

## 4.6 Land Use and Agriculture

### 4.6.1 Introduction

This section evaluates whether implementation of the Russian River Estuary Management Project (Estuary Management Project) would result in potential adverse impacts related to local land use and agriculture. The Setting section describes existing land uses, areas under agricultural production, and property ownership conditions. The Regulatory Framework describes pertinent state and local laws related to land use and agriculture near the proposed project. The Impacts and Mitigation Measures section defines significance criteria used for the impact assessment and presents a discussion of potential project-related impacts. The evaluation and analysis are based, in part, on review of various maps, aerial imagery, and reports. The primary sources include available resources from the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* (2008), California Department of Conservation, and California State Parks, as well as some preliminary summaries compiled by the Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency).

The Estuary Management Project was evaluated for long term effects on land use and agriculture. The land use section draws upon the analyses in **Sections 4.9, Noise; 4.10, Air Quality; and 4.11, Transportation and Traffic**, in which the direct impacts on those resource areas are analyzed, to determine overall land use impacts. The agriculture section analyzes existing agriculture lands in respect to the project site to determine overall impacts.

### 4.6.2 Setting

The proposed project site is located in the lower portion of the Russian River watershed in unincorporated Sonoma County. The Russian River watershed is in the coastal ranges of Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake counties and encompasses 1,485 square miles of drainage area. Major communities within the watershed include Ukiah, Hopland, Cloverdale, Potter Valley, Healdsburg, Windsor, Forestville, Sebastopol, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, and the lower Russian River area. The lower Russian River area stretches from the mouth of the Russian River to Mirabel Park and includes the communities of Jenner, Duncans Mills, Monte Rio, Guerneville, and Rio Nido (USACE, 1982).

The Russian River watershed within Sonoma County is primarily agricultural land with focus on vineyards and orchard crops. Hay and grain production, in addition to sheep and cattle ranching, are also present in the areas surrounding the Russian River Valley. Until the recent economic downturn, there was a growing trend towards more housing, commercial development and light industry in the areas surrounding Santa Rosa. Industrial activities in the watershed include light manufacturing operations, and gravel mining, as well as agricultural production and processing of timber, wine, and other agricultural products (Sonoma County, 2008).

#### ***Existing Land Uses***

The Land Use Element of the Sonoma County General Plan (2008) governs land uses in the unincorporated area surrounding the project site, which lies within the Sonoma Coast/Gualala

