3.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 Background and Methodology

3.2.1.1 Regulatory Context

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that project sponsors evaluate the project's potential to affect prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide importance, farmland of local importance, and farmland protected by the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act).[1] Farmlands of concern include all pasturelands, croplands, and forests (even if zoned for development) considered to be prime, unique, or statewide or locally important lands as defined below:

- *Prime farmland*. This is land having the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimal use of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, or products.
- *Unique farmland*. This is land used for producing high-value food and fiber crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture necessary to produce high quality crops or high yields of them economically.
- *Statewide and locally important farmland*. This is land that has been designated as "important" by either a state government (State Secretary of Agriculture or higher office) or by county commissioners or an equivalent elected body. The State Conservationist representing the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) must agree with the designation.

California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)

The State policy used in regulating farmlands is the *California Land Conservation Act of 1965*, which is commonly referred to as the *Williamson Act*. The purpose of the *Williamson Act* is to integrate the protection of open space and agricultural resources into their overall strategies for planning urban growth patterns. The *Williamson Act* allows local governments to enter into private contracts with land owners for the purpose of restricting the land for agricultural or related open space uses. The County of Sonoma is exempt from reduced property tax assessments in return for enrollment under Williamson Act contract since they are a public agency. The polices of California Land Conservation Act include:[2]

Policy LU-9d: Deny General Plan amendments that convert lands outside of designated Urban Service Areas with Class I, II, III soils (U.S. Department of Agriculture) to an urban or rural residential, commercial, industrial, or public/quasi public category unless all of the following criteria, in addition to the designation criteria for the applicable land use category, are met:

- the land use proposed for conversion is not in an agricultural production area and will not adversely affect agricultural operations;
- the supply of vacant or underutilized potential land for the requested use is insufficient to meet project demand;
- no areas with other soil classes are available for non-resource uses in the planning area; and

[1] State of California Department of Conservation, *Williamson Act Program*, available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/lca/Pages/Index.aspx. Accessed April 20, 2011.
[2] Ibid.

- an overriding public benefit will result from the proposed use;

Sonoma County General Plan 2020

The County of Sonoma has implemented an *Agriculture Resources Element* in the General Plan 2020 that establishes policies to insure the stability and productivity of the County's agricultural lands and industries. Any project must comply with the goals and policies related to agriculture within the context of the General Plan 2020.[3]

Sonoma County Right-to-Farm Ordinance

The County of Sonoma revised the Right-to-Farm Ordinance in 1999 to help protect, enhance, and encourage farming operations. The ordinance requires recordation of a declaration acknowledging the right to farm in connection with certain development approvals within 300 feet of any land zoned for agricultural use and does not permit any neighboring property located on or adjacent to agricultural land to oppose any inconvenience or nuisance caused by any type of properly conducted agricultural activity on agricultural land. This would include "discomfort arising from that operation, including, without limitation, noise, odors, fumes, dust, smoke, insects, operation of machinery during any time of day or night, storage or disposal of manure, and ground or aerial application of fertilizers, soil amendments, seeds, and pesticides."[4] This "Declaration Acknowledging Right to Farm" is required before certain development approval and building permits can be issued on or within 300 feet of lands zoned for agricultural use.

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) is the first special district in the nation for the purpose of protecting agricultural lands. The Program uses sales tax for the purchase of conservation easements to not only protect agricultural lands, but protect open space as well. The SCAPOSD protects Sonoma County agricultural land through donations, bargain sales, and conservations easements which are described below:

- *Donations.* Landowners can donate all or a partial interest in land, or gift a conservation easement over the property to the SCAPOSD in return for an income tax reduction, lower estate taxes, and reduced property taxes based on meeting certain criteria.
- *Bargain Sales.* A bargain sale would occur if a landowner sells a piece of property for less than the fair market value and in return is able to claim an income tax reduction between the sale price and the fair market value.
- *Conservation Easements.* A conservation easement is a permanent, recorded deed restriction that transfers certain property rights from the landowner to the SCAPOSD Conservation easements are permanently binding and entitle the SCAPOSD to all property rights transferred regardless of any future sale or will of the land.[5]

