in a designated agricultural district. Policy 8.1.3.3 would strengthen the protections afforded by the Right to Farm Ordinance by requiring landowners of new adjacent parcels to accept a deed restriction to this effect. The protections of the ordinance are limited, however, with regard to topics such as pesticide use; state law requires that, to the extent allowed by law, farmers must modify their pesticide use practices near sensitive uses such as residential areas. Although the Right to Farm Ordinance asserts the continued right of farmers to actively pursue agricultural operations on their property, the encroachment of sensitive uses would limit or change their ability to pursue standard agricultural practices.

As shown in Table 5.2-5, this alternative designates 104,149 acres of agricultural land with medium- or high-intensity land uses. As shown in Table 5.2-3, the market areas with the greatest acreages of active cropland are Market Areas 4-7 and 9. The land use map shows that, for the most part, designated land uses correlate well with land in agricultural production. Market Areas 5, 6, 7, and 9 have approximately 50% or more rural land uses; Market Area 4 has 33% rural uses. Although Market Area 4 includes only 6,468 acres of cropland (33% of the market area acreage), this includes Apple Hill, with some of the county's most active agricultural production.

The General Plan requires that the Agricultural Commission review requested rezones of discretionary development applications that would affect parcels of agricultural land on choice agricultural soils (Policies 8.1.1.5 and 8.1.3.5) and that the Agricultural Commission determine, for any agricultural parcels of 10 or more acres, whether a discretionary permit would

diminish or impair existing or potential agricultural use. The Board of Supervisors or other approving authority is required to make findings regarding the compatibility of agricultural district or Williamson Act lands and adjacent lands under review for discretionary projects (Policy 8.1.4.1). However, Policy 8.1.1.5 allows the Board of Supervisors to determine that agriculturally zoned land can be used for nonagricultural development, and Policy 8.1.4.1 is limited to discretionary projects, leaving agricultural lands susceptible to conversion or encroachment by conflicting or incompatible land uses.

Policy 8.1.3.4 requires the County to establish a threshold of significance for the conversion of agricultural land. No requirement is included in this policy, however, for mitigation to be identified that would compensate for the loss of agricultural land. The establishment of a threshold of significance alone would not prevent or protect against the conversion of land from agricultural to nonagricultural uses. Setting an acreage threshold below which the conversion of agricultural land would be acceptable would indirectly contribute to the conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses by allowing conversion without mitigation below that threshold. Because the basis of the threshold is not described and no mitigation is identified in the policy, the potential exists for this type of indirect conversion.

Planning Department and Agricultural Commission review are required before permits can be granted for discretionary projects in agricultural areas. However, many uses are permitted by right in the County Zoning Ordinance in agricultural zoning districts, and some of these uses could conflict with or detract from the preferred agricultural uses of the land. Land uses that have medium or high potential to cause conversion and that are identified as being permitted in agricultural production areas include agricultural support uses, visitor-serving uses, ranch marketing and winery uses, and mining and water projects. As described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing, the current system of uses permitted by right would allow most vacant parcels in the county to be developed without any type of consistency review. Although this broad dispersal of development is less likely to occur with the 1996 General Plan Alternative because subdivision is permitted, the availability of this process undercuts the ability of the General Plan to provide protection against the establishment of land uses that have medium to high conversion potential.

Grazing Lands

Although subdivision would be allowed under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, the increased amount of development in El Dorado County would lead to residential uses widely spread throughout the county. Policies are proposed to establish an Agricultural Commission suitability review for discretionary nonagricultural projects in agricultural areas. The flexibility provided in the definitions of land use designations would undercut the usefulness of this

review, however, because many uses considered appropriate for the land use designation would present the potential for conflicts with agricultural operations.

Because cattle and horses require large areas of grazing land to sustain viable agricultural operations, grazing lands are particularly susceptible to fragmentation and land use conflicts that could make continued operations difficult to maintain. Where grazing land remains in large, contiguous areas (e.g., Market Area 8), the potential exists for subdivision of these parcels to reduce the viability of grazing operations. Thus, because of development pressures, the potential for land use conflicts, and conversion of grazing lands to nonagricultural uses, the potential for reduced viability of grazing operations would greatly intensify under this alternative in 2025. However, Policy 8.1.3.1 requires that agriculturally zoned lands be buffered from increases in density on adjacent land by requiring a minimum 10-acre parcel on the adjacent lands. This would buffer grazing lands but would not eliminate the potential for livestock harassment.

Several areas of El Dorado County contain large concentrations of grazing land as defined by the DOC:

- the area from Diamond Springs south on SR 49 (Market Area 3);
- Pleasant Valley and the surrounding area (Market Area 7);
- Cool/Pilot Hill area and the area, particularly north of SR 193 between Cool and Greenwood (Market Area 10);
- the Cosumnes River watershed area (Market Area 13), especially in the southwestern portion and around Grizzly Flat; and
- Mosquito and the surrounding area (Market Area 14).

In these areas, soils identified by the DOC as suitable for grazing lands are designated on the land use map as Natural Resource, which is intended to protect these areas for viable grazing operations. Some areas are in the Rural Residential designation, which is also considered acceptable for grazing, although some potential exists for fragmentation of viable grazing operations because the allowable parcel size is 10-160 acres. Table 5.2-5 shows that, under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, 40,783 acres of DOC-designated grazing land are in General Plan land use designations with medium to high conversion potential. In areas between Cool and Greenwood and north of SR 193 (Market Area 10), around Grizzly Flat (Market Area 13), and near Mosquito (Market Area 14), soils classified by the DOC as grazing land have been designated as Medium-Density Residential, which allows parcel sizes of 1 acre per dwelling

unit that are intended for "limited agricultural land management." These areas have clear potential for conflict or conversion to higher intensity land uses.

General Plan Policy 8.1.2.1 requires the Agricultural Commission to identify lands suitable for grazing. This policy is an important step in establishing protection for viable areas of grazing land and to prevent fragmentation of the large expanses required. This identification process, the 40-acre minimum parcel size (Policy 8.1.2.2), and the adjacent 10-acre minimum parcel size (Policy 8.1.3.1) enable, but do not require, the County to preserve viable parcels of grazing land. The Board of Supervisors, as with land in agricultural use, has the ability to allow nonagricultural use of agricultural land, regardless of the recommendation provided by the Agricultural Commission following review of a discretionary project.

Williamson Act Contracts

Policies have been provided in the 1996 General Plan Alternative to protect Williamson Act lands in El Dorado County from encroachment by or conflict with nonagricultural land uses. With this alternative, 4,582 acres of Williamson Act land (more than 10% of the countywide total) are located in land use designations with medium or high conversion potential (Table 5.2-5). The greater amount intensive level of development that would take place under the 1996 General Plan Alternative would create potential conflicts in the Coloma/Gold Hill and Placerville/Camino areas, where high concentrations of Williamson Act lands are appropriately designated Rural Residential but would be immediately adjacent to areas designated Medium-Density Residential and Tourist Residential. These higher intensity designations have medium to high conversion potential, which could lead to contract nonrenewal as conflicts with adjacent lands make agricultural operations more difficult to maintain.

Under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, land use designations suitable for or compatible with lands under Williamson Act contract are Rural Residential and Natural Resource. The Agricultural District overlay designation, which can be applied to either of these designations, is intended primarily to protect agricultural lands on Important Farmland and under Williamson Act contract. Special requirements and benefits apply to lands under Williamson Act contract that are located in agricultural districts. Only those Williamson Act lands in agricultural districts are permitted by right to have ranch marketing activities. Elsewhere, Williamson Act landowners must obtain a permit to engage in ranch marketing activities.

The areas of greatest concentration of Williamson Act contract lands are primarily in Market Areas 3, 8, 9, 10, and 11 (Exhibit 5.2-2). The land use map depicts several areas where conflicts could occur between agricultural district lands and other, more intensively developed uses (Table 5.2-6).

Summary

Important Farmland is protected by the establishment of agricultural districts, minimum parcel sizes, setbacks, and enhancement of the Right to Farm Ordinance; however, 21,954 acres of Farmland of Local Importance are designated on the land use map for uses with medium or high conversion potential. The greatest concentrations of Important Farmland are in Market Areas 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13.

Land in agricultural production is protected overall by the Right to Farm Ordinance and policies enhancing it, although this protection is limited by state law and the broad range, under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, of potential ministerial residential development. Areas with large amounts of acreage in active crop production include Market Area 4, which is estimated to grow tremendously by 2025; Market Area 9, which is primarily rural; and Market Area 5, which is evenly divided between developed and rural uses.

