

4.1 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

4.1.1 Setting

a. Agricultural Setting. Fertile soils and ground water resources, combined with moderate climate, form the essential ingredients for agriculture. Areas within San Luis Obispo County that possess valuable agricultural resources include the rich irrigated croplands of the Arroyo Grande and Cienega Valleys, the vineyards of the Edna Valley and the Paso Robles area which produce award winning wines, the orchards in the Nipomo Valley, the extensive dry land farming of the north county, and the cattle grazing lands in the coastal hills and interior valleys (County of San Luis Obispo, 2010).

Agriculture makes a substantial contribution to the county's economy and accounts for approximately 80 percent of the privately owned land in the county (County of San Luis Obispo, 2009). In 2013, San Luis Obispo County agricultural production totaled \$960,710,000. The top five crops by value in San Luis Obispo County in 2013 included: wine grapes (\$220,355,000), strawberries (\$210,579,000), cattle and calves (\$96,390,000), broccoli (\$64,135,000) and avocados \$44,299,000) (County of San Luis Obispo, 2013).

In 2013, wine grape total production increased 10 percent compared to the prior year, while drought conditions led to decreases in other agricultural sectors. The number of cattle grazing the hillsides was dramatically reduced due to excessive drought conditions, lack of available grass for grazing and the high cost of supplemental feed. Drought conditions negatively affected field crops such as barley and grain hay resulting in fewer acres planted, decreased yields and planted fields left unharvested due to lack of growth. Overall the combined value of field crops was 34 percent below 2012 levels (County of San Luis Obispo, 2013).

The County of San Luis Obispo Agriculture Element (2010) contains the general description of the main types and uses of agricultural land in the San Luis Obispo County. These were developed in consultation with the County Agricultural Commissioner and the Agricultural Liaison Advisory Board and are described below.

Agricultural Soils. The San Luis Obispo County Agriculture Element utilizes the soil classifications as determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) in Agricultural Handbook No. 210 (1961). Soils are classified into capability classes which range from Class I soils to Class VIII soils. Irrigation capability is required for a soil to be designated as Class I or II soil in the following descriptions. These irrigated soils are commonly referred to as "prime soils". Each soil class is described below.

- **Class I** soils have few limitations that restrict their use. These soils are typically used for vegetables, seedcrops, orchards, and other irrigated specialty crops and irrigated field crops.
- **Class II** soils have minor to moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices. Uses are very similar to those found on Class I soils.



- **Class III and IV** soils have moderate to severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, or that require special conservation practices, or both. In some situations, the Class III soils may be used for some of the crop types that are typically found on Class I and II soils, but are more typically used for specialty crops, forage lands, mixed croplands, and dryland field crops. Irrigated Class IV soils are commonly used for vineyards.
- **Class V** soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use.
- **Class VI** soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation. These soils have commonly been used for rangeland and dryland grain production.
- **Class VII** soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation. These lands are primarily used as rangelands for grazing.
- **Class VIII** soils and landforms have limitations that nearly preclude their use for commercial crop production. However, some grazing occurs on these lands.

Irrigated Lands.

Row Crops Terrain and Soils. These lands are characterized by various types of vegetables, seed crops, orchards, and other irrigated specialty crops. In valley bottom lands, uses included irrigated field crops and other irrigated specialty crops. Property sizes generally range from 10 acres to hundreds of acres. The topography of these areas consists of nearly level valley bottom lands. Soils are mainly in land capability Classes I and II, but may include some Class III land that has been traditionally or is currently used for row crop production.

These areas support the most intensive farming. Farming operations often involve labor-intensive use of equipment and chemicals. They are often close to populated areas because these lands have historically been the easiest to develop.

Specialty Crops and Forage Lands. These areas are characterized by irrigated orchards and vineyards such as wine grapes, avocados, citrus, and apples. Irrigated uses such as alfalfa and pasture may also be found in these areas. The topography is gently rolling and on slopes between five and 30 percent. The soils consist mainly of Land Capability Classes III and IV. Property sizes generally range from 20 to a few hundred acres.

Dry Farm Lands. Dry land farming covers a broad range of properties that are primarily cultivated for an annual crop, but also may include some orchard operations. Parcels are normally large in order to be productive units. Farming activities are seasonal. Dry farm lands are divided into two types of croplands, as described below.

