4.2 AGRICULTURE AND FOREST RESOURCES

The section describes existing agricultural and forest resources in the plan area and the policies and regulations applicable to these resources. Potential impacts to agricultural and forest resources resulting from adoption of the New General Plan are described and mitigation measures are provided to address potentially significant impacts. Information within this section is derived from maps published by the Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Division of the California Department of Conservation and Forest Service.

4.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The plan area was not historically used for major or large-scale agricultural production. Agricultural uses were generally limited to harvesting timber and small-scale farming and livestock activities. During the rancho period through the 20th century, livestock was raised and timber was culled from the foothills.

In the early 20th century Bayfront portions of the plan area saw urban development, including commercial and water transportation facilities. Limited portions of the plan area were used in small-scale and personal farming and livestock activities. A chrysanthemum industry with greenhouses around Woodside Road and the Kentfield Horgan Ranch was prominent up to World War II. These activities mostly disappeared as the plan area became more urbanized in the years following World War II. The development of the Horgan Ranch (Selby Neighborhood) was the last large agricultural tract with greenhouse uses to be developed. Some foothill areas continued to host cattle grazing well into the latter half of the twentieth century, but no large-scale grazing has occurred in the last 15 years or more.

Areas within the Bayfront portion of the plan area have historically, been used for salt production. The salt crystallization ponds, located north of U.S. 101 along Westpoint Slough, have low-lying areas on the edge of southern San Francisco Bay and have been used intermittently in salt production since the early 20th century. Salts are created for harvest through a multi-year process involving the dehydration of brine (salt water) claimed from the sea. The salt crystallization ponds in the City include a number of different crystallizer ponds and beds used in the various stages of salt production. At its peak, the salt crystallization ponds were estimated to have produced and shipped 350,000 tons of salt annually.¹

Farmland Classification

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) administers the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), California’s statewide agricultural land inventory. Four classifications of farmland, including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide

Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance, are considered valuable; any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered an adverse impact. Other categories of land that are not protected by the DOC including Grazing Land, Urban and Built Up Land, and Other Land. Farmland is classified according to its ability to support crops or livestock. Topography, climate, soil quality, and available irrigation water all factor into the FMMP farmland classifications. FMMP farmland is described below in order of productivity, from the most productive to the least productive.

**Prime Farmland** is land with the best combination of physical and chemical features to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply necessary to produce sustained high yields. Soil must meet the physical and chemical criteria provided by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Prime Farmland must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to mapping date. The San Mateo County Important Farmland Map was last updated in 2006. Thus, for the land to be eligible as Prime Farmland, the area must have been used for agricultural production after the year 2002.

**Farmland of Statewide Importance** is similar to Prime Farmland but with minor differences, such as greater slopes or lesser ability of the soil to store moisture. Farmland of Statewide Importance must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to the 2006 mapping date for the San Mateo County Important Farmland Map.

**Unique Farmland** is used for the production of the state’s leading agricultural crops but may contain lesser quality soils than Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. These lands are usually irrigated but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards found in some climatic zones in California. Unique Farmland must have been used for crops at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

**Farmland of Local Importance** is included in the FMMP classifications to allow each county in California the opportunity to define locally important lands that may not be included in the above categories. According to the Department of Conservation, San Mateo County has determined that there is no Farmland of Local Importance in San Mateo County.

**Other Categories of Land.** As identified previously, these categories of land, including Grazing Lands, Urban and Built Up Land and Other Lands are not protected by the DOC. Grazing lands are not typically considered valuable farmland whose conversion from grazing use requires mitigation. Urban and Built-Up Land is a category that reflects areas that are in permanent urban use with little or no likelihood of reversion to agricultural use. FMMP classifies “Other Land” as blocks of vacant and nonagricultural land, at least 40 acres in size, surrounded on all sides by urban development. In the City, the largest land area with the “Other Land” designation is Bair Island.
Forest Land Classification

Forest land is land that can support 10-percent native treecover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions, and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits. Timberland is land, other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the State Board of Forestry as experimental forest land, which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of any commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products. There is currently no forest land or timberland located within the plan area.

Agricultural Resources in Redwood City and the Plan Area

As shown on Figure 4-2.1, the vast majority of lands within the plan area are designated by the FMMP as Urban and Built-Up Land. These areas cover the Downtown, central neighborhoods, Redwood Shores, the Port and some of the Bayfront lands, and foothill neighborhoods. There are no areas of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance within the City or the plan area boundaries.

