4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

4.2.1 Existing Conditions

The proposed quarry is located on an approximately 234-acre parcel owned by the Oster family. Of this, the quarry and access road will occupy approximately 41 acres of the parcel. The entire property is located in the Las Pilitas Planning Area and is within the EX1-Extractive Resource Area Combining Designation.

Past agricultural use on the property was mostly grazing, with some limited cultivation. Based on a review of statements of water diversion filed with the State Water Resources Control Board, this past use has included up to 30 to 40 head of cattle; two acres of corn; and a small orchard and garden near the house. A review of aerial photos over the last 20 years was generally consistent with these uses. There is no evidence of extensive irrigated agriculture on the property.

The surrounding vicinity does not have intensive agriculture use. There is a vineyard on Santa Margarita Ranch occupying about 400 acres three miles to the southwest of the subject property. Based on aerial photo review, there are also two to three small orchards, about one to two acres, each on Parkhill Road one mile east from the property. There is grazing land within and in close proximity to the property.

The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) rates soils and their productivity by two measures, the Land Capability Classification (LCC) system (NSSH Part 622.02) and Farmland Classification (NSSH Part 622.03).

The land capability classification is a system of grouping soils primarily on the basis of their capability to produce common cultivated crops and pasture plants without deteriorating over a long period of time. Soils are defined by the classes which are used to represent both irrigated and non-irrigated land capability classes, as described in Table 4.2-1 below.

The NRCS Farmland Classification identifies map units as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, or farmland of local importance. Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. In general, prime farmland has an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, an acceptable level of acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable content of salt or sodium, and few or no rocks. Its soils are permeable to water and air. Prime farmland is not excessively erodible or saturated with

TABLE 4.2-1
NRCS LAND CAPABILITY CLASSES AND SUBCLASSES

Land Capability Class	Description
Class I (1)	Soils have slight limitations that restrict their use.
Class II (2)	Soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require moderate conservation practices.
Class III (3)	Soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require special conservation practices, or both.
Class IV (4)	Soils have very severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants or require very careful management, or both.
Class V (5)	Soils have little or no hazard of erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use mainly to pasture, range, forestland, or wildlife food and cover.
Class VI (6)	Soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuited to cultivation and that limit their use mainly to pasture, range, forestland, or wildlife food and cover.
Class VII (7)	Soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuited to cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to grazing, forestland, or wildlife.
Class VIII (8)	Soils and miscellaneous areas have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plant production and limit their use to recreation, wildlife, or water supply or for esthetic purposes.
Land Capability Subclass	**Description**
Subclass “e”	Soils for which the susceptibility to erosion is the dominant problem or hazard affecting their use. Erosion susceptibility and past erosion damage are the major soil factors that affect soils in this subclass.
Subclass “w”	Soils for which excess water is the dominant hazard or limitation affecting their use. Poor soil drainage, wetness, a high water table, and overflow are the factors that affect soils in this subclass.
Subclass “s”	Soils that have soil limitations within the rooting zone, such as shallowness of the rooting zone, stones, low moisture-holding capacity, low fertility that is difficult to correct, and salinity or sodium content.
Subclass “c”	Soils for which the climate (the temperature or lack of moisture) is the major hazard or limitation affecting their use.

water for long periods of time, and it either does not flood frequently during the growing season or is protected from flooding. Other criteria are also considered.

The California Revised Storie Index Rating, which is derived from NRCS soil map units, is a soil rating based on soil properties that govern a soil’s potential for cultivated agriculture. For simplification, Storie Index ratings have been combined into six grade classes as follows: Grade 1 (excellent), 100 to 80; grade 2 (good), 79 to 60; grade 3 (fair), 59 to 40; grade 4 (poor), 39 to 20; grade 5 (very poor), 19 to 10; and grade 6 (nonagricultural), less than 10 (USDA 2008). These ratings are primarily used in California to define lands eligible for Williamson Act designation as “prime agricultural land.”

The Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act of 1965) was designed as an incentive to retain prime agricultural land and open-space in agricultural use, thereby slowing its conversion to urban and suburban development.