Mixed Cropland. Mixed croplands consist of two different types of terrain and crops. One type of mixed cropland is found in valleys with good soils but insufficient water for major irrigated uses. These areas are characterized by mixed agricultural uses, such as dry farm grain



and hay and scattered irrigated crops. The other type of mixed cropland is found in areas of higher than average rainfall, such as the easterly slopes of the Santa Lucia Range where dry farm orchards and some vineyards occur. The topography of these cropland areas typically ranges from flat to rolling on slopes between zero and 30 percent. The soils consist mainly of Land Capability Classes III and IV. Property sizes generally range from 40 acres to several hundred acres.

Dry Croplands. These areas are characterized by grain and hay production and are widespread in the northeastern part of the county. Barley, wheat and oat hay are the principal crops. Other crops include dry beans and safflower. Dry croplands may also include grain stubble fields and intervening non-cultivated areas that provide seasonal forage for livestock. The topography of these areas is generally flat to rolling on slopes between zero and 30 percent. The soils consist mainly of Land Capability Classes III and IV. Class VI land has also been commonly used for grain production. Property sizes generally range from 80 to several thousand acres.

Rangelands for Grazing. Grazing lands account for a large percentage of privately owned land in the county. Cattle ranching is the predominant use on these lands. The topography is mainly rolling and on steep slopes between 30 and 75 percent. Rangelands may also include small intervening valleys and ridgetops that have limited use or potential as farmland. The soils consist mainly of Land Capability Classes IV, VI and VII, but may also contain small intervening areas of other land capability classes. Property sizes generally range from 100 acres to thousands of acres, depending on the carrying capacity of the rangelands.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) administered by the California Department of Conservation produces maps of important farmland throughout California, which is determined both by soil quality and irrigation status. There are established criteria for each category of land in the FMMP which are summarized as follows (Department of Conservation, 2013b):

- **Prime Farmland** – Must have been irrigated for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles, or the last 4 years, prior to the mapping date and meet specific requirements related to water availability, soil temperature, acid-alkali balance, water table, soil sodium content, flooding, erodibility, permeability, rock fragment content, and rooting depth.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance** - Must have been irrigated for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles, or the last 4 years, prior to the mapping date and meet specific requirements related to water availability, soil temperature, acid-alkali balance, water table, soil sodium content, flooding, erodibility, and rock fragment content.
- **Unique Farmland** – Land which does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, that has been used for the production of specific high economic value crops at some time during the two update cycles, or the last 4 years, prior to the mapping date. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality and/or