3.2.1.2 Thresholds of Significance

According to Appendix G of the *CEQA guidelines*, potential impacts related to agriculture resources would be considered significant if the project would result in any of the following:

[3] County of Sonoma, *Agriculture Resources Element*, available at: http://www.sonomacounty.org/prmd/gp2020/are.pdf.Accessed April 20, 2011.
[4] County of Sonoma, *Right to Farm Ordinance Disclosure*, available at: http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/docs/handouts/pjr-015.pdf. Accessed April 21, 2011.
[5] County of Sonoma, Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, *Protect Your Land*, available at: http://www.sonomaopenspace.org/Content/10003/protect.html. Accessed April, 21, 2011.

1. convert prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide importance, as shown on maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
2. conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; or
3. involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use.

3.2.1.3 Methodologies

The locations of the prime farmlands, unique farmlands, farmlands of statewide importance, and farmlands of local importance, obtained through the California Department of Conservation and the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), were identified and illustrated using the most recent aerial of the Airport and its environs. Guidance through the *Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA*, applicable to aviation use, was used to determine the impact from the conversion of prime farmland.

The locations of the project elements of the Proposed Project were then superimposed on the same aerial photograph to identify where the project elements would have the potential to affect the designated agricultural resources.

3.2.2 Existing Conditions

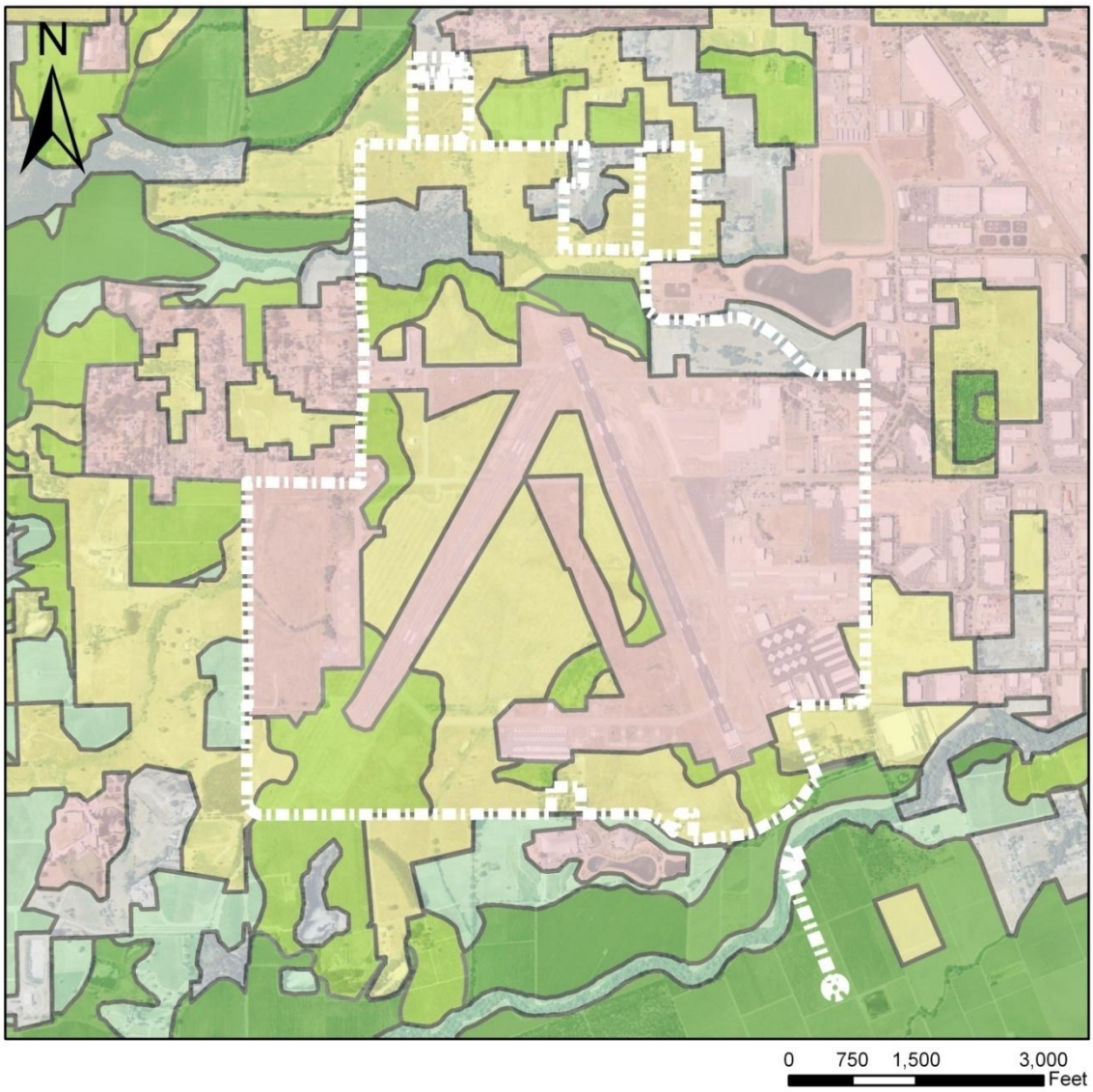
Agricultural resources in the Regional Study Area primarily include vineyards, irrigated vegetable crops, and livestock grazing land. Due to the Airport's geographic location, prime farmland, unique farmland, farmland of statewide importance, and farmland of local importance are all located within the Airport's existing boundary and areas that would be acquired as a result of the Proposed Project (see **Figure 3.2-1**).