Grazing lands are protected by a policy requiring 40-acre minimum parcel size as being suitable for this land use. Potential conflict areas are identified in Market Areas 10, 13, and 14 where DOC-designated grazing lands are identified for medium-density residential development on the land use map. A total of 40,783 acres of land suitable for grazing are designated in the 1996 General Plan Alternative for land uses with high conversion potential. Although the Agricultural Commission is required to identify lands suitable for grazing, the Board of Supervisors may, in reviewing individual projects, allow nonagricultural use of these lands.

Much of the land under Williamson Act contract in the county is protected by the Agricultural District overlay designation, which provides additional benefits to landowners and protects these lands from conflicts with adjacent land uses. The land use map identifies 4,582 acres of Williamson Act land in designations with high conversion potential, which could encourage landowners to file for nonrenewal.

Overall, 104,149 acres of land in or suitable for agricultural production has the potential to be converted to nonagricultural land uses under the 1996 General Plan Alternative. The primary areas of impact are Market Areas 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9. Although this alternative includes a policy to identify a threshold of significance for conversion of agricultural land, no threshold has been identified and the potential exists for such a threshold to contribute to, rather than prevent, conversion. In addition, no mitigation has been identified in the policy to ensure that agricultural conversion would be reduced to a less-than-significant level. For the reasons identified, this impact is considered significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

At full buildout development pressure could continue to create the potential for conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses. Countywide, 44,708 additional residential units could be built after 2025, for a total of 78,692 new units. Subdivision would be allowed in accordance with land use designations, allowing implementation of General Plan policies that focus more intensive residential and commercial development in Community Regions and Rural Centers while protecting Rural Regions for less intensive, rural uses. It is assumed at buildout that all land use designations would be fully built out at their maximum density. Consequently there would be a large amount of subdivision and ministerial development would take place in the Rural Regions as urban/suburban areas become built out. For this reason, residential development would disperse broadly throughout the county as this alternative approaches buildout.

Land in Agricultural Production

Housing could increase by 78,692 units from 1999 levels by full buildout; as property in urban/suburban areas becomes fully developed at the levels permitted with this alternative, more intensive residential development could become broadly dispersed in many areas that are predominantly agricultural. As a result, the likelihood of conflicts or conversion could increase as available acreage in these areas becomes scarcer and the density of residential development increases in rural areas that were formerly rural agricultural property. Even with the policies identified for the 1996 General Plan Alternative, the potential for conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural land uses could be greater at buildout than in 2025.

Grazing Land

As described above for land in agricultural production, the impact of the 1996 General Plan Alternative on conversion of grazing land to nonagricultural uses and the reduction of viable grazing operations would be more intensive than that discussed for 2025. Minimum 40-acre parcel sizes in grazing areas could preserve viable operations in areas designated by the County as suitable for grazing, but the encroachment of residential development throughout rural areas could greatly increase conflicts with adjacent uses.

Williamson Act Contract

Intensive development pressures could continue to create the potential for conflicts with agricultural uses at buildout. The areas of greatest concentration of Williamson Act contract lands are primarily in Market Areas 3, 8, 9, 10, and 11 (Exhibit 5.2-2), and much of the

Farmland of Local Importance that is located in designations with medium or high conversion potential is Williamson Act land. In the rural areas around Cedar Grove/Pollock Pines, Somerset, Pleasant Valley, and Georgetown, increasing population and employment densities could result in more intensive development moving outward from rural centers into rural regions. This dispersal of development could present pressures for the nonrenewal of surrounding Williamson Act lands as surrounding land uses present greater potential for conflicts with viable agricultural operations and land for residential development becomes scarcer. For these reasons, this impact is considered significant.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1—No Project Alternative

The County shall implement all of the following measures:

- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(b): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(b)
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(c): Identify Acceptable Mitigation for Loss of Agricultural Land
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d): Provide Additional Protection of Agricultural Use
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e): Provide Adequate Agricultural Setbacks
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f): Require Agricultural Fencing on Adjacent Residential Property

These potential mitigation measures are described below. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced but not to a less-than-significant level because conversion of lands from agriculture to other uses would occur and the total acreage of available agricultural land would be reduced. This impact is significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)

The County shall implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a) described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(b): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(b)

The County shall implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(b) described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(c): Identify Acceptable Mitigation for Loss of Agricultural Land

The County shall revise Policy 8.1.3.4 as follows to identify mitigation that would meet the policy's intent of ensuring that projects do not exceed the threshold.

> **Revised Policy 8.1.3.4:** A threshold of significance for loss of agricultural land shall be established by the Agriculture Department and the Planning Department, to be used in rezone applications requesting conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural lands, based on the ~~land evaluation and land assessment~~ California LESA model ~~system (as it currently exists) to be developed by the State~~. For projects found to have a significant impact, mitigation shall include 1:1 replacement or conservation for loss of agricultural land in active production and/or 1:1 replacement or conservation for land identified as suitable for agricultural production. A monitoring program should be established to be overseen by the Agricultural Department.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d): Provide Additional Protection of Agricultural Use

> **Revised Policy 8.1.3.2:** Agriculturally incompatible uses adjacent to agricultural zoned lands within designated agricultural districts shall provide a minimum setback of 200 feet from the boundary of the agriculturally zoned lands.
>
> Agriculturally incompatible uses adjacent to agriculturally zoned land outside of designated Agricultural Districts shall provide a minimum setback of 200 feet on parcels 10 acres or larger.
>
> The County shall impose larger than 200-foot setbacks where needed to protect agricultural resources. Administrative relief to these setbacks may be granted ~~by the County Planning Director, where appropriate~~ when reasonable use of the property would otherwise be denied.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e): Provide Adequate Agricultural Setbacks

> **New Policy.** New parcels adjacent to parcels zoned for agriculture shall not be created unless the size of the parcel is large enough to allow for an adequate setback from the surrounding agricultural parcels for any incompatible uses.

The foregoing measure recognizes that setbacks of at least 200 feet are generally considered the minimum needed to create a buffer between agricultural uses and uses that could conflict with agriculture. In addition, in some cases a 200-foot setback may not be sufficient to create

an adequate buffer. The size of the buffer needed in a particular case is highly dependent on the type of agricultural practice, use of pesticides and how they are applied, frequency of machinery use, and other factors; in some cases, buffers of as large as 500 feet may be needed, depending on the pesticide being used on the surrounding agricultural parcels (Great Valley Center 2002). The appropriate minimum parcel size for lands adjoining agricultural lands will depend on the nature of the adjoining use and the physical characteristics of the parcel. For example, a 5-acre parcel, if perfectly square, would be 467 feet x 467 feet, a house in the center of such parcel would be approximately 200 feet from each edge. This leaves little room to account for siting constraints, particularly if the parcel is surrounded by agricultural uses. One option considered was to require a larger minimum parcel size adjoining agricultural lands. Establishing an absolute size, however, would not necessarily avoid incompatibility problems unless established in light of the circumstances of the particular property. The foregoing mitigation would require that parcels be sized to allow sufficient buffers.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f): Require Agricultural Fencing on Adjacent Residential Property

> **New Policy:** Residential uses that are established adjoining grazing land shall have agricultural fencing per County Standards.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f) would reduce the potential for livestock harassment. However, this mitigation measure would likely cause substantial secondary impacts by also constructing barriers to wildlife movement. This measure could also cause additional wildlife habitat fragmentation. This secondary impact would be significant.