Under the Williamson Act, soils must meet any of the following criteria to be considered "prime agricultural land" (CA Government Code Section 51201(c)):

1. *All land that qualifies for rating as class I or class II in the Natural Resource Conservation Service land use capability classifications.*
2. *Land which qualifies for rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating.*
3. *Land which supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and which has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture.*
4. *Land planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes, or crops which have a nonbearing period of less than five years and which will normally return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than two hundred dollars ($200) per acre.*
5. *Land which has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant products an annual gross value of not less than two hundred dollars ($200) per acre for three of the previous five years.*

The subject property is not in any areas mapped as Williamson Act preserve in San Luis Obispo County (DOC 2009).

For the state of California, the Department of Conservation also uses the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) to categorize important agricultural lands. The FMMP produces maps and statistical data used for analyzing changes in on California's agricultural resources. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality and irrigation status; the best quality land is called Prime Farmland. The maps are updated every two years with the use of a computer mapping system, aerial imagery, public review, and field reconnaissance. In order to be shown on FMMP's Important Farmland Maps as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance, land must meet both the following criteria:

Has been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the Important Farmland Map date. Irrigated land use is determined by FMMP staff by analyzing current aerial photos, local comment letters, and related GIS data, supplemented with field verification.

— AND —

Soil:

The soil must meet the physical and chemical criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance as determined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS compiles lists of which soils in each survey area meet the quality criteria. Factors considered in qualification of a soil by NRCS include:

- *Water moisture regimes, available water capacity, and developed irrigation water supply*
- *Soil temperature range*
- *Acid-alkali balance*
- *Water table*
- *Soil sodium content*
- *Flooding (uncontrolled runoff from natural precipitation)*
- *Erodibility*
- *Permeability rate*
- *Rock fragment content*
- *Soil rooting depth*

The FMMP defines nine categories of land (or water) that may potentially be located on the project site, and these are listed in Table 4.2-2. Most of the property is considered Other Land in the FMMP mapping as shown in Figure 4.2-2. Several areas in the southern portion of the Oster property are mapped as Grazing Land, and a small corridor of Metz sandy loam, 0–5 percent slopes, just north of the Salinas River is mapped as Farmland of Local Potential in the FMMP system.

The County defines Important Agricultural Soils in the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan (San Luis Obispo County COSE 2010: Table SL-2). Important soils are defined in the COSE using NRCS description and map units. The descriptions of the map units for these important soils are summarized in Table 4.2-3 below.

Table 4.2-4 summarizes the soil classifications and ratings of the soils that use NRCS map units that are located within the property.

4.2.2 San Luis Obispo County Plans and Policies

Table 4.2-5 identifies San Luis Obispo County agricultural plans and policies applicable to the property.

TABLE 4.2-2
FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM LAND CATEGORIES

Category	Description
Prime Farmland	Prime Farmland has the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	Farmland of Statewide Importance is similar to prime farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
Unique Farmland	Unique Farmland consists of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Local Importance	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.
Farmland of Local Potential	Lands having the potential for farmland, which have prime or statewide characteristics and are not cultivated.
Grazing Land	Grazing Land is land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.
Urban and Built-up Land	Urban and Built-up Land is 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. Common examples include residential, industrial, commercial, institutional facilities, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, and water control structures.
Other Land	Other Land is land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing, confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities, strip mines borrow pits, and water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as other land.
Water	Perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

4.2.3 Regulatory Setting

Approval of the CUP and Reclamation Plan for the project must include a finding that the proposed use is not detrimental or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity of the use (among other findings required by Title 22, Section 22.62.C.4). This finding must apply to agricultural as well as residential uses in the vicinity. Additionally, the project must be found in compliance with applicable plans and policies contained in Table 4.2-5 (i.e., applicable General Plan Policies).