Prime farmland is defined as land with the best combination of physical and chemical features for the production of agricultural crops. Such farmland must meet designated specifications for the following criteria based on the NRCS: water, soil temperature range, acid-alkali balance, water table, soil sodium content, flooding, and erodibility, permeability, rock fragment content, and rooting depth.[6] Fifteen acres of prime farmland exist within Airport boundaries north of the approach ends for Runways 14 and 19 (see **Figure 3.2-1**). About one acre of designated, but currently uncultivated, prime farmland exists in the area that would be acquired as part of the Proposed Project.

Farmland of statewide importance for Sonoma County includes farmlands other than prime farmland that have a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. Approximately 116 acres of farmland of statewide importance exists within the existing Airport boundary (see **Figure 3.2-1**). Approximately 49 acres of farmland of statewide importance exist in the area that would be acquired as part of the Proposed Project.

[6] California Department of Conservation, *Soil Candidate Listing for Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance*, available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Documents/soil_criteria.pdf. Accessed on February 7. 2011.

Figure 3.2-1
EXISTING FARMLAND



SOURCE: Department of Conservation of Land Resource Protection, 2009
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

Unique Farmland is used for the production of specific high quality value crops during two update cycles as specified by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). However, unique farmland does not meet the criteria for prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance. These crops must have a special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply in order to be classified as farmland designated as unique.[7] There is no unique farmland within the Airport's existing boundary (see **Figure 3.2-1**).

Farmlands of local importance are those farmlands important to the local economy as defined by the County of Sonoma's local advisory committee. For Sonoma County, hayland producing areas as well as those lands capable of producing such crops such as grapes and corn are considered locally important.[8] Approximately 290 acres of farmland of local importance exists within the existing Airport boundary (see **Figure 3.2-1**). About 33 acres of farmland of local importance exist in the area that would be acquired as part of the Proposed Project.

3.2.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact 3.2.1: Conversion of Farmland as a Result of Short-Term Project Elements