As stated in the introduction to these mitigation measures, the impacts would be reduced, but not to less than significant. Conversion of land from agriculture to other uses would still occur, and even the establishment of 1:1 easements means that agricultural acreage will be lost. Therefore, this impact is significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

The County shall implement all of the following measures:

- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(b): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(b)
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(c): Identify Acceptable Mitigation for Loss of Agricultural Land

- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d) of the No Project Alternative
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e) of the No Project Alternative
- Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f) of the No Project Alternative

These potential mitigation measures are described below. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced, but not to a less-than-significant level for the same reasons described under No Project Alternative above. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.1-2(a) for the No Project Alternative above.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(b): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(b)

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.1-2(b) for the No Project Alternative above.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(c): Identify Acceptable Mitigation for Loss of Agricultural Land

The County shall revise Implementation Measure AF-F of the Agriculture and Forestry Element of the General Plan as follows:

> **Revised Measure AF-F:** Establish a threshold of significance for the loss of agricultural land, a procedure for evaluating a project's contribution to the loss, and means to mitigate losses so that the established threshold is not exceeded. Mitigation shall include 1:1 replacement or conservation for loss of agricultural land in active production and/or replacement or conservation for land identified as suitable for agricultural production.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d)

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(d) for the No Project Alternative above.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e)

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(e) for the No Project Alternative above.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f)

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.2-1(f) for the No Project Alternative above.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

Refer to the proposed mitigation measures for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative above. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced, but not to a less-than-significant level for the same reasons described under No Project Alternative above. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-1—1996 General Plan Alternative

Refer to the proposed mitigation measures for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced, but not to a less-than-significant level for the same reasons described under No Project Alternative above. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact **5.2-2**

Potential for Ranch Marketing, Winery, and Visitor-Serving Activities to Remove Substantial Areas of Agricultural Land from Production. Ranch marketing, winery, and visitor-serving activities are permitted by right in agricultural areas. Although these activities are considered compatible with agricultural activities and are permitted to take place in conjunction with related agricultural operations, they may create conflicts with adjacent or nearby agriculture uses, ranging from nuisance, littering, and trespass to traffic congestion. The lack of restrictions on the relative area that can be occupied by ranch marketing activities and accessory uses presents the possibility that substantial acreage of agricultural land could be removed from production. This impact is considered **significant** for all four equal-weight alternatives. The severity of this impact would be roughly similar under all four equal-weight alternatives. Impact significance before and after mitigation is shown in the table below.

Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.2-2: Potential for Ranch Marketing, Winery, and Visitor-Serving Activities to Remove Substantial Areas of Agricultural Land from Production	S_1	S_1	S_1	S_1	S_1	S_1	S_1	S_1
Mitigation	**Significance After Mitigation***							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.2-2: Limit Extent of Ranch Marketing Activities, Wineries, and Other Nonagricultural Uses within Agricultural Designations	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS

* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.

No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)

Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative

The relevant policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.2.5.10, 8.1.3.5, and 8.2.2.1(E) and 8.2.2.1(F).

No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

As described for Impact 5.2-1, the No Project Alternative contains a wide variety of policies intended to protect land currently in agricultural production from being converted to nonagricultural uses or being removed from production because of conflicts with adjoining nonagricultural land uses. These include policies that address buffers between agricultural and other uses, allowable uses in agricultural areas, the role of the Agricultural Commission in determining what is and is not a compatible use, and other means of preserving agricultural land for production.

Policies applicable to agricultural operations would still apply under the No Project Alternative in some cases because they address discretionary projects or commercial activities. Policy 2.2.5.10 identifies agricultural support uses that are allowed by right in agricultural areas because they are considered to be consistent with agricultural activities. According to this policy, these uses include:

> processing and/or sale of agricultural products, the sale of handicrafts or goods, picnic areas, and any other use allowed by right as specified in the Zoning Ordinance ('Ranch Marketing Ordinance') provided that these activities are conducted on a site with a bona fide agricultural operation.

Policy 8.1.3.5 requires a compatibility review by the Agricultural Commission for any discretionary permit on a parcel with existing or potential agricultural use. This policy does not address ranch marketing, winery, or visitor-serving uses and, because these uses are permitted by right, no such review would be required for these activities under the General Plan.

Policies 8.2.2.1(E) and 8.2.2.1(F) allow for ranch marketing and visitor-serving activities in agricultural areas. According to the Ranch Marketing Ordinance (County Code §17.14.180), ranch marketing activities are permitted by right in SA-10, PA, and AE zones on parcels of 10 acres or more where 5 acres are in permanent crop production or where 10 acres are in annual crop production. In addition, the Ranch Marketing Ordinance (County Code §17.14.180) and Wineries Ordinance (County Code §17.14.190) identify various land uses that require site plan review or a special use permit in agricultural areas. No minimum parcel size is required for visitor-serving uses. Under the Wineries Ordinance (County Code §17.14.200), minimum parcel size is 20 acres and at least 5 acres must be planted in wine grapes for commercial production.

These restrictions impose minimum limits on the agricultural acreage required for these uses; however, they do not identify the minimum proportion of the land that must be used for agricultural purposes or limit the total acreage that could be devoted to ranch marketing activities. To qualify for ranch marketing activities, an owner must show only that 5 acres of the parcel are in agricultural production, no matter how large the parcel is. A 100-acre parcel could have only 5 acres in agriculture and have unlimited coverage for ranch marketing activities such as pony rides and corn mazes. Therefore, these policies present the possibility that substantial acreage of agricultural land could be removed from production and used instead for agricultural promotional uses.

Ranch marketing and winery development and visitor-serving uses play an important role in maintaining the viability of the county's agricultural economy and continued production of the County's Important Farmlands. However, without limits on their relative size, these types of agricultural promotional uses could expand to a degree that would effectively take agricultural land out of crop production, either directly as a result of their use for ranch marketing activities or indirectly because of conflicts with adjacent or nearby agricultural uses. Ranch marketing and winery activities and visitor-serving uses could lead to conflicts ranging from nuisance, littering, and trespass to traffic congestion on rural roadways. In some instances, noise and agricultural management practices that are expected and usual elements of an economically viable agricultural operation could be seen as nuisances to adjacent ranch marketing operations because of real or perceived conflicts with the tourist recreational nature of these operations, even though the Right to Farm Ordinance protects these agricultural production uses.

For the reasons described above, this impact is considered significant.

No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

If this alternative were to become fully built out, use of agricultural land for ranch marketing, winery, and visitor-serving uses could continue to create to the intensified level of encroachment on productive agricultural land that would result from the lack of development controls or guiding policies at 2025. For the reasons described for this alternative at 2025, this impact is considered significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Alternative #2)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

No policies are applicable.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

General Plan policies identified for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative provide no additional benefits or enhancements to ranch marketing, wineries and associated activities, visitor-serving uses, or other commercial activities in agricultural areas. The setbacks and densities that would be established for each land use in the Zoning Ordinance (including the Ranch Marketing and Wineries ordinances) would be reinforced by the suitability review performed by the Agricultural Commission for discretionary nonagricultural uses adjacent to an agricultural use. These protections are intended to ensure that accessory activities in

agricultural areas would be established as secondary land uses to the primary agricultural use of the land. However, because no policies directly address these uses and they are permitted by right in agricultural zoning districts, no suitability review would be conducted.

According to the Ranch Marketing Ordinance (County Code §17.14.180), ranch marketing activities are permitted by right in SA-10, PA, and AE zones on parcels of 10 acres or more where 5 acres are in permanent crop production or where 10 acres are in annual crop production. In addition, the Ranch Marketing Ordinance (County Code §17.14.180) and Wineries Ordinance (County Code §17.14.190) identify various land uses that require site plan review or a special use permit in agricultural areas. No minimum parcel size is required for visitor-serving uses. Under the Wineries Ordinance (County Code §17.14.200), minimum parcel size is 20 acres and at least 5 acres must be planted in wine grapes for commercial production.

As described for the No Project Alternative, the Ranch Marketing Ordinance identifies minimum parcel size and minimum acreages that must be in agricultural production for a parcel to qualify for these uses. These restrictions do not identify the minimum proportion of the land that must be used for agricultural purposes. To qualify for ranch marketing activities, an owner must show only that 5 acres of the parcel are in agricultural production, no matter how large the parcel. Therefore, these standards present the possibility that substantial acreage of agricultural land could be removed from production and used instead for agricultural promotional uses. This impact is considered significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

As stated for 2025, this alternative has no specific policies addressing ranch marketing, winery, and visitor-serving uses, but the compatibility review and setback requirements established in the General Plan policies could provide some assurance that accessory activities in agricultural areas could be established as secondary land uses to the agricultural use of the land. However, parcel size and acreage restrictions identified in the Ranch Marketing Ordinance would not prevent the removal of substantial amounts of agricultural land for accessory uses. This impact is considered significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

No policies are applicable.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Under this alternative, ranch marketing, winery, and visitor-serving activities would present the same potential for removal of agricultural land from production as identified for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. Although residential and commercial development with this alternative would be focused in Community Regions and Rural Centers, this would not change the impact regarding agricultural land for accessory uses. As described for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, this impact is considered significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

Development at buildout under this alternative is expected to be focused in urban/suburban areas more effectively than under the other equal-weight alternatives. This would not change the impact regarding agricultural land for accessory uses, however. As stated for 2025, this impact would be similar to that described for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. This impact is considered significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)

Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative

For the relevant policies of the 1996 General Plan Alternative, please refer to the policies listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative.