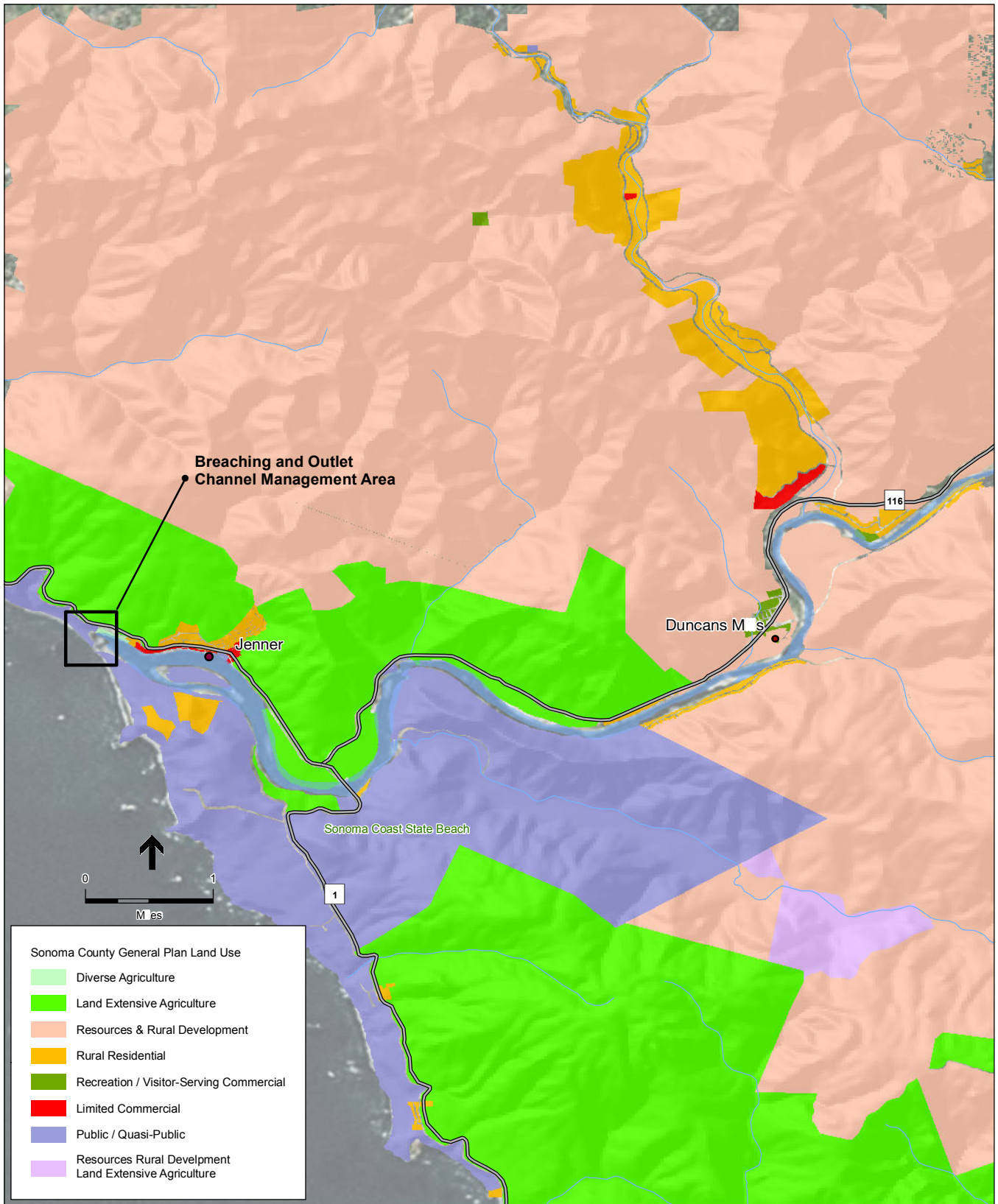
Basin Planning Area, and encompasses 40 miles of the Pacific Coast, including several coastal communities and small inland towns. Land use designations are shown in **Figure 4.6-1**. Residential land use is sparse outside of the small established towns and communities due to its remoteness and inaccessibility. The area's economy is focused towards tourism and recreation, in addition to commercial fishing, sheep ranching, and timber production. Land use designations in the project vicinity are described as follows:

1. *Diverse Agriculture* is established to enhance and protect those land areas where soil, climate, and water conditions support farming but where small acreage intensive farming and part time farming activities are predominant. In these areas, farming may not be the principal occupation of the farmer. The primary purpose of this category is to protect a full range of agricultural uses and to limit further residential intrusion.
2. *Land Extensive Agriculture* is established to enhance and protect lands capable of and generally used for animal husbandry and the production of food, fiber, and plant materials. Soil and climate conditions typically result in relatively low production per acre of land. The objective in land extensive agricultural areas shall be to establish and maintain densities and parcel sizes that are conducive to continued agricultural production.
3. *Resources and Rural Development* allows very low density residential development and intends to not extensively provide public services and facilities. The categories main purpose is to protect timberlands, lands for aggregate resource production, and natural resource lands including watershed, fish, and wildlife habitat.
4. *Rural Residential* provides for very low density residential development on lands that have few if any urban services but have access to County maintained roads. The primary use shall be detached single family homes. Densities range from one to twenty acres per dwelling.
5. *Recreation/Visitor Serving Commercial* allows for visitor serving use such as restaurants, lodging, developed campgrounds, resorts, marinas, golf courses, and similar types of uses.
6. *Public/Quasi-Public* provides sites that serve the community or public need and are owned or operated by government agencies, non profit entities, or public utilities. Uses include schools, places of religious worship, parks, libraries, governmental administration centers, fire stations, cemeteries, airports, hospitals, sewage treatment plants, waste disposal sites, etc.
7. *Limited Commercial* allows a smaller range of commercial uses and may be applied to areas either outside or inside Urban Service Areas. In rural community areas, this category may limit commercial uses to retail and service uses that are local serving. This category also provides opportunities for mixed residential and commercial uses where the residential use is compatible with the commercial use.