The Air Pollution Control District of San Luis Obispo County can protect adverse effects to agriculture under Rule 402, Nuisance (Adopted 8/2/76), which states:

TABLE 4.2-3
DESCRIPTIONS OF COSE IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL SOILS

Category	Description
Prime Farmland	Using both federal and state definitions of land that are considered "prime" lands for farming. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) has defined these lands as "Prime Farmland" in the Code of Federal Regulations for Agriculture. The State of California also defines lands that are "prime" for farming as "Prime Agricultural Land" in the (Williamson Act) and the California Coastal Act of 1976. The State's definition of prime agricultural land is based on relevant land capability classifications and the California Revised Storie Index, whether or not land is actually irrigated. The "Prime Farmland" in this Element is based on both federal and state definitions.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	These soils are defined by the USDA NRCS in the Code of Federal Regulations for Agriculture. Farmland of Statewide Importance designation is based on soil physical and chemical criteria, whether or not land is actually irrigated. Farmland of Statewide Importance is identified and mapped as per the Web Soil Survey
Other Productive Soils	Unique Farmland, as defined by the USDA NRCS in the Code of Federal Regulations for Agriculture, have a soil slope of 30 percent or less (except Paso Soil 198, 15 to 50 percent slope), and meets at least two of the following three criteria: 1) California Revised Storie Index is fair, good or excellent; 2) Irrigated Capability Class is one through six; 3) More than 3 percent of the soil type is in irrigated/permanent crop use as of 2008. Criteria 1 and 2 are based upon information from the Web Soil Survey. Criterion 3 is based upon GIS cropland mapping by the San Luis Obispo County Agriculture Department.
Highly Productive Rangeland Soils	These soils meet all of the following criteria as identified on the Web Soil Survey: 1) Produces forage that is equivalent to 60 percent or more of the maximum normal year forage production for that soil survey area; 2) Majority of the forage produced is herbaceous; 3) Slope is less than 30 percent (except soil types Coastal 133 and 168 and Carrizo 130, each 15 to 50 percent slope).

A. A person shall not discharge from any source whatsoever such quantities of air contaminants or other material which cause injury, detriment, nuisance or annoyance to any considerable number of persons or to the public, or which endanger the comfort, repose, health or safety of any such persons or the public, or which cause, or have a natural tendency to cause, injury or damage to business or property.

B. The provisions of Rule 402.A shall not apply to odors emanating from agricultural operations necessary for the growing of crops or the raising of fowl or animals.

Since air contaminants such as fugitive dust could cause damage to plants, this rule would apply to the project due to the potential risk of "damage to business or property."

TABLE 4.2-4
SUMMARY OF SOIL TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS FOR THE SUBJECT PROPERTY

Soil Series Name	Map Unit No.	Acres In Property	Acres In Proposed Quarry	Land Capability Class*	California Revised Storie Index	Farmland Classification NRCS	FMMP Category	COSE Designations
Cieneba coarse sandy loam, 30 to 75 percent slopes	126	107	34	7e/7e	9 (Non-agricultural)	Not Prime Farmland	Other	None
Cieneba-Andregg complex, 30 to 75 percent slopes	127	110	6	7e/7e	12- 19 (Very Poor)	Not Prime Farmland	Other Land (99.75 ac) Grazing Land (10.25 ac)	None
Metz loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes	166	17	<1 (plus 2.1, access road)	4s/3s	64 (Good)	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Other Land (14 ac) Farmland of Local Potential (3 ac)	Farmland of Statewide Importance
Xerofluvents-Riverwash association	212	22	0	6w/6w and 8w/8w	Not Rated	Not Prime Farmland	Grazing Land	None

* Non-Irrigated/Irrigated

TABLE 4.2-5
SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PLANS AND POLICIES

Source	Policy Statement	Discussion	Preliminary Determination
Conservation and Open Space Element/ Policy SL 1.1	Prevent Loss of Topsoil in All Land Uses: Minimize the loss of topsoil by…cooperation between property owners, agricultural operators, agencies, and organizations that will lead to effective soil conservation practices on all lands.	The thin layer of topsoil over the proposed quarry site will be preserved for later restoration.	Potentially consistent
COSE/Policy SL 1.2	Promote Soil Conservation Practices in all Land Uses: Require erosion and sediment control practices during development or other soil-disturbing activities on steep slopes and ridgelines. Requires restoration and re-vegetation of disturbed areas.	Best management practices will be used to minimize the effects of erosion. The thin layer of topsoil over the proposed quarry site will be preserved for later restoration.	Potentially consistent
COSE/Policy SL 3.1	Conserve Important Agricultural Soils: Conserve the Important Agricultural Soils mapped and listed by the COSE. Coordinate with Resource Conservation Districts and local agencies to determine potential impacts and subsequent mitigation measures.	The only listed soil within the proposed quarry site is Metz loamy sand which is considered a Farmland of Statewide Importance. This soil is only present at a portion of the entry way to the quarry, most of which has already been developed on.	Potentially consistent
COSE/Policy WR 1.7	Agricultural operations: Groundwater management strategies will give priority to agricultural operations. Protect agricultural water supplies from competition by incompatible development through land use controls.	The project will not significantly reduce the amount or quality of water for production agriculture as there are no water intensive agriculture uses in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project site.	Potentially consistent
Agriculture Element/ AGP 11	Agricultural Water Supplies: Maintain water resources for production agriculture in both quantity and quality.	The project will not significantly reduce the amount or quality of water for production agriculture as there are no water intensive agriculture uses in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project site.	Potentially consistent