1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

The development pattern identified for this alternative is more intensive and more broadly distributed than the pattern for any of the other equal-weight alternatives. The identified policies would apply to agricultural projects, although ranch marketing, winery, and visitor-serving uses are permitted by right in agricultural areas. This impact is similar to that described for the No Project Alternative. For the reasons described above, this impact is considered significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

Development at buildout under this alternative is expected to be even more broadly distributed throughout urban/suburban and rural areas of the county than under the other equal-weight alternatives. This would not change the impact regarding agricultural land for

accessory uses, however. As stated for 2025, this impact would be similar to that described for the No Project Alternative. This impact is considered significant.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-2: Limit Extent of Ranch Marketing Activities, Wineries, and Other Agricultural Promotional Uses within Agricultural Designations and Require Compatibility Review

Mitigation Measure—No Project Alternative

The County shall revise the Agriculture and Forestry Element of the General Plan to include the following new policy:

> **New Policy:** Ranch marketing, winery, and visitor-serving uses (agricultural promotional uses) are permitted on agricultural parcels, subject to a compatibility review to ensure that the establishment of the use will have no significant adverse effect on agricultural production on surrounding properties. Such ranch marketing uses must be on parcels of 10 acres or more; the parcel must have a minimum of 5 acres of permanent agricultural crop in production or 10 acres of annual crop in production that are properly maintained. These uses cannot occupy more than 5 acres or 50% of the parcel, whichever is less.

With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because the amount of agricultural land converted to ranch marketing uses would be limited.

Mitigation Measure—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measure for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because the amount of agricultural land converted to ranch marketing uses would be limited.

Mitigation Measure—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measure for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because the amount of agricultural land converted to ranch marketing uses would be limited.

Mitigation Measure—1996 General Plan Alternative

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measure for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because the amount of agricultural land converted to ranch marketing uses would be limited.

Impact 5.2-3

Inconsistent Level of Protection for Agricultural Operations based on Location in Identified Agricultural Areas. Protections are provided to agricultural lands under the No Project, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus," and 1996 General Plan alternatives by the use of an Agricultural District overlay designation. The Environmentally Constrained Alternative uses an Agricultural Land designation to provide similar, but stronger, protection by eliminating the need to coordinate between a base land use designation and an overlay designation, thereby eliminating this source of conflict. The inconsistencies created by the overlapping designations for three alternatives include higher levels of protection for agricultural operations and more restrictive conditions on residential uses within agricultural districts, as well as less protection for agricultural operations outside districts. The conflicts between broadly dispersed residential development and undesignated, unprotected agricultural land with the No Project, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus," and 1996 General Plan alternatives would lead to direct and indirect conversion of agricultural land. This impact is considered **significant** for the No Project, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus," and 1996 General Plan alternatives and **less than significant** for the Environmentally Constrained Alternative. The severity of this impact would be greatest under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, followed by the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" and No Project alternatives. Impact significance before and after mitigation is shown in the table below.

Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.2-3: Inconsistent Level of Protection for Agricultural Operations based on Location in Identified Agricultural Areas	S_3	S_3	S_2	S_2	LS	LS	S_1	S_1
Mitigation	**Significance After Mitigation***							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.2-3: Incorporate Productive and Suitable Agricultural Land into Agricultural Districts	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS

* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.

No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)

Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative

The relevant policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.2.2.2, 8.1.1.1 through 8.1.1.4, and 8.1.3.2.

No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

The purpose of the six agricultural districts identified in El Dorado County is to provide orderly development of the most suitable land for agriculture, which includes having sufficient space, hydrology, and soil conditions. Through parcel size requirements and strategic location on suitable agricultural land, establishment of agricultural districts has provided a way to preserve and enhance the economic viability of the county's agricultural lands, as well as protect land from encroaching uses that are incompatible (El Dorado County Planning Department 2001). Uses permitted on these lands include raising and grazing of livestock,

growing of crops (including timber), and packaging and sale of agricultural products. Under the No Project Alternative, 49,460 acres of land in the county would be included in agricultural districts (Table 3-6).

All parcels within an agricultural district must be a minimum of 20 acres in size, regardless of the zoning, and no further subdivision is permitted for 20-acre parcels. Agricultural district parcels of less than 20 acres that were established before the implementation of the requirements are permitted to contain one single-family detached dwelling that may include a guest house, second dwelling unit, and other accessory structures, such as a garage or swimming pool.

Agricultural districts provide a high level of protection for agricultural operations located within their boundaries. For this reason, farmers may request that their property be rezoned to fall within an agricultural district, subject to a compatibility review by the Agricultural Commission, but only if the lands are adjacent to an existing agricultural district. The Right to Farm, Ranch Marketing, and Wineries Ordinances all apply to land in agricultural districts; certain ranch marketing activities are permitted by right in these districts.

Residential properties within these districts, however, are heavily restricted. Policy 8.1.3.2 requires 200-foot setbacks from adjacent agricultural uses. Policy 2.2.2.2 requires minimum parcel sizes of 20 acres for residential development and 10 acres for planned residential development on lands found to be unsuitable for agriculture. Clustered residential developments on lands determined to be non-choice soils may be permitted but the minimum parcel size is 5 acres, and the minimum density is 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres. While these restrictions are generally protective of agriculture, they may not be fully protective under some circumstances. In these cases the Right-to-Farm Ordinance fills the gap in protection.

Conversely, agricultural operations outside these districts are not protected as strongly from encroachment or conflict with adjacent nonagricultural uses. Ranch marketing activities require a special use permit and minimum parcel size and setback buffers are reduced.

The designation of an Agricultural District overlay zone introduces a potential inconsistency into the land use pattern for the No Project Alternative. Lands included in the overlay zone are, first and foremost, identified with a base land use designation that may or may not be entirely compatible with agricultural production. Table 5.2-5 shows that, under this alternative, 172 acres of land are designated in agricultural districts but also in high-intensity land use designations.

The protections afforded by the establishment and designation of agricultural districts contribute to the continued maintenance, enhancement, and expansion of agricultural operations in these areas. At the same time, the lower level of protection afforded to agricultural operations in other areas may contribute to conflicts between these operations and adjacent nonagricultural activities. Landowners outside these districts may have more difficulties in continuing or initiating agricultural operations. With the development pattern identified for the No Project Alternative, which involves broadly distributed residential development throughout rural areas of the county, this lack of protection could lead indirectly to the removal of this land from agricultural production. This impact is considered significant.

No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

At buildout, the potential for conflicts between residential and agricultural uses within and outside of agricultural districts could intensify as development increases and available land becomes more scarce. As described for 2025, this impact is considered significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Alternative #2)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative are Policies AF-1a, AF-1b and AF-1e, and Implementation Measure AF-B.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

This alternative would include 49,771 acres of land in agricultural districts. These districts are similar to those described for the No Project Alternative in purpose and definition. However, Policy AF-1e extends the protections of the Right to Farm Ordinance to all agricultural lands, rather than restricting it to those in agricultural districts.

As described above, lands included in the overlay zone are, first and foremost, identified with a base land use designation that may or may not be entirely compatible with agricultural production. Table 5.2-5 shows that, under this alternative, 287 acres of land are designated in agricultural districts but also in high-intensity land use designations.

Development under this alternative would be distributed broadly throughout the county and at higher densities than those identified for the No Project Alternative. The conflicts and inconsistencies described above would also apply to this alternative for the most part. For the reasons described for the No Project Alternative, this impact is considered significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

At buildout, the potential for conflicts between residential and agricultural uses within and outside of agricultural districts could intensify as development increases and available land becomes more scarce. As described for 2025, this impact is considered significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Environmentally Constrained Alternative are Policies AF-1a, AF-1b, AF-1e, AF-1g, and Implementation Measure AF-B (please refer to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative above). In addition, Policy AF-1g is applicable to this alternative.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Under this alternative, the Agricultural District overlay designation has been eliminated and an Agricultural Land (A) designation has been added. This change provides a greater level of protection for agricultural lands in the county because the designation protects and preserves high-quality agricultural lands in or suitable for agricultural operations without the need to coordinate with an underlying land use designation that allows conflicting land uses within the same area. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that the No Project (and 1996 General Plan) Alternative has 172 acres of Agricultural District land designated for land uses with high conversion potential; the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative has 287 acres of such land. The Environmentally Constrained Alternative, by virtue of using a base land use designation to protect agricultural land, has no land with such conflicts.