### ***Agricultural Resources***

The existing agricultural environment is classified by:

1. The California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), and
2. Williamson Act Contracts.



SOURCE: SCWA, 2010; Sonoma County, 2006

Russian River Estuary Management Project. 207734.01

**Figure 4.6-1**  
General Plan Land Use Designations

### **Farmland Mapping**

The California Department of Conservation, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). The FMMP identifies the state's priority farmlands and monitors the conversion of farmland to and from agricultural use. The California Department of Conservation, Office of Land Conservation, creates maps of important farmland throughout California and updates those maps every two years. Important farmlands are divided into the following five categories based on their suitability for agriculture:

1. *Prime Farmland* has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for crop production. It has the soil quality, growing season and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when appropriately treated and managed.
2. *Farmland of Statewide Importance* is land other than Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for crop production.
3. *Unique Farmland* does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide importance which has been used for the production of specific high economic value crops.
4. *Farmland of Local Importance* is either currently producing crops, or has the capability of production, and does not meet the criteria of the categories above.
5. *Grazing Land* is land in which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

Three categories of farmland are considered valuable and any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered to be an adverse impact: (1) Prime Farmland, (2) Farmland of Statewide Importance, and (3) Unique Farmland.

### **Williamson Act**

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act, is designed to preserve agricultural and open space lands by discouraging their premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses. The Act creates an arrangement whereby private landowners contract with counties and cities to voluntarily restrict their land to agricultural and compatible open-space uses. In return, Williamson Act contracts offer tax incentives by ensuring that land will be assessed for its agricultural productivity rather than its highest and best uses. Contracts run for a period of ten years, however, some jurisdictions exercise the option of making the term longer, up to twenty years. Contracts are automatically renewed unless the landowner files for non-renewal or petitions for cancellation. As of 2007, Sonoma County contained a total of 273,258 acres of prime and non-prime agricultural land held under Williamson Act Contracts (California Department of Conservation, 2008). Williamson Act Contract enrolled lands meet one the following descriptions:

1. *Prime Agricultural Land* is enrolled under California Land Conservation Act contract and meets any of the following criteria: (1) Land which qualifies for rating as class I or class II in the Natural Resources Conservation Service land use capability classifications; (2) Land which qualifies for rating 80 to 100 in the Storie Index Rating; (3) Land which supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber; (4) Land planted with fruit or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes or crops and has an annual gross value of not less than two hundred dollars per acre, or (5) Land which has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production and has an annual gross value of not less than two hundred dollars per acre.

2. *Non-Prime Agricultural Land* is enrolled under California Land Conservation Act contract and does not meet any of the criteria for classification as Prime Agricultural Land. Non-Prime Land is defined as Open Space Land of Statewide Significance. Most lands have agricultural uses such as grazing or non-irrigated crops.

Portions of the proposed project are adjacent to areas that are currently enrolled under Williamson Act contract. Approximately one and one half miles of Williamson Act Prime Agricultural Land is located on the north side of the Russian River Estuary (Estuary), south of the Highway 1 and State Route 116 intersection, as shown in **Figure 4.6-2**. The Estuary is also adjacent to approximately three miles of Williamson Act Non-Prime Agricultural Land east of the community of Jenner (Department of Conservation, 2008).

### ***Local Land Use Adjacent to the Estuary***

The Russian River Estuary extends from the Pacific Ocean upstream approximately seven miles, between the community of Duncans Mills and Austin Creek.<sup>1</sup> The mouth of the Estuary and the Russian River is located at Goat Rock State Beach, which is part of Sonoma Coast State Beach. Owned by the California State Parks, Sonoma Coast State Beach encompasses 17 miles of beaches, separated by rock bluffs and headlands. The land use designation for Goat Rock State Beach is public/quasi-public land use which was recently expanded when the California Department of Parks and Recreation acquired the 3,373 acre Willow Creek area. The land includes a network of old logging and ranch roads previously used for timber production, and has a public/quasi-public land use designation. The communities of Duncans Mills and Jenner are closest to the Russian River Estuary Management Project area. Land use designations in Jenner, as shown in Figure 4.6-1, include agriculture (diverse, land extensive), resources and rural development, rural residential, public/quasi-public, and limited commercial. Land use designations in the town of Duncans Mills include resources and rural development, rural residential, public/quasi-public, and recreation/visitor-serving commercial. Land adjacent to the Estuary is designated primarily for resources and rural development, land extensive agriculture, and public/quasi-public land uses with smaller areas designated for rural residential and limited commercial uses. Resources and rural development land along the Estuary includes mainly grazing land and timberland.