Some lands in Edgewood County Park (approximately one half of which are within the plan area) are designated by FMMP as “Grazing Land” and “Other Land.” According to the San Mateo County Department of Parks, grazing has not occurred in Edgewood County Park for more than 16 years. San Mateo County declared Edgewood County Park a “nature preserve” in 1993. The San Mateo County Department of Parks periodically brings goats into Edgewood County Park together as brush clearance. These clearance periods are temporary in nature and are typically considered primarily as a brush and weed abatement activity, rather than as an agricultural use.2

Some lands along the Bayfront, including Bair Island, Grecco Island, and the Salt crystallization ponds are classified as Other Land. The approximately 1,433 acre salt crystallization ponds are classified by FMMP as “Other Lands.” In 2006, the property-owner, Cargill, announced its intention to the City to cease salt production at this site and since then has submitted a proposal to the City3 for development of the site with a mix of residential, commercial, recreational, and other development.

The Cargill Property has two land use designations within the existing General Plan, which are carried forward without change in the New General Plan: “Open Space/Future Development Expanding Limits of Urbanization” and “Open Space/Unimproved Areas Devoted to Preservation of Natural Resources, the Managed Production of Resources, Outdoor Recreation, or Public Health and Safety.” While most of the salt crystallization

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2 Information in this paragraph was developed from personal communication with Sam Hershberg, planner, San Mateo County Department of Parks, March 9, 2009.
3 The City received an application for the development of the salt crystallization ponds site in May 2009.
Redwood City Important Farmlands and Williamson Act Lands


Legend
- Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Lands, 2006
- Williamson Act Lands, 2006
- Urban & Built Up Land
- Non-Prime Agricultural Lands
- Grazing
- Other
- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence

1 inch equals 5,500 feet

Redwood City Important Farmlands and Williamson Act Lands

Geografia Consulting 04.06.10
pond area has been under a Williamson Act contract, as of October 2009, the salt crystallization ponds property owner filed a non-renewal notice for the property’s Williamson Act status, which will ultimately remove the lands from the Williamson Act contract.

4.2.2 Regulatory Setting

California Department of Conservation

The DOC, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the FMMP, which monitors the conversion of the state’s farmlands to and from agricultural uses. The map series identifies eight classifications and uses a minimum mapping unit size of 10 acres. The FMMP also produces a biannual report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use. The FMMP sets standards and relies upon information from National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil surveys, NRCS land inventory and monitoring criteria, and land use and water availability. While the FMMP provides an informational service, it does not constitute state regulation of local land use decisions.

The DOC also has certain responsibilities regarding the Williamson Act, especially when the use of land subject to a Williamson Act contract is changed or a contract is to be cancelled. If the land is proposed to be transferred to a public agency, or if the land is to be used for public improvements, the DOC reviews the proposal to determine its consistency with the purposes of the Williamson Act and its effect on agricultural land.

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, has been in effect since 1965. The intent of the Williamson Act was to provide a tax incentive to limit the conversion of farmlands to non-agricultural use. In agricultural areas experiencing urbanization, farmlands could be assessed not necessarily for their value in agricultural use, but instead for urban uses. In such areas that were urbanizing rapidly, farmlands could have significantly greater assessed value for non-agricultural uses. Such assessments would typically lead to greater property taxes on the agricultural land, and would thus provide a financial enticement to actually convert the land to non-agricultural use.

The Williamson Act is a voluntary program that allows property owners to have their property assessed for agricultural production value rather than at the current market value for any other use. The property owner would not have to pay higher property taxes, as long as the land remained in agricultural production. To participate in the program the area was required to consist of 100 contiguous acres of agricultural land under one or more ownerships.

Upon approval of an application by the City Council (or County Board of Supervisors within unincorporated areas), the agricultural preserve is established, and the land within the preserve is restricted to agricultural and compatible uses for 10 years. Williamson Act
contracts are automatically renewed annually for an additional one-year period, unless the property owner applies for non-renewal or early cancellation. The Williamson Act also contains limited provisions for cancellation of contracts.

As shown in Figure 4.2-1, the salt crystallization ponds have been under a Williamson Act contract as Non-Prime Agricultural Land. Under the Williamson Act, lands without the soils or characteristics of Prime Agricultural Land may still be enrolled in a Williamson Act contract. However, as of October 2009, the salt crystallization ponds property owner filed a non-renewal notice for the property’s Williamson Act status, which will ultimately remove the lands from the Williamson Act contract. No other land in the plan area has been designated as Williamson Act land.4

Redwood City Municipal Code

Various City ordinances apply to agricultural resources. Chapter 5 of the Redwood City Municipal Code sets forth regulations for the keeping of animals. Article IV of this chapter establishes regulations that establish a permit and licensing program for the limited keeping of horses, cows, goats, and sheep on lands and within facilities meeting a number of distance and separation requirements.