The Agricultural Land designation encompasses a broader range of lands than the Agricultural District overlay. The Agricultural Land designation also includes grazing lands by definition, incorporating a larger portion of the agricultural land in the county. As a result, the total area designated Agricultural Land is 59,363 acres, compared to an Agricultural District overlay designation of 49,460 acres under the No Project and 1996 General Plan alternatives and 49,771 acres under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" alternative.

Although growth in the county would be greater under the Environmentally Constrained Alternative than under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, the substitution of the Agricultural Lands designation for the Agricultural District overlay and the expanded area it covers would reduce the potential for conversion of Important Farmland to nonagricultural

uses, both in the county as a whole and in the areas of concern identified above. This impact is considered less than significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

At buildout, the protection afforded to agricultural land by the use of a base land use designation rather than an overlay designation could be enhanced because of the greater intensity of developed land uses throughout the county. This impact is considered less than significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)

Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative

For the relevant policies of the 1996 General Plan Alternative, please refer to the policies listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative.

1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

The 1996 General Plan Alternative takes the same approach to land use protection for agricultural land as described for the No Project Alternative. Although the development pattern would differ and development intensities would be greater, the protections and conflicts remain similar. The conflict between broadly dispersed residential development and unprotected, undesignated agricultural land would be more severe under this alternative than under the other equal-weight alternatives. This impact is considered significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

At buildout, the potential for conflicts between residential and agricultural uses within and outside of agricultural districts could intensify as development increases and available land becomes more scarce. The conflict between broadly dispersed residential development and unprotected, undesignated agricultural land is expected to be more severe under this alternative than under the other equal-weight alternatives. As described for 2025, this impact is considered significant.

Mitigation Measure 5.2-3: Incorporate Productive and Suitable Agricultural Land into Agricultural Districts

Mitigation Measure—No Project Alternative

The County shall revise the Agriculture and Forestry Element of the General Plan to include the following new policy:

> **New Policy:** All agricultural lands in active production or determined by the Agricultural Commission to be suitable for production shall be incorporated into an Agricultural District following suitability review.

With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because all productive agricultural lands would be afforded an equal level of protection.

Mitigation Measure—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measure for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because all productive agricultural lands would be afforded an equal level of protection.

Mitigation Measure—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

No mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measure—1996 General Plan Alternative

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measure for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because all productive agricultural lands would be afforded an equal level of protection.

5.2.2 FOREST RESOURCES

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Physical Environment

For many years, the lifestyle and economy of El Dorado County have been closely linked to the presence of large amounts of forestland. Forest resource management and production (collectively referred to as forestry) include various aspects, from management of the plant and wildlife habitat that comprise the forests to harvesting of timber and production and use of wood and fiber products. Approximately 864,000 acres of the county are covered with forestland (defined as land containing at least 10% live trees or land that previously had this minimum coverage and that is not presently developed for nonforest uses). (Shih 1998.)

In El Dorado County, woodlands are defined as forestlands dominated by hardwood species (e.g., California black oak, canyon live oak, interior live oak) and that are not primarily used for commercial purposes. These noncommercial forested lands (e.g., blue oak woodlands, riparian canyons, subalpine forests) are valued primarily for the environmental benefits they provide, such as watershed protection, recreation, and wildlife habitat. For this reason, woodlands are treated primarily as a biological resource issue and are addressed in Section 5.12, Biological Resources.

Timberlands are generally defined as lands capable of growing 20 cubic feet per year per acre of harvestable wood (Shih 1998). This definition applies to approximately 636,000 acres of forestland, or about 75% of the total forestland in the county. The remaining 25% are woodlands (discussed in Section 5.12, Biological Resources). Of the timberland acreage, 377,000 acres (about 59%) are National Forest acreage, 120,000 acres (about 19%) are owned by the timber industry, other private landowners control 131,000 acres (about 21%), and other public agencies own 8,000 acres (about 1%) (Shih, pers. comm., 2002).

The recent population growth in northern California and the resulting need for additional housing have created a higher demand for forest products and increased pressure on timberlands to continue or expand timber production. At the same time, the government and residents of El Dorado County have identified a desire to protect forested areas that provide environmental benefits and contribute to the county's rural lifestyle. Timber production practices can generate land use conflicts, be incompatible with adjacent residential development, and affect air and water quality and wildlife habitat. Conversely, urbanization and development that take place adjacent to timberland can result in a variety of conflicts, including increasing costs of operation because of complaints from adjacent landowners.

The subdivision or development of individual parcels within large areas of contiguous timberland can cause fragmentation of land in timber resource production, in some cases reducing property size or increasing conflicts to the point that the production activity is no longer economically viable. Over time, this process of fragmentation and encroachment can affect the efficiency of timber resource managment.

Eldorado National Forest

The Eldorado National Forest, established in 1910, covers 786,994 total acres, with 558,344 acres in El Dorado County and the rest in Alpine, Amador, and Placer counties (U.S. Forest Service 2003a). The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has jurisdiction over 596,724 of those acres (U.S. Forest Service 2003a); the remaining 190,270 acres are lands owned privately or by other agencies within the National Forest boundary. The diversity in climate, elevation, soil, water, and geology support a wide variety of wildlife and botanical species. Elevations range from 1,620 feet to 10,380 feet within the forest. Annual precipitation averages 45 inches of rain and 10-15 feet of snow in the higher elevations. As stated above, 377,000 acres (59%) of the county's timberlands are in the Eldorado National Forest. Timber harvesting is an acknowledged and valuable management technique in the forest. The national forest is also home to the Desolation Wilderness and the Mokelumne Wilderness, which together consist of approximately 103,000 acres.

Tahoe National Forest

The Tahoe National Forest covers 177,133 acres and is located in El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sierra, and Yuba counties. Elevations range from 1,500 feet in the American River canyon to more than 9,400 feet along the Sierra Nevada crest. The forest is known for its beauty, downhill and cross-country skiing opportunities, historic sites, and productive timberlands. In the past few years, tourism and outdoor recreation have replaced timber harvest activities as the dominant economic force in the forest (U.S. Forest Service 2003b). The portion of Tahoe National Forest that is in El Dorado County is managed separately, along with other national forestland in the Lake Tahoe Basin, by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Private Timberlands

In California, 42% of the forest land and 44% of the timberland is privately owned, either by forest industry concerns or other private landowners. El Dorado County had 636,000 acres of timberland in 1996, with 251,000 acres in private ownership by the forest industry (120,000 acres), private farmers (3,000 acres), or other private companies (128,000 acres). Of the 73.14

million board feet of timber harvest in 1996, 85% was privately owned, with a value of $22.3 million (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2003).

Forest Types and Habitats

El Dorado County has many types of forest and vegetation. Cover types on the west slope of the county include blue oak foothill pine, blue oak woodlands, valley oak woodlands, montane hardwood, and montane hardwood-conifer. A wide band of Douglas-fir is scattered through the central portion of the county and transitions to a mix of Sierran mixed conifer, ponderosa pine, and white fir. The higher elevations in the eastern portion of the county but west of Lake Tahoe are dominated by red fir intermixed with areas of white fir and nonforested areas. The southeastern part of the county, south of Lake Tahoe, is predominantly Jeffrey pine with areas of lodgepole pine, red fir, Sierran mixed conifer, and subalpine conifer extending to the southeastern border (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 1996). The vegetation communities in El Dorado County, including hardwood and coniferous woodland communities, are discussed in Section 5.12, Biological Resources.

Forest Research

El Dorado County is home to several academic and research facilities that benefit forest resources science and provide employment to county residents. As a facility of the USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station, the Institute of Forest Genetics in Placerville is world renowned for its research in the fields of genetic diversity, genetic resources, and disease resistance. The institute sponsors a broad range of programs, such as the Center for Conservation of Genetic Diversity, established in 1990; the National Electrophoresis Laboratory and the Sugar Pine Rust Resistance Center, located at the Placerville Forest Nursery, which produces 15 million young trees for research projects each year on 2.64 acres; and Dendrome, a database devoted to information on forest tree genetic resources (U.S. Forest Service 2002). The University of California, Berkeley, also owns and operates a forest research center east of Georgetown in the Blodgett Forest.