There are a number of rural residential land use designations, along the Estuary that are used as either permanent residences or vacation homes. These properties may consist of a boat dock or beach closest to the Estuary, followed by houses, sheds, and garages placed further away from the Estuary, usually above 12 foot elevation. Various types of infrastructure are also located near the Estuary, typically at the 14 foot and higher elevations, including wells, septic, roads, bridges, and telephone poles. When the Estuary mouth is closed by a naturally-forming barrier beach, water begins to fill the Estuary and some lower elevations of properties along the Estuary may become

<sup>1</sup> As previously noted in **Chapter 2.0, Project Description**, under certain closed conditions, the Estuary may backwater to Monte Rio, and as far upstream as Vacation Beach. Although this condition may periodically occur, potential impacts related to land use are generally thought to be limited to the seven mile area downstream of Austin Creek, which is typically defined as the Russian River Estuary. Where appropriate, discussion of land use impacts within the Estuary Study Area and the larger Project Area, which includes the Russian River reach between Austin Creek and Vacation Beach, is provided (Please refer to **Figure 2-3 in Section 2.0, Project Description**).

inundated before the river naturally breaches the barrier beach (SCWA, 2010). There are approximately 96 properties along the Estuary that experience different degrees of inundation during periods of Estuary closure, depending on water surface level (SCWA, 2010).

### ***Locally Important Farmlands***

Portions of the proposed project area adjacent to areas that are currently in agricultural use, some of which are protected by the Williamson Act. The Estuary is adjacent approximately 3,200 acres of grazing land and approximately 120 acres of Farmland of Local Importance, as shown in **Figure 4.6-2** (Department of Conservation, 2006). According to the FMMP, the project area is not adjacent to Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland.

Goat Rock State Beach is adjacent to “other land” use. The FMMP’s Sonoma County Important Farmland 2006 map describes other land as “land not included in any other category including low density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for grazing, confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities, strip mines, borrow pits, and water bodies smaller than 40 acres.”