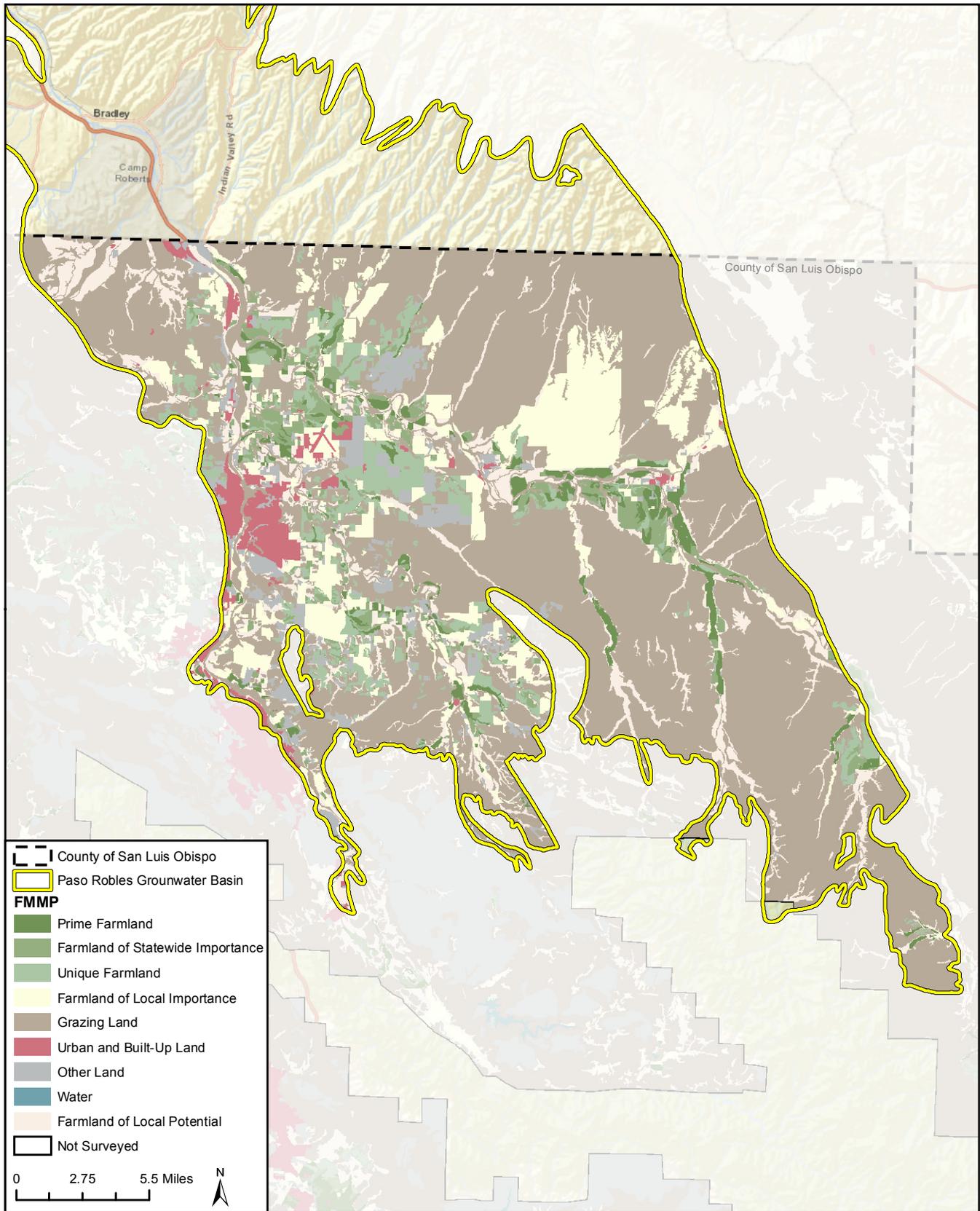


high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods.

- **Farmland of Local Importance** - Farmland of Local Importance is either currently producing crops, has the capability of production, or is used for the production of confined livestock. In San Luis Obispo County this is further defined as:
 - Local Importance (L): areas of soils that meet all the characteristics of Prime or Statewide, with the exception of irrigation. Additional farmlands include dryland field crops of wheat, barley, oats, and safflower.
 - Local Potential (LP): lands having the potential for farmland, which have Prime or Statewide characteristics and are not cultivated.
- **Grazing Land** - Grazing Land is defined in Government Code §65570(b)(3) as land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock.
The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres.
- **Urban and Built-up Land** - Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 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 ((Department of Conservation, 2013b).

Figure 4.1-1 illustrates the location of the various FMMP categories (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land) in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. Table 4.1-1 provides the most current data on acres and percentages of land area by FMMP category in all of San Luis Obispo County and for the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.





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 Department of Conservation, 2010.

**Important Farmland:
 Paso Robles Groundwater Basin**

Figure 4.1-1

**Table 4.1-1
 FMMP Important Farmland Statistics for San Luis Obispo County**

FMMP Land Use Category	San Luis Obispo County		Paso Robles Groundwater Basin	
	Acres	Percent of Land Area	Acres	Percent of Land Area
Prime Farmland	41,319	2 %	10,473	2.9%
Farmland of Statewide Importance	21,132	1 %	11,827	3.3%
Unique Farmland	39,950	2 %	20,290	5.6%
Farmland of Local Importance	307,325	16 %	38,980	10.8%
Farmland of Local Potential	Included in Farmland of Local Importance	N/A	36,363	10.1%
Grazing Land	1,181,015	63 %	218,102	60.4%
Urban and Built-Up Land	45,017	2 %	8,621	2.4%
Other Land	242,998	13 %	15,797	4.4%
Water Area	8,780	<1 %	--	--
Not Surveyed	--	--	900	0.2%
Total Area Inventoried	1,887,536	100 %		

Source: California Department of Conservation, 2010; County of San Luis Obispo 2005 & 2006.

b. Regulatory setting.

California Land Conservation Act. The California Land Conservation Act (LCA) of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act, offers financial incentives for landowners to maintain their properties in agricultural production to encourage the preservation of the state’s agricultural lands and prevent their premature conversion to urban uses. Under provisions of the Williamson Act, private landowners may voluntarily enter into a long-term contract (minimum of 10 years) with cities and counties to form agricultural preserves and maintain their property in agricultural or open space uses in return for a reduced property tax assessment based on the agricultural value of the property. Local governments receive a subsidy for forgone property tax revenues from the state via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971. The term of an LCA contract is generally ten years and the contract automatically renews itself each year for another ten-year period, unless a Notice of Non-Renewal is filed or the contract is cancelled. State Government Code Section 51282 provides specific findings that must be made for the approval of LCA contract cancellations. In 2010, San Luis Obispo County had 792,577 acres under LCA (10-year) contract (California Department of Conservation, 2013).