TABLE 4.2-5 (CONTINUED)
SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PLANS AND POLICIES

Source	Policy Statement	Discussion	Preliminary Determination
Agriculture Element/ AGP 12	Pest, Vertebrate, and Weed Management: Assure that pests and noxious weeds are managed on county owned properties so as to avoid impacts on agriculture. Encourage integrated pest management on private and public lands.	This issue is discussed in Section 4.2.6 below.	Potentially consistent
Agriculture Element/ AGP 18	Locate new buildings, access roads, and structures so as to protect agricultural land.	The project site in not presently, nor historically been used for agriculture other than grazing activities, a small orchard, and a few acres of corn on the south side of SR 58. The area where mining will occur is not suitable for agricultural activities due to the steep slopes and poor soil conditions within the proposed mining area.	Potentially consistent

4.2.4 Assessment Methodology

The impact assessment in this EIR is based on a review of soil types on the property and the agricultural ratings; a review of past and current agricultural uses on the property and the vicinity; and, a review of applicable policies and programs in San Luis Obispo County. Representatives of the County Department of Agriculture were consulted to identify the importance of agricultural value on the project site and other issue. Their concerns were taken into account and provided guidance in research and assessment of agricultural impacts.

4.2.5 Significance Criteria

With appropriate consideration of the significance criteria presented in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the County of San Luis Obispo has developed and adopted the following significance criteria to determine project effects for Agricultural Resources within San Luis Obispo County. Accordingly, the Las Pilitas Quarry project will have a significant impact if it will:

1. Converting prime agricultural land to non-agricultural use; and/or
2. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; and/or

3. Involve other changes in the existing environment, which due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of agricultural land (farmland of statewide importance) to non-agricultural use; and/or
4. Impair agricultural use of other property or result in conversion to other uses.

The property does not contain any prime agricultural land or land within a Williamson Act contract, so the first two of the above criteria do not apply. The proposed project would convert a small area of agricultural soil and land to other uses, so the third criteria does apply, and is considered in the analysis that follows below. With respect to potential impairment or other effects on agricultural uses in the general area, two specific issues were identified during the scoping process. These include the potential to introduce weeds or other invasive species into the area, and the potential to create dust that might adversely affect agricultural uses, both of which are discussed below. The effect of the proposed project on water use is discussed in Section 4.13 of this EIR.

4.2.6 Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Loss of Agricultural Land

Development of the quarry site itself will not affect any substantial area of Important Agricultural Soils or areas used for agricultural purposes, but the access road and related improvements will cross agricultural land (farmland of statewide importance). As a result of the project, the loss of agricultural soil and grazing land will amount to approximately 2.1 acres on the north side of SR 58. The project will directly convert 1.2 acres of land containing Metz loamy sand and currently used for grazing, into the project access road, stormwater detention basin, and related improvements. In addition, 0.9 acre of pasture land also containing Metz loamy sand on the north side of SR 58 will become separated from the retained agricultural uses and ranch complex; thus, its usefulness for agricultural purposes may be reduced.

The other remaining grazing uses on the Oster property are expected to continue, including the 1.6 acres of Metz loamy sand used for pasture land south of SR 58, and several acres of rangeland located on the less steep western portion of the property. The loss of the grazing land and Metz loamy sand is considered adverse; however, because of the small area involved, the absence of irrigation improvements, and the relatively low grazing potential of non-irrigated land, this loss would be considered less than significant.