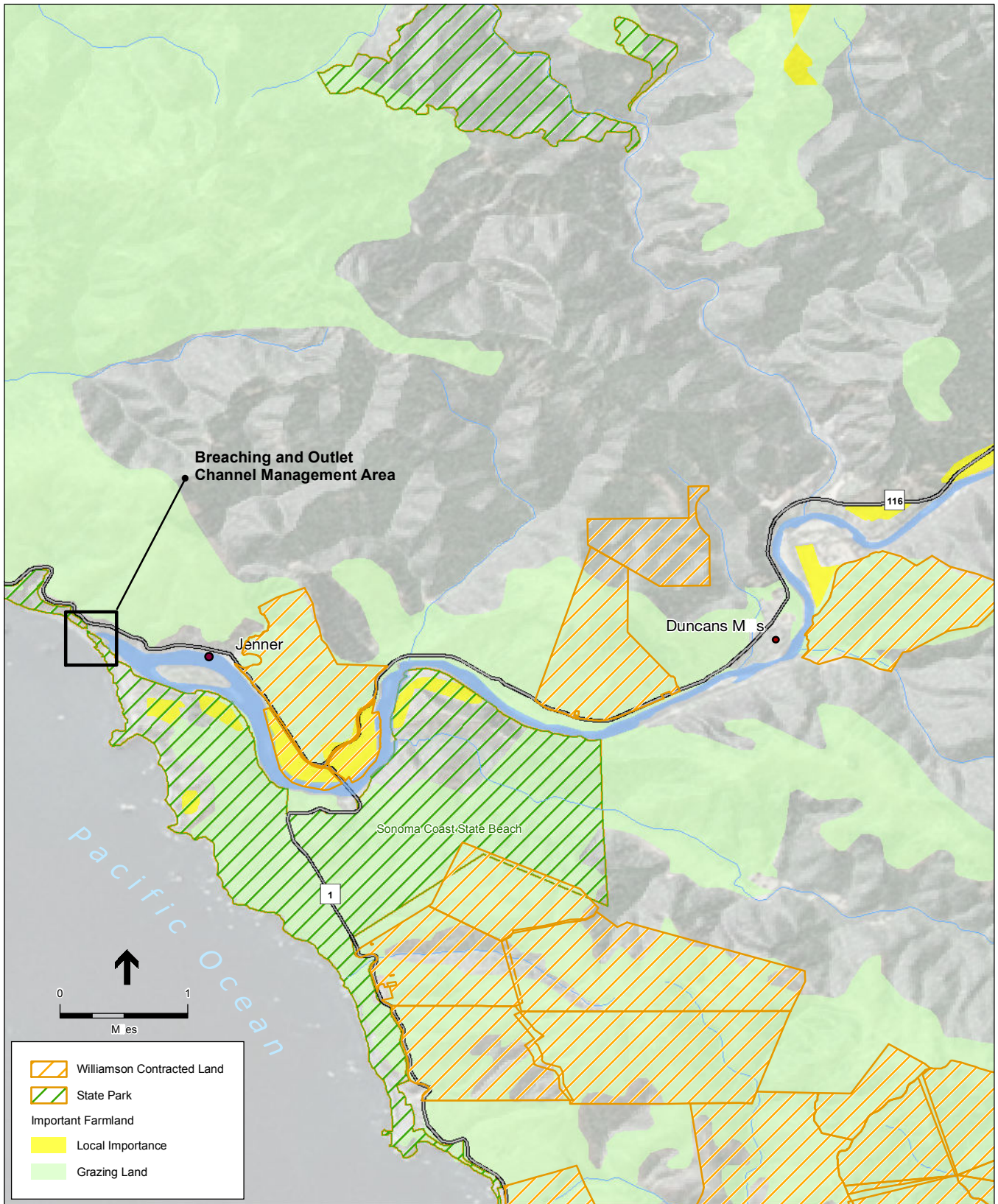
### ***Conservation and Recreation Lands***

The Sonoma County Agriculture Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOS) acquired land, including the Willow Creek and Freezeout Creek watersheds, for the Sonoma Coast State Park. These areas are also designated as other land use, as the land was previously used for timber production and is now forestland which is open to the public for recreational opportunities. On the north side of the Russian River are the newly conserved Jenner Headlands. The 5,600-acre ranch was recently protected by the Sonoma Land Trust and is managed by the Wildlands Conservancy. The purchase was facilitated by numerous grants from both public and private organizations (Sonoma Land Trust, 2009).

### ***California State Sovereign Lands***

The California State Lands Commission (CSLC) was established by the California legislature in 1938, and was given the authority and responsibility to manage and protect the important natural and cultural resources on certain public lands within the state and the public’s rights to access these lands. The public lands under the Commission’s jurisdiction are of two distinct types—sovereign and school lands. Sovereign lands encompass approximately 4 million acres statewide. These lands include the beds of California’s naturally navigable rivers, lakes and streams, as well as the state’s tide and submerged lands along the state’s more than 1,100 miles of coastline, extending from the shoreline out to three miles offshore. The CSLC’s jurisdiction extends to more than 120 rivers and sloughs, 40 lakes and the state’s coastal waters. Public and private entities may apply to the CSLC for leases or permits on state lands for many purposes including marinas, industrial wharves, dredging, sand mining, tanker anchorages, grazing, right-of-ways, bank protection, and recreational uses. The Sonoma County Water Agency possesses a land lease permit issued by the CSLC, in accordance with Article 2 of the Leasing and Permits Regulations, to conduct artificial breaching within CSLC jurisdiction (CSLC, 2007).