Right-to-Farm Ordinance. Chapter 5.16 of the San Luis Obispo County Code is a “Right-to-Farm Ordinance”, which supports, encourages, and protects agricultural operations and agricultural processing within the county and gives recognition to an operation’s right to farm within the limits of the law. Paragraph ‘b’ of Section 5.16.020 (Findings and Policy) states:



Where non-agricultural land uses occur near agricultural areas, agricultural operations frequently become the subjects of nuisance complaints due to lack of information about such operations. As a result, agricultural operators may be forced to cease or curtail their operations. Such actions discourage investments in farm improvements to the detriment of agricultural uses and the viability of the County's agricultural industry as a whole.

The "Right-to-Farm" Ordinance advises purchasers of residential and other property types adjacent to existing agricultural operations of the inherent potential problems associated with the purchase of such property. Such concerns may include, but are not limited to, noise, odors, dust, chemicals, smoke, and hours of operation that may accompany agricultural operations.

San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Preserve Program. San Luis Obispo County has established an Agricultural Preserve Program, consistent with the Williamson Act discussed above. The objectives of the program are to protect agricultural lands for continued production of food and fiber and limited types of land devoted to open-space and recreational uses.

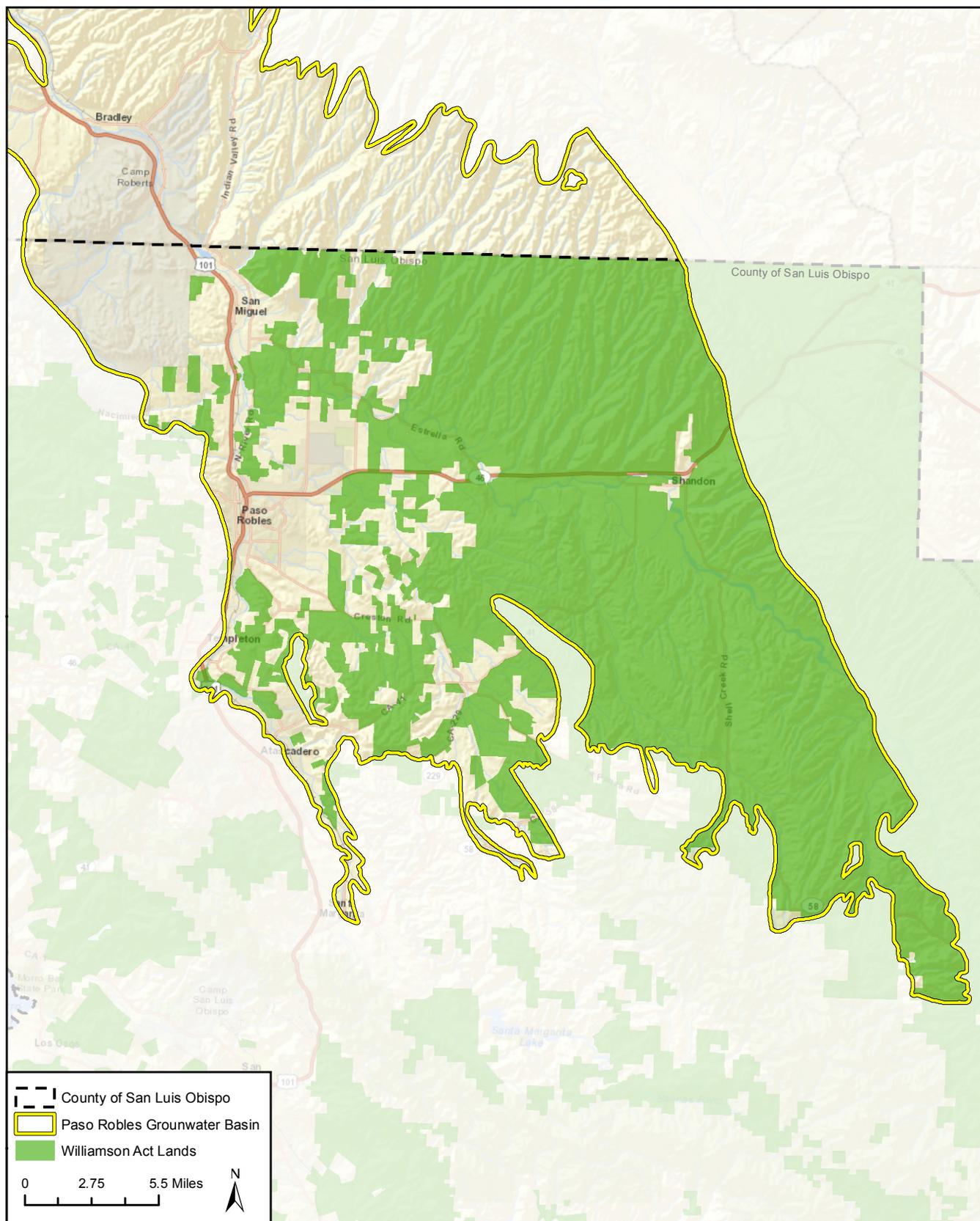
An agricultural preserve is established by landowner request in an area devoted to an agricultural use, recreational use, and/or an open-space use as defined in and established in accordance with the Williamson Act. Establishment of an agricultural preserve is a prerequisite for landowners to enter into land conservation contracts with the County. A land conservation contract is a contract entered into by and between the property owner and lien holders (if any) and the County to restrict the use of the land for agricultural and compatible uses for a minimum term of 10 years or more. Agricultural lands under Williamson Act contract in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin are illustrated on Figure 4.1-2.