Woodland Suitability

The NRCS (while it was still known as the U.S. Soil Conservation Service) published a soil survey for El Dorado County in 1974. Soils were categorized into seven woodland suitability groups to assist forest managers and landowners in planning and managing timberland. Factors used to categorize the soils are site quality, erosion hazard, equipment limitations, pest and disease hazards, wind-throw hazards (susceptibility to uprooting as a result of wind), and manageability (U.S. Soil Conservation Service 1974).

Site quality indicates the suitability of a soil for timber production by means of a site index: the height obtained by the average dominant and codominant trees at 100 years of age and the average production in board-feet per acre per year. The soil's effective depth, or depth to bedrock, is an important measure of site quality.

Other factors in evaluating the suitability of soils for timber production are erosion hazard and pest and disease hazard. Susceptibility to erosion is determined based on the length and slope, texture, and stability of soils. Pest and disease hazard is assessed according to depth, texture, wetness, and inherent fertility.

Shallow soils are more susceptible to wind-throw than are deeper soils and are rated according to the severity of wind-throw potential. The overall manageability of a soil type is a combination of the factors discussed above (U.S. Soil Conservation Service 1974).

Forest Products and Logging Industry

El Dorado County's timberlands provide economic benefits for businesses and residents of the county by serving as a major source of employment (i.e., the logging industry) and providing the raw material for forest products, including lumber for construction. El Dorado County has several lumber mills, including three mills that produce high volumes of lumber for national and international markets:

- Sierra Pacific operates 14 sawmills in the western United States and specializes in wood products such as construction lumber, poles, and window frames. Sierra Pacific Industries Mill, located in Camino, employs approximately 140 people (Sierra Pacific Industries, pers. comm., 2002).
- Wetsel-Oviatt Lumber Company, which has been operating at a 265-acre site in El Dorado Hills since 1973, employs approximately 120 people. Timber is supplied to the mill from logging operations in El Dorado and Amador counties (Slater 1999).
- El Dorado Northern Lumber, located in the town of El Dorado, employs 18 people and specializes in remanufacturing (purchasing large pieces of lumber and cutting them down to smaller sizes). The company has been in business for 31 years as El Dorado Northern Lumber and, before that, was the El Dorado Sierra Lumber Mill (Smith, pers. comm., 2002).

In addition, a substantial acreage of timberland is owned by forest product corporations that send their timber to milling facilities outside El Dorado County.

The USFS operates a database retrieval system, developed in support of the 1997 Resources Planning Act (RPA) Assessment, that offers statistical data for the forest product output of the county. According to this database, almost all of the timber harvested in El Dorado County comprises softwood species, primarily Douglas-fir, true firs, and ponderosa or Jeffrey pine. Most of the timber harvested is processed as saw logs, with approximately 2.2% processed as veneer logs (U.S. Forest Service 1997).

Table 5.2-7 shows trends in the annual amount and value of timber production in El Dorado County using the Agricultural Crop Reports from 1990 to 2000 (El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 1991-2001). In 2000, 107,500 million board feet of lumber were harvested at a total value (including byproducts) of $28,229,200. With a few notable exceptions (especially 1992-1993), this figure has been gradually declining since 1990.

Table 5.2-7
Timber Production in El Dorado County, 1990-2000

Year	Board Feet [1]	Value [1]	Total Value of Timber and Byproducts [2]
1990	314,465,000	$47,335,000	$47,455,300
1991	182,000,000	$28,900,000	$29,034,500
1992	152,018,000	$33,687,000	$33,784,000
1993	242,100,000	$95,500,200	$95,603,800
1994	129,130,000	$57,354,700	$57,449,900
1995	124,584,000	$45,799,900	$45,901,600
1996	73,140,000	$25,676,000	$25,873,000
1997	91,892,000	$27,049,500	$27,087,800
1998	99,514,000	$27,640,300	$27,698,800
1999	126,000,000	$31,761,000	$31,785,200
2000	107,500,000	$28,207,600	$28,229,200

[1] Includes timber from private and public forests.
[2] Byproducts include wood sales and permits.

Source: El Dorado County Department of Agriculture 1990-2000

Regulatory/Planning Environment

A broad range of policies, regulations, and laws affect forestry operations in El Dorado County. The most prominent of these are described below.

Federal Regulatory Programs

Sierra Nevada Forest Plan

The Sierra Nevada Forest Plan provides federal direction on habitat management for 11 national forests: the Modoc, Lassen, Plumas, Lake Tahoe Basin, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, Sequoia, Sierra, Inyo, and portions of Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests. The goal of the forest plan is to manage sensitive wildlife habitat cautiously and provide for species conservation while addressing the needs of forest managers to reduce the threat of wildfire. The Sierra Nevada Forest Plan addresses five objectives for the Sierra Nevada region:

- preserve and enhance old-forest ecosystems and associated species;
- identify and implement effective techniques for fire and fuel management;
- preserve and enhance aquatic, riparian, and meadow ecosystems and associated species;
- manage noxious weeds; and
- sustain lower-westside hardwood forest ecosystems (U.S. Forest Service 2001).

In the early 1990s, in response to the declining population of spotted owls in California, the USFS Pacific Southwest Region began a habitat management planning effort that encompassed the entire Sierra Nevada region. The result was a long-term management plan for owl habitat and other natural resources in the Sierra Nevada and Modoc Plateau (U.S. Forest Service 2003a).

The Sierra Nevada Framework for Conservation and Collaboration is an effort begun in 1998 by the USFS to integrate the latest science and a collaborative approach into national forest management. Work by the framework resulted in a federal environmental document known as the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA), published in 2001. The SNFPA describes nine alternatives to address five problem areas in Sierra Nevada national forests: old-forest ecosystems; aquatic, riparian, and meadow ecosystems; fire and fuel management; noxious weeds; and lower-westside hardwood ecosystems. The adoption of the SNFPA has prompted amendments to 11 National Forest plans. As a result of an appeal by various individuals and groups and because some of the programs are not feasible to implement, the USFS is reviewing certain elements of the SNFPA and seeking public input on improvements to those elements. However, the SNFPA is currently in effect. A supplement is in preparation to address changes (Rodman, pers. comm., 2003).

Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

The Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (L&RMP) was prepared by the USFS in 1988. The L&RMP covers 786,994 acres of forestland in parts of Alpine, Amador, El Dorado, and Placer counties, including both National Forest and forestlands in other ownership. The plan prescribes compatible sets of forest practices for various types of land and resources, divided by management areas, and contains targets for the production of market and nonmarket goods and services. As a result of the SNFPA, the L&RMPs of various National Forests, including the El Dorado National Forest L&RMP, are now being revised to bring their management practices and guidelines into conformance with the policies of that document.

Twenty-Five Percent Fund Act

Federal legislation established the Twenty-Five Percent Fund Act in 1908, which requires National Forests to provide 25% of their revenues to the county or state in which they are located. Eldorado National Forest encompasses approximately 50% (558,344 acres) of the county's 1,110,103 acres (excluding the Lake Tahoe Basin and Folsom Reservoir), and management and resource extraction activities in the National Forest substantially influence the economic stability of the county as a result of the Twenty-Five Percent Fund Act. In 1996, the County received $1,014,225 in payments from National Forest receipts. In accordance with federal law (16 United States Code [USC] 500), the USFS funds are distributed between schools and road improvements.

State Regulatory Programs

California Forest Practice Act

The California Forest Practice Act, adopted in 1973, established regulations requiring that a timber harvest plan (THP) be submitted to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) before timber harvesting can take place on nonfederal timberlands, including privately owned lands. The THP must be prepared by a certified registered forester, contain a schematic drawing or representation of the forestland and the harvest plan, and identify the steps that will be taken to prevent damage to the site.

The State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection works in cooperation with CDF to review submitted THPs for compliance with the Forest Practice Act and other rules and regulations that protect watersheds and wildlife. If a plan is found to be in compliance with the appropriate rules and regulations, it cannot be disapproved solely based on public opposition.

Once a THP is implemented and timber harvesting is under way, CDF foresters perform routine inspections of logging sites to monitor and enforce the requirements of the Forest Practice Act.

California Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976

The Forest Taxation Reform Act established guidelines allowing cities and counties with qualifying timberland to adopt Timber Production Zones (TPZs) that protect timberlands from incompatible uses. With establishment of a TPZ, a private landowner agrees to commit the land to forest production for 10 years. In return, the approving jurisdiction grants the landowner a 35% reduction in property taxes. CDF has jurisdiction over timber harvest and timberland conversion decisions in TPZs, which it passes down to county agriculture departments. El Dorado County had 150,720 acres in TPZs in 1996 (CDF 2003).

El Dorado County Regulatory Programs

El Dorado County Zoning Ordinance

The County's Zoning Ordinance includes provisions affecting timberlands. Although the Zoning Ordinance will be updated to conform to the policies of the General Plan adopted by the County, the following discussion of the key timber-related aspects of the current zoning ordinance is provided as background information. Although the County Zoning Ordinance specifies timber harvesting and production as uses permitted by right in the Exclusive Agriculture (AE), Transportation Corridor (TC), and Timberland Preserve Zone (TPZ) zoning districts because timber harvesting is not regulated by the County, it may be carried on in all zone districts, subject to the requirements of state law. Associated permanent structures and support facilities are allowed with a special use permit in the Timberland Preserve Zone district.

Within the Zoning Ordinance, §17.16.150 specifies special setbacks for protection of agricultural properties, including timberland. For parcels subdivided after August 11, 1983, incompatible adjacent uses must have a 200-foot setback if the timberland use is in a Rural Region or the Natural Resource district. The required setback is 50 feet if the parcel is in a Community Region or Rural Center. For previously existing parcels, the required setback is 200 feet for parcels larger than 10 acres, with no setback required for parcels of 10 acres or less.

Implementation of Timber Production Zone Program

Although the Forest Taxation Reform Act is a state regulation, the County has jurisdiction to develop and establish criteria and standards that apply to TPZs within its purview. TPZs encompass approximately 149,000 acres in the county (Shih, pers. comm., 2002). Although the County makes harvest and conversion decisions in TPZs, CDF participates in the process as a responsible agency.

The act established three categories (lists) of criteria under which land is considered to qualify for zoning as a TPZ:

< List A: Parcels that the County Assessor had previously assessed for growing and harvesting timber as the highest and best use of the land.

< List B: Parcels that appeared to constitute timberland but had been previously assessed for some other use (the County Board of Supervisors has discretion to add to or delete properties from this list).

< List C: Parcels for which the landowner applies to the County (the County Board of Supervisors must rezone the parcel if it meets the requirements of the TPZ Zoning Ordinance).

Compatible uses permitted within a TPZ include watershed management; management for fish and wildlife; hunting; fishing; growing, harvesting, and processing of forest products; utility construction or maintenance; and grazing. A residential unit is permitted in a TPZ only with a special-use permit following review by the County Agricultural Commission and approval by the Planning Commission. When reviewing the suitability of a discretionary project in timberland, the County takes into consideration whether a property is located on soil designated as choice timber production soil, regardless of whether the property is located in a TPZ.

Most TPZs are located in the central portion of the county and are in the List A category. List B parcels are fewer and are located primarily in the south-central portion of the county, and the few List C parcels are in the north-central portion of the county. Exhibit 5.2-4 displays lands presently enrolled in the County's TPZ program.

Designation of Choice Timber Production Soils

The County uses the site quality information and site index provided in the SCS's *Soil Survey of El Dorado County* (U.S. Soil Conservation Service 1974) to designate choice timber production

soils. The factors used to make this determination are the same as those used to determine choice agricultural soils, as described above.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Thresholds of Significance

The General Plan would have a significant impact on timber resources if development would:

- convert forestland zoned Timber Production Zone (TPZ), Exclusive Agriculture (AE) or Transportation Corridor (TC) to nonforestry uses;
- convert land currently in timber production to nonforestry uses; or
- create an obstacle to processing of timber resources in the county.

Impact **5.2-4**

Conversion of Timberland, Including Lands Currently in Timber Production and Lands Zoned for Timber Production, to Nonforestry Uses. Encroachment of more intensive land uses in timber management areas can result in conflicts with appropriately designated forestry uses and could encourage conversion of lands to nonforestry uses. In general, the General Plan provides strong protection for lands zoned TPZ, AE, and other zone districts suitable for timber production through designation in the Natural Resource category and other policies. The 160-acre and 40-acre minimum parcel sizes would provide adequate buffers in most cases for adjacent land uses. The General Plan policies and Zoning Ordinance include setbacks for all non-timber uses in TPZs and require special-use permits for these uses adjacent to timber harvesting activities. This impact is considered **less than significant** for all four equal-weight alternatives.

Exhibit 5.2-4, Timber Production Zones

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Exhibit 5.2-4, Timber Production Zones

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Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.2-4: Conversion of Timberland, Including Lands Currently in Timber Production and Lands Zoned for Timber Production	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS
Mitigation	**Significance After Mitigation***							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
N/A	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS

* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.

No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)

Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative

The relevant policies of the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.2.1.2, 2.2.5.11, 2.2.5.18, 7.1.1.1, 7.4.4.1, 7.6.1.1, 7.6.1.3, 8.3.1.1 through 8.3.1.3, 8.3.2.1 through 8.3.2.3, 8.3.3.1 and 8.3.3.2, 8.4.1.1 and 8.4.1.2, and 8.4.2.1.

No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

With the No Project Alternative, no residential subdivisions would be allowed except those already approved under development agreements or tentative maps (14,565 units). One residential dwelling would be allowed on any legal parcel with a ministerial building permit, and ministerial actions would not undergo analysis of consistency with General Plan policies.

Under the No Project Alternative, General Plan policies provide strong protection for TPZs throughout the county as areas of timber management and harvesting. These policies include protection of the natural resources through land use designation (Policies 7.6.1.3 and 8.3.1.1), a process for designating the suitability of lands for TPZs (Policies 8.3.1.2 and 8.3.1.3), setbacks

and buffers to avoid land use conflicts (Policies 8.4.1.1 and 8.4.1.2), and a review process to ensure that new adjacent land uses would not create conflicts with activities in TPZs (Policy 8.4.2.1).

The primary protection for TPZs is the Natural Resource land use designation. The No Project Alternative would have 722,562 acres in this designation. This establishes timber harvesting and management as a primary use of the land, establishes minimum parcel sizes of 40 acres, and protects these activities from encroachment or conflict from other land uses. The maximum allowable residential density is one unit per 160 acres above 3,000 feet elevation and, for parcels that are below 3,000 feet or are unsuitable for timber production, one unit per 40 acres. In several areas of the county, small TPZs are located in areas that are not designated Natural Resource on the General Plan land use map. These areas are southeast of Placerville (Market Area 4), in the central portion of Somerset (Market Area 9), near the northern county border north of Georgetown (Market Area 11), and southwest of Mosquito (Market Area 14). In these four areas, TPZs are not being provided the protections established with the Natural Resource designation. However, TPZs are provided additional protections that would allow timber-related activities to continue without encroachment.

The Agricultural Commission is responsible for reviewing applications for discretionary projects in timber harvesting areas and making recommendations to the approving authority on the suitability of the projects for location adjacent to existing forestry uses. The County Zoning Ordinance, however, identifies a large number of uses allowed by right in the zoning districts where timber harvest activities are likely to take place. These uses include growing and harvesting of forest products; related uses such as roads, log storage areas, and temporary camps for employees; gas, electric, water, or communication transmission facilities; watershed management and management for fish and wildlife habitat; noncommercial recreation, such as hunting and fishing, day use, and temporary camping; removal of mineral resources in the process of road building in conjunction with timber harvesting; and raising and grazing of livestock. Uses allowed by right in AE zoning districts include growing of trees, fruits, and other crops; timber growing and harvesting; barns, corrals, and outbuildings; excavation of earth and drilling of wells; ranch marketing activities; and wineries and wine tasting facilities. The Zoning Ordinance requires setbacks for these types of uses, however, and the large parcel sizes required in the Natural Resource designation would provide large buffers between these uses and timber management activities.

Policies of the No Project Alternative would protect timberland from conflicting uses. Although General Plan policies would not apply to most residential development, which would be broadly dispersed throughout the county, the large parcel sizes required in the Natural Resource designation would prevent residential development from substantially encroaching

on less intensive timber management activities. Other potentially conflicting uses would require setbacks and special use permits. This impact is considered less than significant.

