

3.2 Effects Found Not Significant During Initial Study

Two resource areas were found to have less than significant effects as detailed in the County Environmental Checklist for the Project (refer to Appendix A, which contains the CEQA Initial Study – Environmental Checklist Form), incorporated by reference into this EIR. Prior to approval of the 2011 County General Plan, the site was specifically subject to environmental review associated with a then-proposed project. Detailed environmental evaluation was undertaken for a number of environmental issues. For all topics related to two of those resource issues, agriculture and minerals, review was accepted as complete in a 2007 County Assessment Letter. For both of those issues, on-site resources were identified as less than significant. The on-site conditions supporting those assessments have not changed since that evaluation—the surface soils/geologic formations generally have not been disturbed. Additional review also has been undertaken as part of the current Project, as addressed below and in Appendix A to this EIR. The following text addresses data in brief, consistent with the County EIR Report Format and General Content Requirements (County 2006). The reader is also referred to the County CEQA Checklist Form (noted above as part of Appendix A to this EIR).

3.2.1 Agricultural Resources

County Guidelines for Determining Significance – Agricultural Resources (2007k), provide specific thresholds for review of potential agriculture impacts. County thresholds for identification of significant agricultural resources include (not only) current use, but also characterization of Project soils and availability of water. Each of these criteria is discussed below.

Direct Impacts

The majority of on-site Project site soils are mapped as low-fertility soils such as the Las Posas Fine Sandy Loams (LpD2, LrG, and LpE2), Escondido Very Fine Sandy Loam (EsE2), and Cienega-Fallbrook Rocky Sandy Loam (CnG2), with Classifications IV, VI, and VII and Storie Indexes of between 8 and 33. These low fertility and poor soil types comprise over 100 acres (approximately 91 percent) of the Project site. Class IV through VII soils have limitations that restrict the choice of crops and are generally only suitable for grazing or wildlife habitat (NRCS 1973).

Class II or better soils comprising only 10 acres of the Project site (RECON 2006). The Class II soils consist of 0.54 acre of Visalia Sandy Loam (VaB), located in a small pocket along the northern border, and 9.5 acres of Wyman Loam, (WmB & WmC) located in the northwestern portion of the Project site (approximately nine percent of the Project site). Wyman and Visalia soils are generally considered to be of high fertility and useful for a wide variety of crops such as citrus, truck crops, field crops, tomatoes, flowers, and specialty crops.

The Project site does not contain Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. According to the State Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), only Farmland of Local Importance (approximately 20 acres) and “Other” (approximately 91 acres) are present. Farmland of Local Importance is land that meets all the characteristics of prime and statewide farmland, with the exception of irrigation. “Other” includes timber, brush, wetlands,

riparian habitats not suitable for cattle grazing, vacant and non-agricultural land surrounded by development, etc.

Based on a site visit and a review of historic aerial photography, as well as a prior agricultural report prepared for the property (RECON 2006), there is no evidence of agricultural use on the project site for over 65 years. In order to qualify for the Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance designations, land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the last FMMP mapping date. Given the lack of agricultural use on the site, the Farmland of Local Importance designation of this area according to the State is incorrect. As noted in Appendix A, the Farmland designation was likely misapplied as a result of the large scale of the Statewide mapping effort—which assigns Farmland designations based on aerial photography and limited ground verification.

The Project site also has a “low” rating for water under the County guidelines, based on the associated criteria provided in Table 3 in the Guidelines for Determining Significance – Agricultural Resources (2007k). Specifically, Table 3 identifies a low rating for water under several applicable criteria, including a scenario where both of the following conditions apply:

1. County Water Authority Service Status: The site is outside or inside the County Water Authority, but infrastructure connections are not available at the site and no meter is installed.
2. Groundwater Aquifer Type and Well Presence: The site is located in an alluvial or sedimentary aquifer, but has no existing well.

With respect to condition No. 1, the Project site is within the County Water Authority_service area, but no water-related infrastructure or meter is available at the site. The closest known water supply infrastructure includes the following two facilities owned by Rincon MWD: (1) an existing 12-inch potable water line in Harmony Grove Road approximately 500 feet north of the site; and (2) an existing 8-inch potable water line located in Country Club Drive approximately 800 feet west of the project site near the Harmony Grove Spiritualist Association.

With respect to condition No. 2, there are no known existing or previous groundwater wells located within the site or immediate vicinity. This conclusion is based on field investigations conducted as part of the current EIR analysis, as well as a number of previous and current technical studies prepared for the Project site (ASM 2016; Geocon 2009, as amended 2014; RECON 2006). From the above information, it is likely that groundwater was not used for historical agricultural operations at the site. Accordingly, as noted above and pursuant to Table 3 of the County Agricultural Guidelines, the Project site is assumed to have a low water rating.

Therefore, due to lack of on-site water, generally poor identified soil quality, and lack of a recent history of agricultural production (leading to lack of Prime, Unique or Statewide Importance farmlands), the Project Checklist identified direct impacts to agricultural resources as **less than significant**.