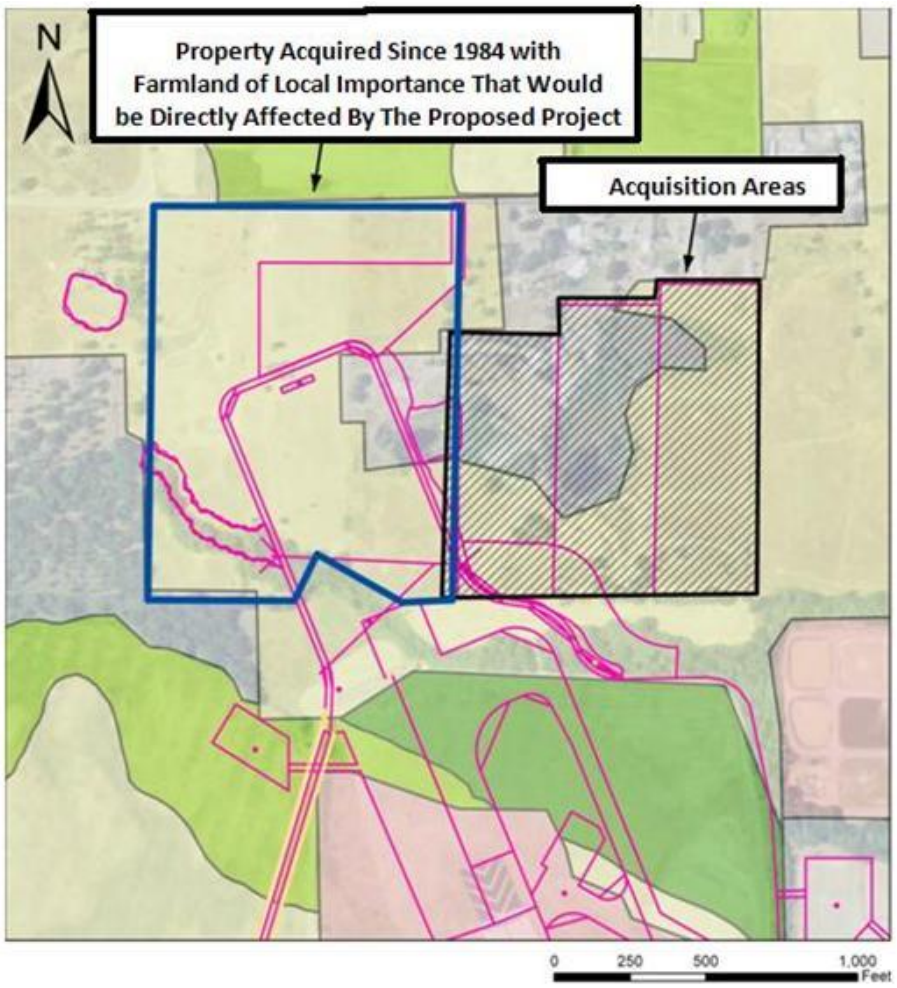
As a result of the project elements that would occur prior to 2015, the Proposed Project would convert approximately 14 acres of prime farmland, 17 acres of farmland of statewide importance, and 28 acres of farmland of local importance to non-agricultural uses. The 14 acres of prime farmland, which are on Airport property and have not been under agricultural use for more than 60 years, would be used to extend the two runways and their respective RSAs. However, since this land has been in ownership by the County for aviation-related uses since 1949 (i.e., prior to 1984 when the *Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)* was enacted), and this is not considered to be an impact to farmlands within Sonoma County.[9] The FPPA is intended to minimize the impact Federal programs have on unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. However, activities not subject to the FPPA include construction within an existing right-of-way purchased on or before August 4, 1984.[10] Implementation of the short-term project elements would convert 17 acres of farmland of statewide importance and 28 acres of farmland of local importance to non-agricultural uses. This conversion, however, would not be considered significant because this farmland has not been under cultivation since the Airport's ownership of this property. Fourteen acres of the farmland that would be converted directly is located on parcels that have been acquired since 1984 (see **Figure 3.2-2** for a graphic depicting these parcels). This is not a significant impact because no agricultural lands would be taken out of production.

Mitigation Measure 3.2.1

No mitigation is warranted.

[7] Ibid.
[8] California Department of Conservation, *Farmland of Local Importance*, available at: http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Documents/Local_definitions_00.pdf. Accessed on February 7, 2011.
[9] U.S. Code. 1981. *Farmland Protection Policy Act*, 7 USC Subsection 4200.
[10] National Resource Conservation Service, *Farmland Protection Policy Act*, available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/fppa/. Accessed June 10, 2011.