Article 20 of the Redwood City Zoning Code establishes the “TP” or Tidal Plain zoning district. This district’s permitted uses include agriculture, the extraction of chemicals from sea water by natural evaporation (harvesting of salt and related substances), and public parks/recreation areas. The salt crystallization ponds and other Bayfront areas are shown with the TP zoning classification on the Redwood City Zoning Map dated July 17, 2009.

Article 21 of the Redwood City Zoning Code sets forth allowable uses and regulations pertaining to the “AG” or Agriculture-Greenhouse District. However, on the Redwood City Zoning Map dated June 5, 2008, no areas have been assigned this zoning classification.

Project Consistency Analysis

Since there are no areas designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of State or Local Importance, adoption of the New General Plan and its associated land use map would be consistent with the objectives of the DOC to preserve the protected classes of Farmland and the Redwood City Municipal Code. As there are no forest lands in the plan area, there would be no impact to policies or protections afforded these lands. Further, as discussed in Section 4.2.4 below, adoption of the New General Plan would not introduce policies, programs or land uses that would conflict with existing Williamson Act contracts, resulting in consistency with the Williamson Act regulations. Additionally, adoption of the New General Plan would not change any of the classifications for the salt crystallization ponds. The New General Plan would therefore be consistent with the regulatory policies for agricultural and forest resources.

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4 Personal communication, Carol Mondino, San Mateo County Assessor’s Office, May 6, 2009.
4.2.3 **Thresholds of Significance**

The City has not established local CEQA significance thresholds as described in Section 15064.7 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Therefore, significance determinations utilized in this Section are from Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. A significant impact could occur if development allowed by the New General Plan would:

a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; or

c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resource Code section 12220(g)) or timberland (as defined in Public Resource section 4526); or

d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; or

e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

4.2.4 **Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

**Issues Not Discussed Further**

*Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to Non-Agricultural Use*

As discussed in Section 4.2.2 and shown on Figure 4.2-1, there are no areas of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance in the plan area. Since the plan area includes no protected classes of farmland, the New General Plan would not convert any such protected classes of farmland to non-agricultural use. No impact would result; no mitigation is required.

*Conflict with Existing Zoning for Agricultural Use, or a Williamson Act Contract*

As noted previously, two existing zoning designations allow for agricultural uses: AG and TP. There are no properties in the plan area with an “AG” zoning designation.

The salt crystallization ponds are covered by the only known Williamson Act contract operative within the plan area. As previously stated, the property owners for this site have filed a non-renewal notice for the Williamson Act contract for the property. Since the New General Plan would not result in any change to the General Plan designations or to the agricultural use of these ponds, the New General Plan would not result in any conflict with the Williamson Act contract. Upon finalization of the non-renewal, no other lands in the plan area would be under Williamson Act contract. The New General Plan would
therefore have no impact to existing agricultural uses or conflicts with Williamson Act contracts.

**Conflict with Existing Zoning for Forest Land or Timberland**

No property within the plan area currently has a forest land or timberland zoning designation. Therefore, the New General Plan would not conflict with existing zoning or cause the rezoning of forest land or timberland.

**Result in the Loss of Forest Land or Conversion of Forest Land to non-Forest Use**

As stated above, the plan area does not currently contain any forest land. Therefore, the New General Plan would not result in the loss of forest land or convert forest land to non-forest use.

**Project Impacts**

**Impact 4.2-1: The development allowed by adoption of the New General Plan would not result in direct nor indirect conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. (Less than Significant)**

As discussed previously, there are no protected classes of Farmland in the plan area (Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance). According to the FMMP mapping, the closest protected farmlands to the plan area are along Alpine Road in unincorporated San Mateo County, approximately 3 miles southeast of the westernmost edge of the plan area.

The New General Plan would allow for the development of an additional 9,103 dwelling units and about 7.3 million square feet of new non-residential development within the plan area by the year 2030. These land use changes would be focused on and around the Downtown area, as well as major corridors within the plan area. The level and pattern of proposed new development allowable under the New General Plan would have no foreseeable significant impact to the distant Farmland areas in unincorporated San Mateo County.

The New General Plan encourages a future streetcar network that could follow Seaport Boulevard, located adjacent to the salt crystallization ponds, to the potential new Ferry Terminal site. The streetcar system is envisioned to serve existing development along Seaport Boulevard, including the Port of Redwood City and the Pacific Shores Development. It would not encroach onto the salt crystallization pond property, and would therefore not change the existing land uses within the Cargill Property. Since the New General Plan also maintains the existing General Plan land use designation for the Cargill Property, the potential for a streetcar line along Seaport Boulevard would not indirectly convert Farmland to non-agricultural use. This would be a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.