San Luis Obispo County General Plan Agriculture Element. The Agriculture Element focuses on wisely managing and protecting agriculture in San Luis Obispo County. The Agriculture Element identifies areas of the county with productive farms, ranches and soils, and establishes goals, policies and implementation measures that will enable their long-term stability and productivity. The Agriculture Element contains goals, policies, implementation measures and programs to implement the Agriculture Element mission statement to "identify those areas of the county with productive farms, ranches and soils, and establish goals, policies and implementation measures that will enable their long-term stability and productivity."

Additionally, the Agriculture Element discusses hydrology and the balance between water supply and water demand and encourages the County to ensure actions by individuals or agencies are consistent with maintaining this balance. The Agriculture Element offers the following policy direction:

1. Storage of water in or under the watershed should be maximized, thereby minimizing discharges that are lost out of the watershed.
2. Recharge of groundwater basins should be preserved and enhanced by protecting stream bed gravels that are a major source of recharge from sediment deposition. Other alluvial areas should be protected from impervious surfaces or compaction.
3. Water that is extracted from storage should be properly used in a manner that maximizes its beneficial use and that minimizes evaporative losses.





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Department of Conservation, 2005.

Williamson Act Lands:
Paso Robles Groundwater Basin

Figure 4.1-2

4. Storage of water in or under the watershed should be maximized, thereby minimizing discharges that are lost out of the watershed.
5. Recharge of groundwater basins should be preserved and enhanced by protecting stream bed gravels that are a major source of recharge from sediment deposition. Other alluvial areas should be protected from impervious surfaces or compaction.
6. Water that is extracted from storage should be properly used in a manner that maximizes its beneficial use and that minimizes evaporative losses.

4.2.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. Evaluation of the potential agricultural impacts from the Program was conducted by considering whether any component of the Program would result in the direct or indirect conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural uses, agricultural compatibility impacts, or otherwise substantially affect the ability of the land to be farmed.

An agricultural resources impact is considered significant if implementation of the Program would result in any of the following:

1. *Direct conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency and defined by Public Resources Code Section 21061.1, to non-agricultural use;*
2. *Indirect conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, resulting from a net decrease in the amount of designated agricultural land in the county, as represented by the Agricultural Resource and Agriculture, Watershed, and Open Space designations on the current San Luis Obispo County General Plan Land Use Map;*
3. *Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; and/or*
4. *Involve other changes in the existing environment, which due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use or conflicts with agricultural use or agricultural operations (e.g. placement of urban and other uses adjacent to agricultural uses resulting in potential conflicts).*

b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

Impact AG-1 **The Agricultural Offset program component of the Countywide Water Conservation Program would result in the following of agricultural fields, crop conversion, or conversion of irrigation systems as a means of reducing water consumption which could result in direct conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Impacts would be Class II, significant but mitigable.**

The Water Neutral New Development (WNND) requirements would require that new or expanded irrigated agricultural development overlying the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin offset water use at a minimum 1:1 ratio. This would be accomplished through the Agricultural



Offset program, which as described in Section 2.0, *Project Description*, would allow for creation of water credits to be transferred within and between agricultural properties. Water offsets could be granted under this program by allowing a potential grower on currently vacant land to purchase water credits from a grower willing to reduce or eliminate existing crops, switch to a less water intensive crop, or change to a more efficient irrigation system.

In order to meet the definition of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance, agricultural land must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date, which equates to every four years. Thus, any water conservation method which results in the loss of irrigation (crop conversion to non-irrigated crops or fallowing) of Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance for a duration of four years or more, would lead to a loss of a property's designation as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance.