Figure 3.2-2
CONVERSION OF FARMLAND OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE



SOURCE: Department of Conservation of Land Resource Protection, 2009
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

Impact 3.2.2: Acquisition of Property Containing Farmland as a Result of Short-Term Project Elements

The Proposed Project would affect approximately 13 acres of farmland of local importance for short-term projects that would occur prior to 2015. **Table 3.2-1** and **Figure 3.2-3** show the location and acres associated with each parcel in Area 1 to be acquired by the County of Sonoma. These three parcels located within Area 1, would be leased for an agricultural operation or maintained as fallow agricultural land for runway protection purposes. Therefore, no loss of farmlands would occur as a result of Airport's short-term property acquisition projects.

Mitigation Measure 3.2.2

No mitigation is warranted.

Table 3.2-1
ACQUISTION OF PROPERTY CONTAINING FARMLAND AS A RESULT OF SHORT-TERM PROJECT ELEMENTS

Farmland Area	Assessor Parcel Numbers	Total Acres	Acres of Farmland	Type of Farmland
Area 1	164-170-011	8.2	6.6	Local Importance
	164-170-010	7.5	3.2	Local Importance
	164-170-004	6.6	2.7	Local Importance

SOURCE: Sonoma County, 2010
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

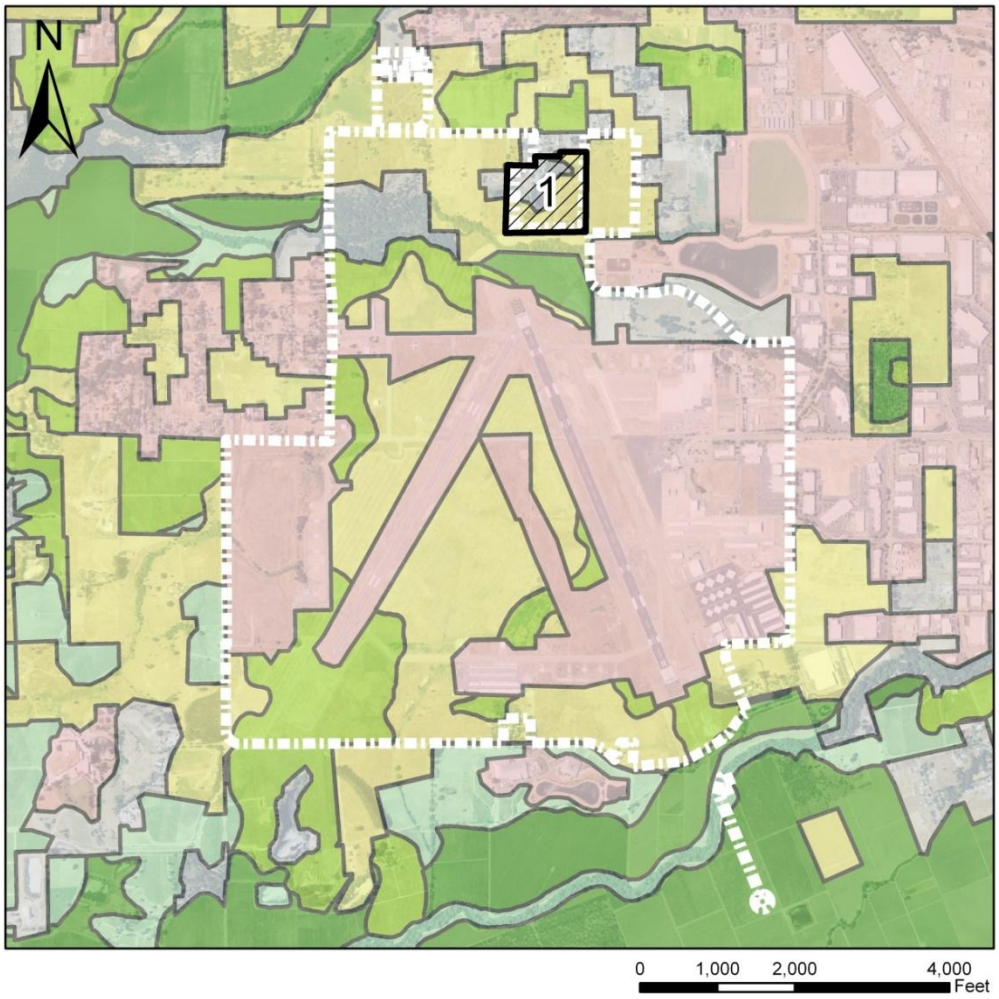
Impact 3.2.3: Acquisition of Property Containing Farmland Associated with Long-Term Project Elements