Indirect Impacts

The 2006 RECON study also evaluated indirect impacts related to a (then ongoing) agricultural operation (the De Raadt Dairy on the former Kesting Dairy site), and consisting of edge effects which can occur where residences from a development are located close to agricultural operations and impacts occur (e.g., trespassing, crop pilfering, heavy traffic, noise or odor complaints, or other nuisances). The De Raadt Dairy was located across Country Club Drive from the Project, where the HGV future Equestrian Ranch is now proposed. During technical review regarding potential development of the Harmony Grove Meadows project, that project was preliminarily identified as having a potential impact due to the proximity of planned residential units to the approximately 30 head cow/calf operation. The agricultural use of the (current) HGV parcel west of Country Club Drive is now defunct. The feeding and milking areas have been removed and the site is currently in use as a staging area for the larger HGV construction north of Harmony Grove Road. The area is, however, identified as an Equestrian Ranch (with some horse boarding, a mare motel, riding rings, etc.) in the Final HGV approved project. As a result, noise or odor complaints or other nuisances could still occur.

When edge effects are likely to occur, agricultural buffers between 50 and 1000 feet are usually recommended in order to minimize these effects. Country Club Drive would provide some separation between these two uses as the existing road right-of-way width of 60 feet would provide a buffer. Adjacent properties to the west of the Project currently have, and may continue to have, horses as part of their residential use. These are residential properties with large-animal keeping activities, however, and are not characterized as an agricultural operation that could be converted. Regardless, there is a potential for nuisance effects related to large-animal keeping. These potential nuisance effects would be reduced to below a level of significance through the use of an environmental design feature. Disclosure statements would be included in sales documentation for all proposed residential units. The statements would notify potential owners that the adjacent property could potentially be used for agricultural operations and that there could be associated issues such as odors, noise, and vectors. Indirect impacts were found less than significant with the inclusion of this environmental design feature. The small potential number of large animals associated with abutting residential lots, the buffer provided by Country Club Drive and associated landscaping that would provide a buffer between the future Equestrian Ranch and HGV South, and the disclosure statement regarding the future equestrian ranch required as an environmental design feature (see Table 1-2 and Chapter 7.0), all combine to render indirect Project impacts to agricultural resources as **less than significant**.

Conflicts with Agricultural Zoning or Williamson Act Contracts

The Project would not result in a significant conflict in zoning for agricultural use, because the site is designated Semi-rural Residential 0.5 in the County's General Plan. Additionally, the Project site's land is not under a Williamson Act Contract. Similarly, the County does not have any existing Timberland Production Zones and the Project is not located in the vicinity of forest resources. Therefore, Project implementation would not conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forestland, timberland or timberland production zones. Therefore, impacts to County zoning would be **less than significant**, with **no impact** to lands under existing Williamson Act contract or forest lands.

Cumulative Impacts

The area surrounding the Project site has limited grove uses associated with an estate residential use within 0.25 mile of the Project. Active agricultural operations consisting of avocado and/or citrus orchards commonly operate among residential uses and create minimal land use conflicts due to the nature of the agricultural use. In addition to this general compatibility, in this case, the active agricultural operations are separated from proposed land uses on the Project site and by other developed residential parcels. Therefore, there would be **no impacts** related to cumulative-level conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Farmland of Local Importance would occur as a result of Project implementation.

3.2.2 Mineral Resources

A Mineral Resources Evaluation was prepared for the Proposed Project (Geocon 2015b, Appendix R). Several quarries were active directly north of the site from 1923 through the 1950s; the nearest aggregate mine is the “Harmony Grove Quarries,” located in granitic rock approximately 0.5 mile north of the site that was last mined in 1994. The Project site is underlain in part by Quaternary-age alluvium/colluvium, primarily consisting of silty sand to sandy clay, and has been classified by the California Department of Conservation – Division of Mines and Geology as an area of “Potential Mineral Resource Significance” (MRZ-3). The alluvium/colluvium is further underlain by Cretaceous-age granitic rock.

The Mineral Resources Evaluation determined the alluvium/colluvium that underlies the Project site would not meet the minimum requirements for commercially viable sand products such as Sand Equivalent 30 (SE-30). With respect to the potential for aggregate resources, the air-percussion borings performed on site indicate that the granitic rock that underlies the alluvium/colluvium is deeply weathered to depths of at least 40 to 50 feet below the ground surface and would not be viable for aggregate production. In addition, the Project site is adjacent to existing and proposed residential areas, which would be incompatible with future extraction of mineral resources on the Project site. A future mining operation at the Project site would likely create a significant impact to neighboring properties for issues such as noise, air quality, and traffic. Therefore, since the material that underlies the Project site would not be economically viable to extract and since incompatible land uses are adjacent to the project, implementation of the Project would result in **less than significant impacts** to the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state.

The Project site is not located in an area that contains MRZ-2 designated lands, nor is it located within 1,300 feet of such lands. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in the loss of availability of locally important mineral resource(s). Therefore, **no impacts** from the loss of availability of a known mineral resource of locally important mineral resource recovery (extraction) site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan would occur as a result of the Proposed Project.