Similarly, if Unique Farmland were to stop producing high value crops or began producing excluded crops (such as grains) and this change lasted four years or more, it would lose its designation as such. Similar rules would also apply to Farmland of Local Importance. Unique Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance do not have irrigation requirements and would likely only be impacted through Agricultural Offset program through crop conversion or fallowing of fields. As defined in San Luis Obispo County, land can remain designated as Farmland of Local Potential, which is a sub-category of Farmland of Local Importance, without any active agriculture as long as it has characteristics of Prime or Statewide Farmland and is not cultivated.

Figure 4.1-1 illustrates the prevalence of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.

Table 4.1-1 identifies the total quantity and percent of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin that could potentially be converted under Agricultural Offset program if they are used to provide water credits using fallowing or conversion to non-irrigated crops. As shown in Table 4.1-1, there is the potential for the conversion of up to 10,473 acres (2.9 percent of the area) of Prime Farmland and 11,827 acres (3.3 percent of the area) of Farmland of Statewide Importance. While in reality it is unlikely that all Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance in this area would participate in the Agricultural Offset program, due to the importance of these resources as well as the small percentages of both Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, any conversion of these lands to a different FMMP designation or non-agricultural uses would be a potentially significant impact.

While irrigation is not required to meet the definition of Unique Farmland, land under this category is usually irrigated though it may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards. There are 20,290 acres (2.9 percent of the area) of Unique Farmland in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. Unique Farmland in this area could be impacted due to crop conversion from a high water usage crop to a crop that does not require irrigation, or is low water usage and therefore no longer meets the definition of a high economic value crop. Examples of high economic value crops include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers. Because irrigation is not required to meet the definition of Unique Farmland, changes in crop type (less water intensive)



or changes in irrigation do not necessarily result in a loss of the Unique Farmland designation. For this reason not all crop conversions would result in a conversion of Unique Farmland. However, because conversion of Unique Farmland could potentially occur as a result of crop conversion or fallowing, impacts would be considered potentially significant.

Amendments to the policies and goals proposed under the proposed Program would not have an adverse effect on Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance as the policies and goals are intended to protect these same resources. In addition, because the Agricultural Offset program also allows for planting credits to be obtained through a shift to less water intensive crops (rather than fallowing), the Agricultural Offset program may result in a net increase in agricultural acreage in agricultural areas overlying the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. The transfer of planting credits and conversion of high water use crops (e.g. alfalfa) to low water use crops (e.g. vineyards) could yield potential new irrigated agriculture acreage – all while maintaining current water demand.

Additionally, the Water Waste Prevention (WWP) program would identify a series of best management practices (BMPs) aimed at increasing water use efficiency in agricultural practices. This includes expansion/clarification of existing policy regarding increased water efficiency efforts and increased educational outreach. However, the WWP program would not alter existing land uses, including agriculture, and would therefore have no influence on the conversion of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance or Unique Farmland. In addition, the WWP program would serve to conserve water, which is a vital component necessary for a successful agricultural industry.

In summary, potentially significant impacts would include the following types of FMMP classification changes resulting from changes in irrigation regime or crop types:

- Prime Farmland converted to Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, or non-agricultural uses.
- Farmland of Statewide Importance converted to Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, or non-agricultural uses.
- Unique Farmland converted to Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, or non-agricultural uses.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation would reduce potentially significant impacts to Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland to a less than significant level.

- AG-1** Sending sites participating in the Agricultural Offset program shall be consistent with the following:
- a. Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland shall not be fallowed as a means of providing water offset credits.
 - b. Changes in irrigation type/method and conversions of crops on agricultural lands designated as Prime Farmland must remain consistent with criteria for Prime Farmland as defined by the Department of Conservation FMMP. To be classified as



- Prime Farmland, land must have been irrigated for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles, or the last four years prior to the mapping date.
- c. Changes in irrigation type/method and conversions of crops on agricultural lands designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance must remain consistent with criteria for Farmland of Statewide Importance or Prime Farmland as defined by the Department of Conservation FMMP. To be classified as Farmland of Statewide Importance, land must have been irrigated for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles, or the last four years, prior to the mapping date.
 - d. Changes in irrigation type/method and conversions of crops on agricultural lands designated as Unique Farmland must remain consistent with criteria for Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance or Prime Farmland as defined by the Department of Conservation FMMP. To be classified as Unique Farmland, land must have been used for the production of specific high economic value crops at some time during the two update cycles, or the last four years, prior to the mapping date.