Description of Impact	Mitigation Measure	Residual impact
IMPACT AG-1: Loss of Agricultural Land. The project involves the direct conversion of 1.2 acres of Metz loamy sand, 0–5% slope, which is currently used for grazing, and loss of access to an additional 0.9 acres. This is a relatively small area	MM AG-1: Loss of Agricultural Land. Since this effect is less than significant, no mitigation is required.	Less than significant

Description of Impact	Mitigation Measure	Residual impact
of Important Agricultural Soil and the current agricultural use is of low intensity.		

Introduction of Invasive Species

There are many non-native invasive species in San Luis Obispo County including yellow starthistle, which if left unchecked could have an adverse environmental impact. The construction and operation of the quarry would require the movement of vehicles to and from the project site on a regular basis. These vehicles could potentially bring unwanted invasive species or seeds onto the property. Revegetation and erosion control could also be a source of invasive species introduction if non-native or improper species are used. This is considered a potentially significant impact that can be mitigated.

Description of Impact	Mitigation Measure	Residual impact
IMPACT AG-2: Introduction of Invasive Species. Ground disturbance and regular movement of vehicles into and out of the property, and revegetation efforts during reclamation, will increase the potential for an introduction of invasive weed species. These weed species may impair the agricultural use of other properties near the project.	MM AG-2: Introduction of Invasive Species. Prior to the issuance of the Notice to Proceed, the applicant shall incorporate a Weed Control Program into the Operational Plan and Reclamation Plan for County review and approval. The Weed Control Plan shall include methods, success criteria and a monitoring and reporting program to the satisfaction of the County.	Less than significant

Dust Generation

The development and use of the quarry would involve grading, operations, and aggregate movement that have the potential to generate dust and adversely harm agricultural operations. Due to the use of watering trucks and the nature of the extracted material, dust from the mining operation will be limited and should not carry far beyond the property. Since there are no agricultural operations in the immediate vicinity, there would not be direct impacts from quarry operations. Implementation of dust control measures associated with the proposed quarry will be monitored pursuant to APCD Rule 401 and 403. Indirect impacts, such as truck travel to and from the site, would not contribute significantly to fugitive dust beyond the site vicinity as they will be using SR 58 which is paved with reinforced shoulders and is regularly maintained. Therefore, project impact is less than significant.

Description of Impact	Mitigation Measure	Residual impact
IMPACT AG-3: Dust Generation. Dust will be generated during the quarry development and use which could adversely affect agricultural resources.	MM AG-3: Dust Generation. Mitigation Measure AQ-1b serves as adequate mitigation for Impact AG-3.	Less than significant

Cumulative Effects

The project is about one-half mile from the existing Hanson Santa Margarita Quarry. Both quarries are within the EX1 Extractive Resource Area Combining Designation, as shown on Figure 3-1. In this region, the EX1 Combining Designation is placed over the La Panza Granitics, a large area that is classified as MRZ-2 by the California State Geological Survey (1989:9). Since this Combining Designation is specifically intended to protect mineral resources, it is reasonable to expect that future quarries could be approved and constructed in this area. Areas suitable for aggregate mining, however, are generally steep with shallow soils and are not capable of supporting intensive agricultural use. For this reason, development of future quarries similar to the proposed project is not expected to have a cumulative significant effect on agricultural lands.

Countywide, there was a loss of 5,840 acres of agricultural land from 2006 to 2008 (FMMP). The proposed project would result in a loss of approximately 2.1 acres of grazing land which is relatively small in size and is generally of low productivity. This loss does not contribute a considerable or significant proportion of the total agriculture land in the County or of the loss of agricultural land over time. With proper implementation of best use practices and mitigation measures, the impacts related to the introduction of invasive species would be considered less than significant. Given the lack of agricultural uses within the immediate vicinity and with proper implementation of APCD procedures, the threat of dust damage from this project and other sources in the vicinity is considered less than significant.

In summary, due to the steep topography and poor soils conditions found in high value aggregate areas, and with the continued application of policies and programs designed to help preserve agricultural lands and activities within the County, potential cumulative impacts to Agricultural Resources are less than significant.