The Proposed Project would affect approximately one acre of prime farmland, two acres of unique farmland, 49 acres of farmland of statewide importance, and 20 acres of farmland of local importance in designated acquisition Areas 2 through 8. **Table 3.2-2** and **Figure 3.2-4** show the location, acres, and type of farmland associated with each parcel in Areas 2 through 8. The eleven parcels located within these seven areas would not be converted to non-agricultural uses because all would be leased for an agricultural operation or maintained as fallow agricultural land for runway protection purposes. Therefore, no loss of farmlands would occur as a result of long-term property acquisition projects.

Mitigation Measure 3.2.3

No mitigation is warranted.

Figure 3.2-3
ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY CONTAINING FARMLAND AS A RESULT OF SHORT-TERM PROJECT ELEMENTS



Legend

- Prime Farmland
- Farmland of Statew ide Importance
- Unique Farmland
- Urban and Built Up Area
- Other Land
- Farmland of Local Importance
- STS Property Boundary
- 5 Farmland Parcel Area (Future)
- Land to be Acquired

SOURCE: Department of Conservation of Land Resource Protection, 2009
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

Table 3.2-2
ACQUISTION OF PROPERTY CONTAINING FARMLAND ASSOCIATED WITH LONG-TERM PROJECT ELEMENTS

Farmland Area	Assessor Parcel Numbers	Total Acres	Acres of Farmland	Type of Farmland
Area 2	057-070-044	23.6	16.9	Statewide Importance
	057-070-043	22.0	20.7	Statewide Importance
	057-070-043	22.0	1.3	Unique
Area 3	059-200-002	2.5	2.5	Local Importance
Area 4	059-200-010	1.5	1.5	Local Importance
Area 5	059-200-018	14.0	1.0	Prime
	059-200-018	14.0	0.7	Unique
	059-200-018	14.0	12.3	Local Importance
Area 6	164-150-025	1.0	0.2	Local Importance
Area 7	164-160-002	20.0	11.7	Statewide Importance
Area 8	066-220-042	3.0	3.0	Local Importance

SOURCE: Sonoma County, 2010
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

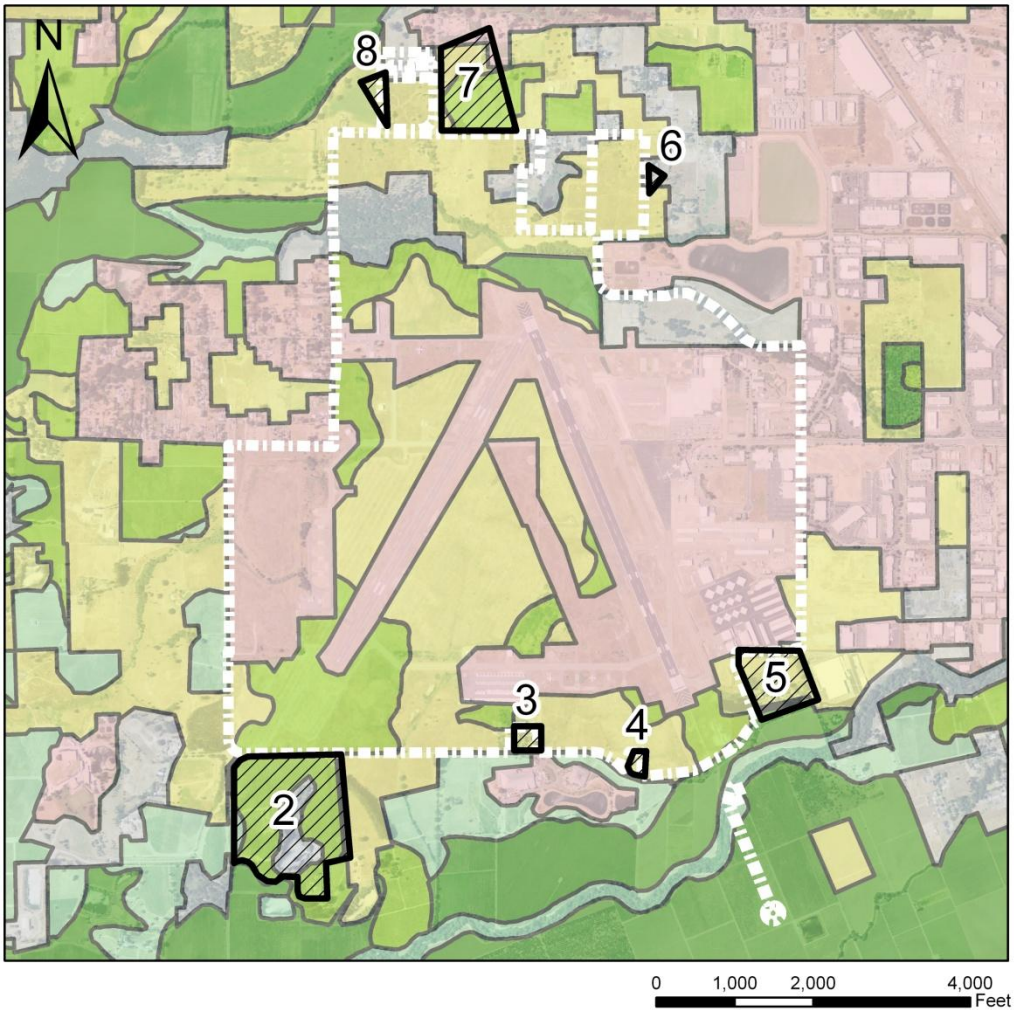
Impact 3.2.4: Acquisition of Property Containing Williamson Act Farmlands Associated with Long-Term Project Elements