Significance After Mitigation. With the implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-1, impacts would be less than significant.

Impact AG-2 Implementation of the proposed Countywide Water Conservation Program would not result in a net decrease in the amount of designated agricultural land in the county, as represented by the Agricultural Resource and Agriculture, Watershed, and Open Space designations on the current San Luis Obispo County General Plan Land Use Map or conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use. Impacts would be considered Class III, less than significant.

As discussed in Section 4.3, *Land Use*, neither component of the Countywide Water Conservation Program would alter existing land use or zoning designations. Thus, while WNND requirements would facilitate new urban and rural development in certified LOS III groundwater basins, and new irrigated agricultural development overlying the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, they would do so consistent with existing San Luis Obispo County General Plan land use designations and Zoning Ordinance. The WWP program would promote agricultural water conservation through a series of BMPs aimed at increasing water use efficiency in agricultural practices, including policy modifications and educational outreach. However, the WWP program and associated policy modifications would not alter existing land uses, including agriculture. As such, there would be no decrease in the amount of designated agricultural land use in the county, as represented by Agricultural Resource and Agriculture, Watershed, and Open Space designations on the current San Luis Obispo County General Plan Land Use Map. Although some development may be facilitated by WNND requirements, any



development would be required to offset its water demand, and would occur in accordance with existing land use and zoning designations. Additionally, the Agricultural Offset program allows for the creation of water credits to be transferred between only agricultural properties and no other forms of development (residential, commercial, etc.). Therefore, there would be no change in land use designations or conflicts with current agricultural zoning and impacts would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are necessary.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

Impact AG-3 Implementation of the Countywide Water Conservation Program could result in the fallowing of lands under Williamson Act contract and conflict with the provisions of Williamson Act contracts. Impacts are Class II, significant but mitigable.

Implementation of the Agricultural Offset program in agricultural areas overlying the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin could result in the fallowing of agricultural fields as a means of offsetting water consumption in new agricultural uses. It is possible that some of these lands would include lands currently under Williamson Act contract. Agricultural lands currently under Williamson Act contract in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin are illustrated on Figure 4.1-2. San Luis Obispo County has established the San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Preserve Program, as provided by the Williamson Act and described under *Regulatory Setting*, above. The purpose of the program is to protect agricultural lands for continued production of food and fiber and limited types of land devoted to open-space and recreational uses. The County of San Luis Obispo Rules of Procedure to Implement the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Rules) as amended in January 2012 establish the criteria for agricultural land to be eligible as an agricultural preserve. The Rules have criteria for: 1) Dry Farm Preserves and Rangeland Preserves, 2) Prime Land Preserves, and 3) High Productivity Prime Land (Small Specialized Farms). Dry Farm Preserve and Rangeland Preserve does not allow for irrigation and would not be affected by the proposed Agricultural Offset program. The criteria for Prime Land Preserves and High Productivity Prime Land includes irrigation, soil, and in some instances crop type requirements.

Areas identified as being under Williamson Act contract and designated as Farmland of Local Importance, Farmland of Local Potential or Grazing Land could potentially be fallowed under the Agricultural Offset program if they are currently irrigated (see Figure 4.1-3). This could result in conflicts with existing Williamson Act contracts resulting in a potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures. Mitigation Measure AG-1 would prevent the fallowing of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland. Each of these categories of farmland could be under Williamson Act contract; therefore, implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-1 would partially address this impact. However, because other categories of potentially irrigated farmland subject to Williamson Act could be fallowed, the following mitigation measure would be required.



AG-3 The following provision shall be added to the proposed Agricultural Offset program:

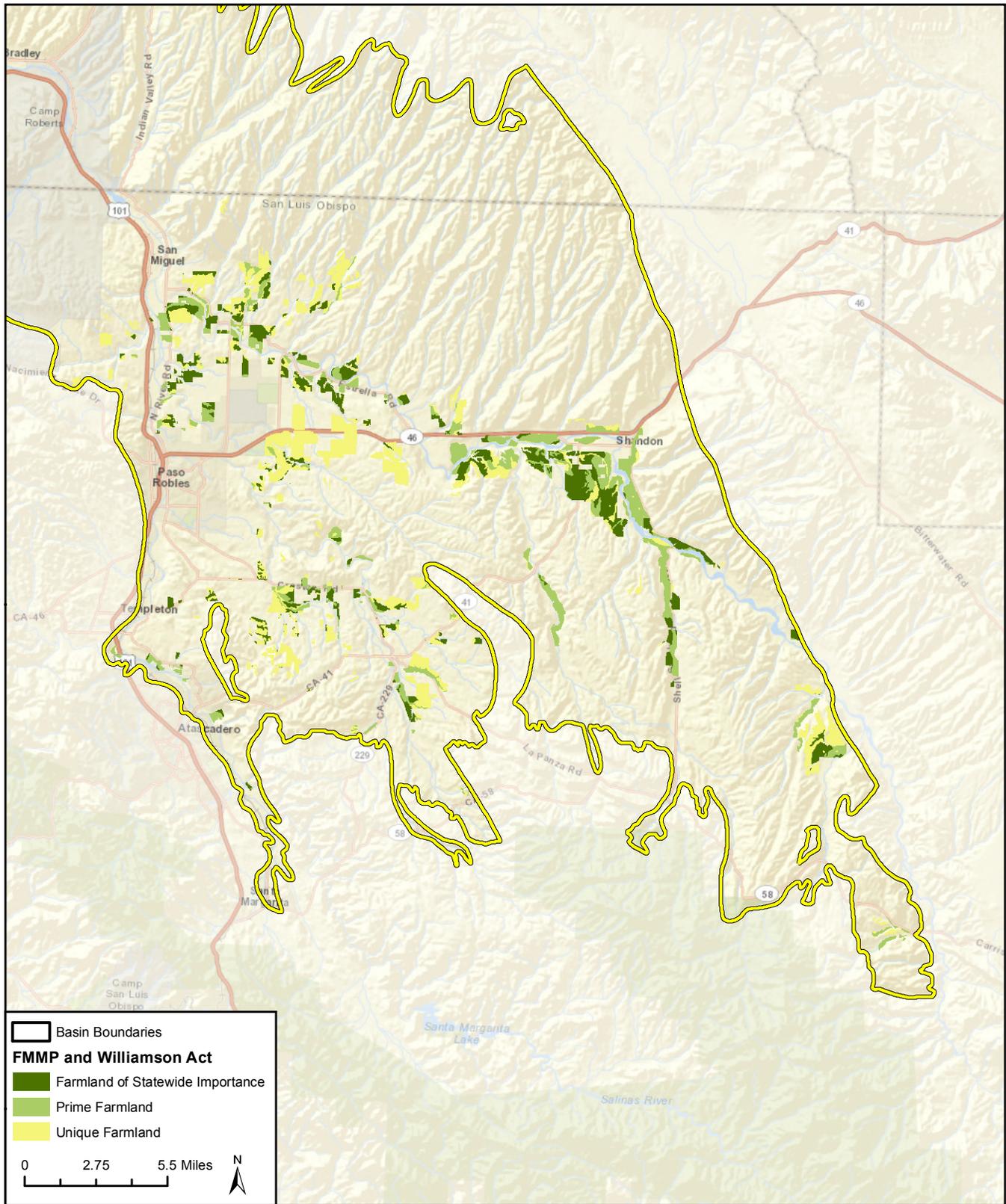
Sending sites providing planting credits shall remain consistent with the provisions of any existing Williamson Act contract for the property and County of San Luis Obispo Rules of Procedure to Implement the California Land Conservation Act Of 1965.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-3 as well as Mitigation Measure AG-1 would reduce potential impacts associated with conflicts with the Williamson Act to a less than significant level.

c. Cumulative Impacts. Cumulative impacts would not occur as a result of conversion of agriculture under the proposed Program beyond those considered in the San Luis Obispo County General Plan. As discussed above and in Section 4.3, *Land Use*, the proposed Program would facilitate new urban and rural development in certified LOS III groundwater basins and new irrigated agricultural development in agricultural areas overlying the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, however it would do so consistent with existing San Luis Obispo County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance land use designations. The Program does not involve any amendments to land use designations or zoning. Implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-1 would prevent downgrades of FMMP classifications for Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland; however, there is the potential for some irrigated Farmland of Local

Importance, Farmland of Local Potential or Grazing Land to be fallowed as a result of the proposed Program, unless it would conflict with an existing Williamson Act contract (per Mitigation Measure AG-3). Agricultural lands would only be fallowed under the proposed Program as a means of water offset to allow other agriculture uses to be developed or intensified and water offsets generated through fallowing of agricultural would not be used to facilitate non-agricultural development types. Therefore, the contribution of the proposed Program to cumulative impacts related to the conversion of agriculture would be less than significant.





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County of San Luis Obispo, 2005, 2006.

Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and
Unique Farmland in Williamson Act Lands:
Paso Robles Groundwater Basin

Figure 4.1-3

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