Description of Impact	Mitigation Measure	Residual impact
IMPACT AG-4: Cumulative Effects related to Agricultural Resources. The proposed project would result in a loss of approximately 2.1 acres of grazing land which is relatively small in size and is generally of low productivity.	MM AG-4: Cumulative Effects related to Agricultural Resources. Since this effect is less than significant, no mitigation is required.	Less than significant

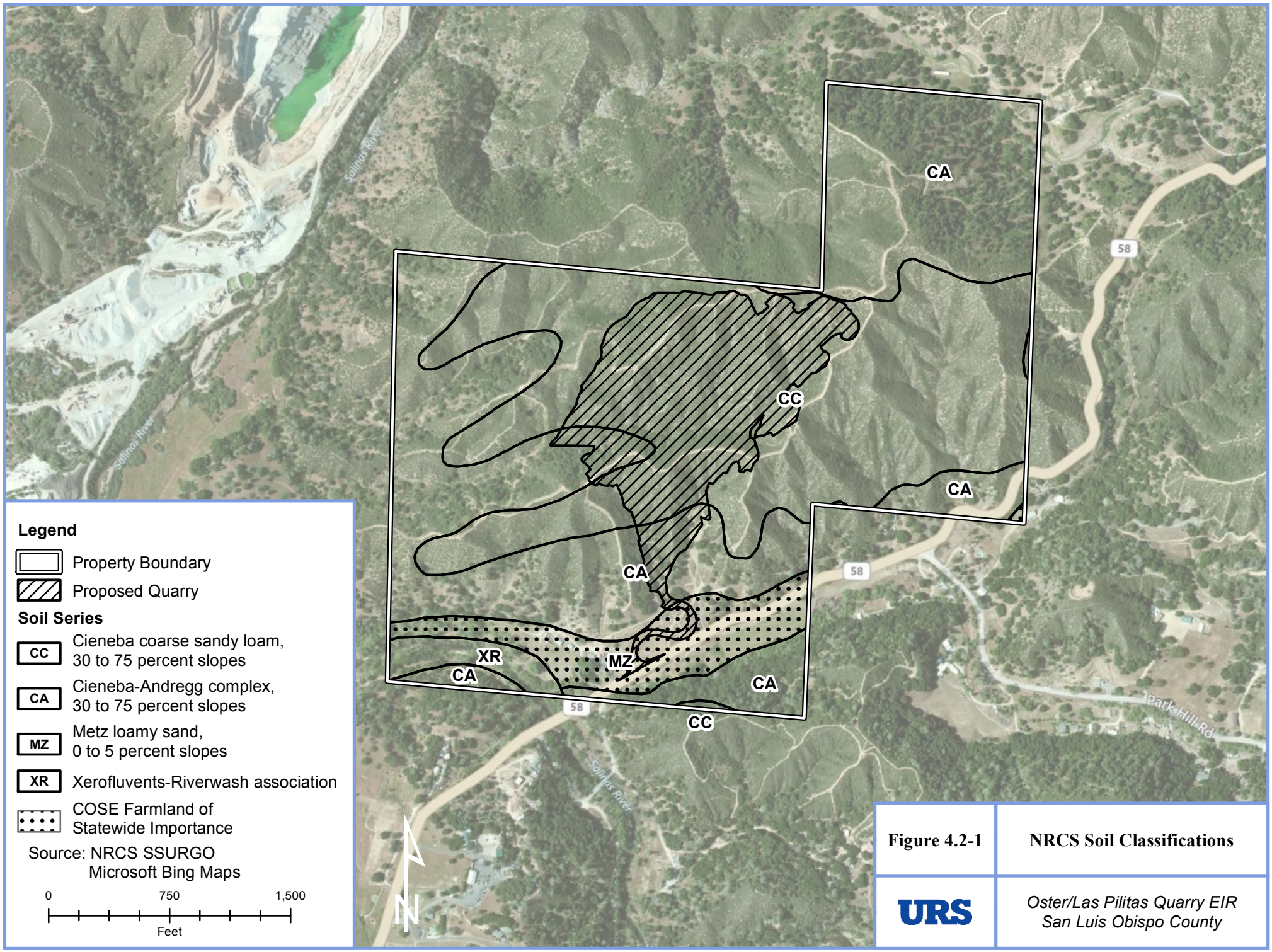

Figure 4.2-1 | **NRCS Soil Classifications**

URS

Oster/Las Pilitas Quarry EIR
San Luis Obispo County

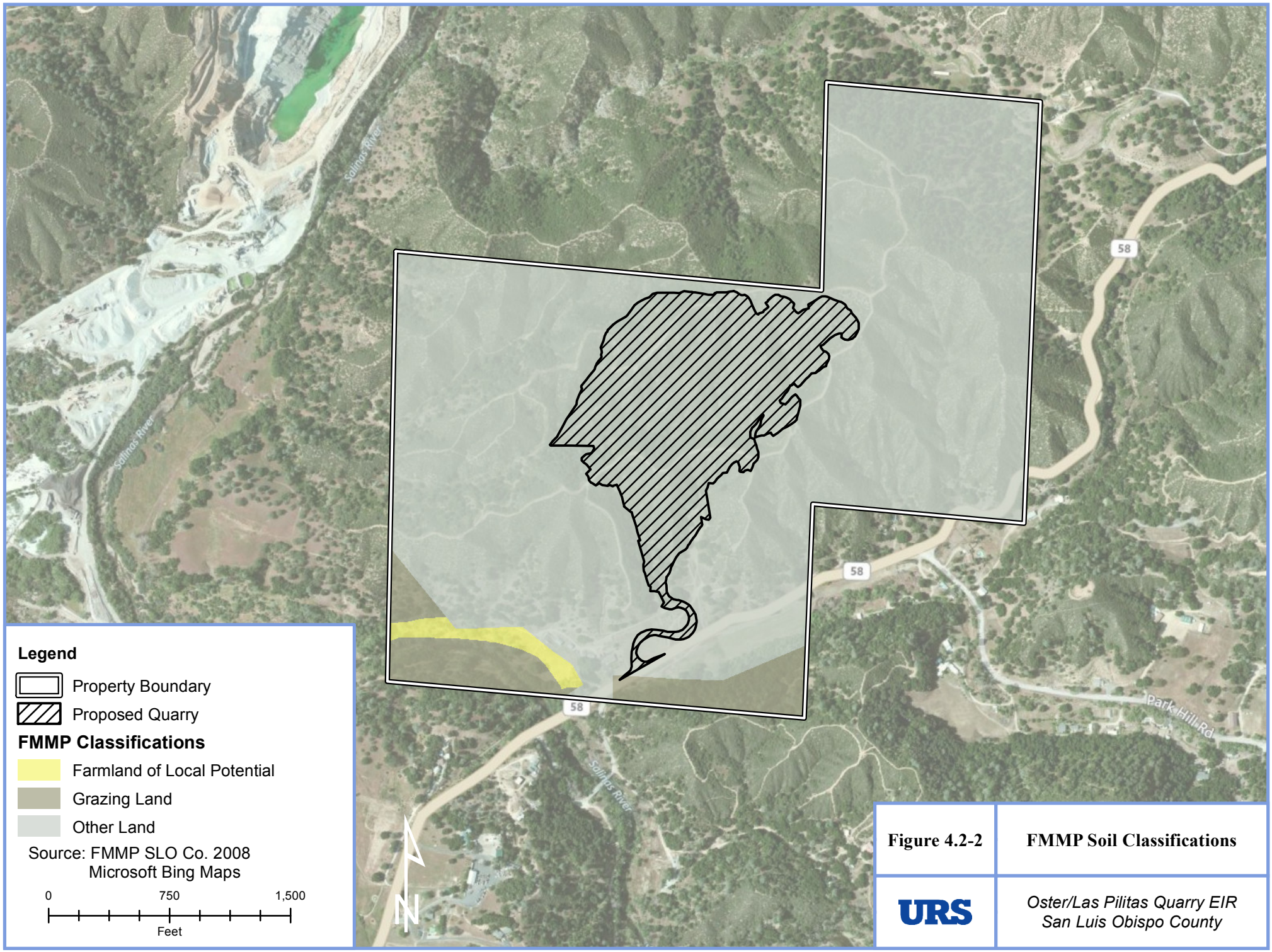

Figure 4.2-2	**FMMP Soil Classifications**
URS	*Oster/Las Pilitas Quarry EIR* *San Luis Obispo County*