No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

If the No Project Alternative were to reach full buildout, residential development would be more broadly dispersed throughout the Rural Regions because subdivision would be precluded. The protections provided by the General Plan with regard to non-timber activities would remain, and the large parcel sizes in the Natural Resource designation would continue to provide buffering for these uses as well as residential development in timber management areas. This impact is considered less than significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Alternative #2)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative are the land use designations and Policies LU-4e, AF-4a, and AF-4b; Implementation Measures AF-A, AF-C, AF-E, and AF-H; and Policies CO-1a, CO-11a, and CO-11b.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

The Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative permits a one-time division of existing legal parcels to a maximum of four new parcels even if further division is consistent with the property's land use designation. The parcel map is a discretionary action and is therefore subject to General Plan policies. Development of the four subsequent units is a ministerial action requiring only a building permit. Such ministerial actions would continue and would undergo no analysis of consistency with General Plan policies. Although residential subdivision in rural areas would be limited to a maximum of four new parcels for each existing parcel, such parcel splits could increase the density of more intensive development in Rural Regions.

The Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative contains policies intended to preserve and protect TPZs from encroachment by incompatible land uses or increasing urban development. These policies include establishment of the Natural Resource designation to protect management and harvesting of timber and other natural resources (Policies LU-4e, CO-1a, and CO-11b), processes and procedures to ensure that adjacent land uses are compatible and that areas designated TPZ are suitable for forestry uses (Implementation Measures AF-E and AF-H), protections related to setbacks and parcel size established in the

Zoning Ordinance (Implementation Measure AF-A), and the requirement that timber harvesting activities are protected from land use incompatibility through the Agricultural Commission's suitability review process (Policy AF-4a and Implementation Measure AF-E). The land use map is consistent with the protections of the policies. All TPZ areas are classified Natural Resource on the land use map, providing a high level of protection for these areas from encroachment or incompatibility.

The Natural Resource designation would encompass 806,931 acres under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. Policies identified for this alternative would provide for a suitability review by the Agricultural Commission for discretionary projects, including parcel splits; however, the potential exists for ministerial residential development to be broadly dispersed though rural areas. The large parcel sizes and the required setbacks in TPZs would adequately buffer these uses from conflicting with timber management activities, however. This impact is considered less than significant.

Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

The impact of this alternative on TPZs and adjacent lands at buildout is expected to be similar to that described above for 2025. Overall, residential development is projected to be spread more broadly throughout the county than at 2025. All TPZs would be protected by designation as Natural Resource areas, complete with setbacks, minimum parcel designations, and other protection policies. The proposed General Plan policies would provide protections for lands in timber production. Policies established to maintain Natural Resource areas as lands primarily dedicated to timber production uses apply only to discretionary approvals and are not mandatory, but the large parcel sizes in this designation would provide adequate buffering for accessory and residential uses. As described for 2025, this impact is considered less than significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)

Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative

For the relevant policies of the Environmentally Constrained Alternative, please refer to the policies listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Countywide, the development pattern for the Environmentally Constrained Alternative would differ from those described for the previously mentioned equal-weight alternatives. Although the total amount of development expected under this alternative by 2025 is comparable to that under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative, the policies governing that development are expected to focus land uses more intensively in fewer and smaller Community Regions and Rural Centers and away from Rural Regions. Although ministerial residential uses would be permitted as with the other equal-weight alternatives, residential subdivision would be allowed and would be subject to General Plan policies. The Natural Resource designation would encompass 795,744 acres under this alternative, substantially more than any of the other equal-weight alternatives.

Policies are provided to protect TPZs from incompatible land uses or conversion to nonforestry activities as described for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. As described for that alternative, all TPZs are designated on the land use map as Natural Resource lands, providing them a high level of protection from the risk of development or fragmentation.

Community Regions and Rural Centers would occupy a smaller overall area and have higher development densities. This would allow the aggregation of Agricultural Lands and Natural Resource areas into larger contiguous areas as well. Development would be greater overall, but conflicts between residential development and timber areas would be less widespread in rural areas than under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus" Alternative. The protections afforded by the Agricultural Commission's suitability review would be effective in preventing encroachment of development into TPZ areas. These protections would ensure that nonforestry activities in these areas would not encroach on the ability of property owners to continue conducting timber harvesting activities.

The Environmentally Constrained Alternative would provide adequate land use buffering and protections to prevent conflicts or conversion pressures for lands in timber production. Requirements established to ensure that Natural Resource areas remain dedicated primarily to timber production uses apply to discretionary approvals, including residential subdivision, and large parcel sizes would provide adequate buffering for residential and accessory uses. This impact is considered less than significant.

Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

If this alternative were to reach full buildout, residential development would be distributed throughout the county, although still focused primarily in the Community Regions and Rural Centers. As described for 2025, all TPZs are designated on the land use map as Natural Resource lands, providing them a high level of protection from the risk of development or fragmentation. The proposed General Plan policies and land use designations could provide strong protections for lands in timber production. Policies established to maintain Natural Resource areas as lands dedicated primarily to timber production uses apply to discretionary approvals, including residential subdivision, and large parcel sizes would provide buffering for residential and accessory uses. This impact is considered less than significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)

Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative

For the relevant policies of the 1996 General Plan Alternative, please refer to the policies listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative.

1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion

Development patterns under this alternative would follow the same land use map used for the No Project Alternative. The intensity and density of development would be much greater, however. Unlike the No Project Alternative, the 1996 General Plan Alternative allows residential subdivision; however, the ministerial development permitted under the Zoning Ordinance remains broad. Because subdivisions are allowed under this alternative, land use patterns at 2025 would focus higher intensity uses into Community Regions and Rural Centers, although subdivision could also take place in Rural Regions. The total amount of residential development countywide would be greater than under any of the other alternatives, and ministerial development on individual parcels would still be permitted. In addition, substantially more land in the Rural Regions may be subdivided in this alternative, creating the potential for greater conflicts to result from residential uses in timberland. The Natural Resource designation would encompass 722,562 acres under this alternative, as with the No Project Alternative.

The 1996 General Plan Alternative contains policies that provide strong protection for TPZs throughout the county as areas of timber management and harvesting. The primary protection for TPZs is the Natural Resource land use designation. This establishes timber harvesting and management as a primary use of the land and protects these activities from

encroachment or conflict from other land uses. These policies are more effective than those for the No Project Alternative because subdivision is allowed and the policies would apply to a much greater percentage of overall development.

In the areas southeast of Placerville (Market Area 4), the central portion of Somerset (Market Area 9), near the northern county border north of Georgetown (Market Area 11), and southwest of Mosquito (Market Area 14), small TPZs are not being provided the protections established with the Natural Resource designation. However, TPZs are provided additional protections that would allow timber-related activities to continue without encroachment.

The Agricultural Commission is responsible for reviewing applications for discretionary projects in timber harvesting areas and making recommendations to the approving authority on the suitability of nonforestry projects adjacent to existing forestry uses. The County Zoning Ordinance, however, identifies a large number of uses (listed for the No Project Alternative) allowed by right in the zoning districts where timber harvest activities are likely to take place. Policies also set forth minimum setbacks, densities, and buffers to protect activities in TPZs from coming into conflict with adjacent land uses. Policy 8.4.1.1 establishes minimum parcel sizes for Natural Resource and TPZ areas, as well as for adjacent lands. The policy exempts lands near Community Regions and Rural Centers from these minimum parcel sizes in the interest of concentrating developed land uses outside of rural areas.

In general, the 1996 General Plan Alternative provides strong protection for TPZs through designation in the Natural Resource category and other policies. Policies of the 1996 General Plan Alternative would protect timberland from conflicting uses. General Plan policies would apply to most residential development, and the large parcel sizes required in the Natural Resource designation would prevent residential development from substantially encroaching on less intensive timber management activities. Other potentially conflicting uses would require setbacks and special use permits. This impact is considered less than significant.

1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion

The impact of the 1996 General Plan Alternative on agricultural land is projected to be more intensive at buildout than described above for 2025. Development pressure could continue to create the potential for conflicts between existing timber management activities and encroaching residential uses. The development pattern identified for this alternative would distribute residential development broadly throughout the county, but higher intensity uses would be focused in to the urban/suburban areas. General Plan policies and the land use map would provide incentives for discretionary residential subdivision. Although a broad range of uses would be permitted by right policies and minimum parcel sizes would buffer these uses.

At buildout of this alternative, the impact regarding land use compatibility with TPZs could be similar to, but more intensive than, that discussed for 2025. General Plan policies would continue to protect timber management activities from encroachment by or conversion to nontimber-related uses. This impact is considered less than significant.