As a result of the Proposed Project, the County would acquire Williamson Act Farmlands, located in acquisition Areas 2 and 5 (Assessor parcels #057-070-044, 057-070-043, and 059-200-018) (see **Figure 3.2-5**) prior to future project implementation. The County of Sonoma would terminate all Williamson Act contracts on these parcels. This process is called *Williamson Act Program – Easement Exchanges*. It would provide a voluntary recession for the County of Sonoma to cancel the Williamson Act contracts and simultaneously dedicate a permanent agricultural conservation easement on another land. An agricultural conservation easement is less than a fee simple interest in land and includes the right to prevent future development or improvement of land.[11] The value of this agriculture conservation easement must be equal or greater than the cancellation fee required to cancel the contract. This conservation easement must meet criteria established under the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) found in Government Code section 51256. [12]

Figure 3.2-4

[11] California Department of Conservation, *Williamson Act – Easement Exchange Program*, available at: http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/lca/easement_exchanges/Documents/Ezmt_Exchange_Fact_Sheet_04.pdf. Accessed April 21, 2011.
[12] California Farmland and Conservancy Program, *Guidelines for the Preparation of Agricultural Conservation Easements Appraisals*, available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/cfcp/Documents/CFCP%20Appraisal%20Guidelines.pdf. Accessed April 21, 2011.

ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY CONTAINING FARMLAND ASSOCIATED WITH LONG-TERM PROJECT ELEMENTS

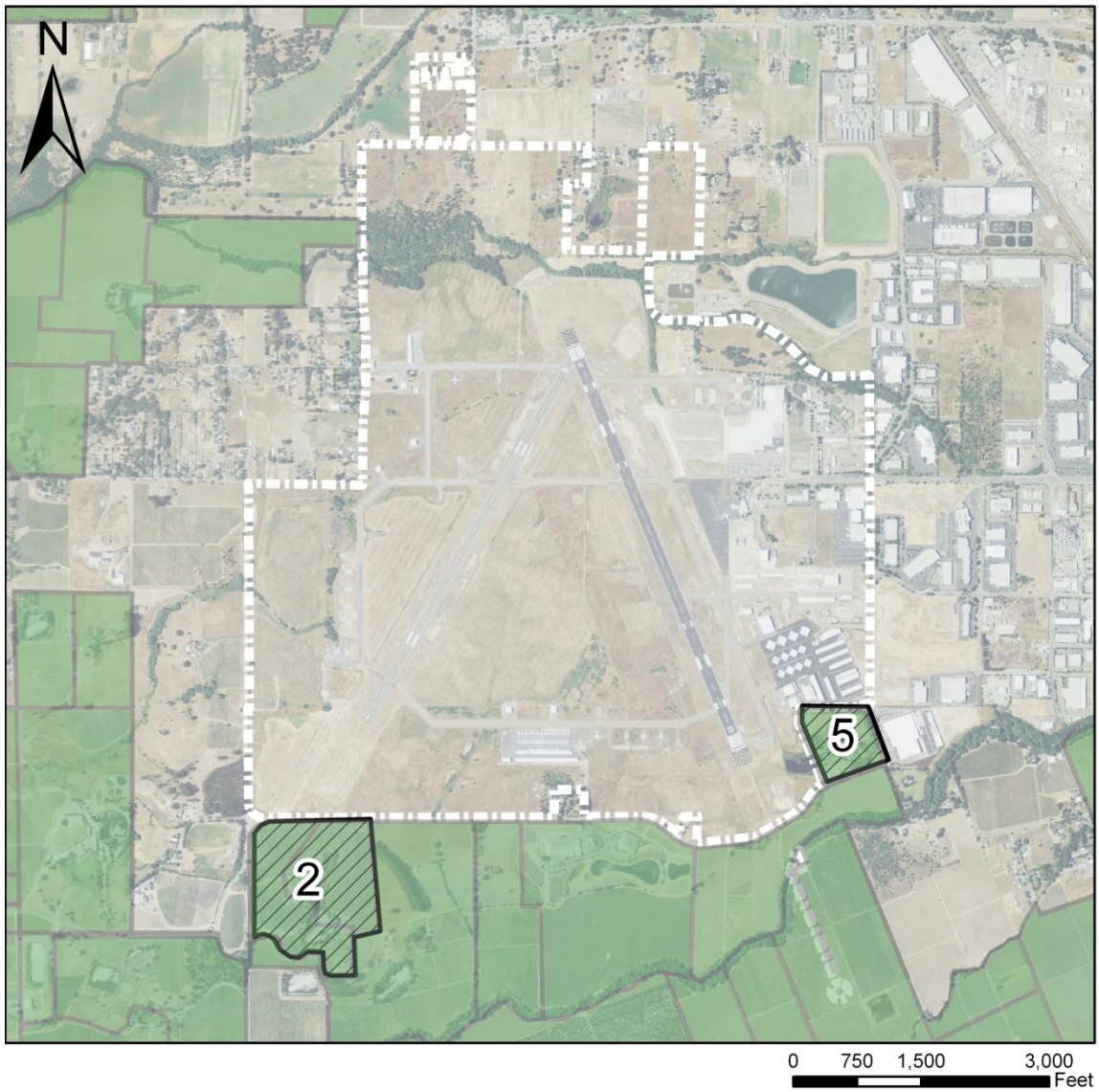


Legend

- Prime Farmland
- Farmland of Statewide Importance
- Unique Farmland
- Urban and Built Up Area
- Other Land
- Farmland of Local Importance
- STS Property Boundary
- 5 — Farmland Parcel Area (Future)
- Land to be Acquired

SOURCE: Department of Conservation of Land Resource Protection, 2009
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

Figure 3.2-5
ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY CONTAINING WILLIAMSON ACT FARMLANDS



SOURCE: Department of Conservation of Land Resource Protection, 2009
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

Mitigation Measure 3.2.4

The County of Sonoma shall seek approval for a Williamson Act easement exchange for the approximately 50 acres of farmland currently under Williamson Act contracts. The proposal for this process would be reviewed and submitted to the California Department of Conservation (CDOC). Once approval has been made, the County would be able to rescind the Williamson Act contract and simultaneously place other land under an agricultural conservation easement. Further details on the policy and procedure for this action are located in the Procedure for *Permits on Parcels Under Williamson Act Contracts.*[13]

[13] Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, *Procedure for Permits on Parcels Under Williamson Act Contracts*, available at: http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/docs/policies/8-1-8.pdf. Accessed June 10, 2011.