SOURCE: SCWA, 2010; FMMP, 2006; DOC, 2006

Russian River Estuary Management Project. 207734.01

**Figure 4.6-2**  
Important Farmland and  
Williamson Act Contracted Land

### 4.6.3 Regulatory Framework

This section discusses the state and local regulatory framework for managing land use, agricultural resources, and recreational resources within the project area. This section introduces the applicable plans, including General Plans, Local Coastal Plans, and Area Plans, as well as other policies and regulatory constraints that apply to the Estuary Management Project. The goals, policies, and programs were considered in this analysis to define sensitive land uses, prime agricultural resources, determine project consistency with policies, and evaluate significant impacts in the following section.

#### State

##### ***California Coastal Act***

The California Coastal Act was enacted by the State Legislature in 1976 to provide long-term protection of the state's 1,100-mile coastline for the benefit of current and future generations. The Coastal Act created a unique partnership between the State (acting through the California Coastal Commission [CCC]) and local government entities (15 coastal counties and 58 cities) to manage the conservation and development of coastal resources through a comprehensive planning and regulatory program. Coastal Act policies, the heart of the coastal protection program, are the standards used by the CCC in its coastal development permit decisions and review of LCPs prepared by local governments and submitted to the Commission for approval.

##### **Priority Uses**

The Coastal Act recognizes that there is a limited amount of coastal land in the State and prioritizes coastal-dependent development of coastal areas. These types of priority uses and development include:

1. Lower-cost visitor and recreation facilities (Section 30213),
2. Visitor-serving commercial recreational facilities designed to enhance public opportunities for coastal recreation (Section 30222),
3. Aquaculture facilities (Section 30222.5),
4. Upland areas for coastal recreation (Section 30223),
5. Recreational boating and associated facilities (Section 30224),
6. Commercial fishing and recreational boating facilities (Section 30234),
7. Prime agricultural land (Section 30241), and
8. Coastal-dependent development (Section 30255).

Additionally, Section 30231 encourages the protection of, and continued biological productivity of marine resources and environmentally sensitive habitat areas including the biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms.



### **Public Access**

A primary focus of the Coastal Act is to provide public access to the coast. The Act includes several policies related to public access and recreation, most of which provide strong support for the public's ability to use and enjoy coastal areas. The primary public access policies are:

1. Access, recreational opportunities, and posting (Section 30210),
2. Development not to interfere with access (Section 30211),
3. Requirements for new development projects (Section 30212),
4. Distribution of public facilities (Section 30212.5),
5. Lower-cost visitor and recreation facilities (Section 30213),
6. Implementation of public access policies (Section 30214),

Additionally, Section 30220 states that "Coastal areas suited for water-oriented recreational activities that cannot readily be provided at inland water areas shall be protected for such uses." This relates to activities such as surfing and is related to the proposed project. The potential inconsistency with policies regarding recreational opportunities is discussed further in **Section 4.7, Recreation**.

### ***Marine Life Protection Act***

The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) was enacted in 1999 and is part of the California Fish and Game Code. The MLPA requires California to reevaluate all existing marine protected areas (MPAs) and potentially design new MPAs that together function as a statewide network. MPAs are developed on a regional basis and are evaluated over time to assess their effectiveness. There are four different types of MPAs including: state marine reserve, state marine park, state marine recreation area (Russian River Estuary mouth to Highway 1 bridge), and state marine conservation area. Each designation provides authority for different levels of restriction on human uses and includes various objectives, as listed in **Section 4.4, Biological Resources**.

### ***Sonoma Coast State Park Final General Plan & Environmental Impact Report***

The Sonoma Coast State Park Final General Plan & Environmental Impact Report was certified in May 2007. Every State Park in California must develop a general plan prior to approval of major developments. The general plan provides guidelines for future land use management and designation, including land acquisition and the facilities required to accommodate expected increases in visitation. The general plan also provides a comprehensive framework that guides the Park's developments, ongoing management, and public use for the next 20 years or more. The protection and restoration of natural and cultural resources are key components of the Plan. The Plan also includes goals and guidelines aimed at biological resources and water quality protection, the preservation of scenic and cultural resources, recreation and interpretive opportunities, and facility improvements and potential construction of new developments in response to heavy and growing visitation, environmental constraints, and recent and expected near-term property acquisitions. Sonoma Coast State Park provides opportunities for a wide variety of recreational activities, including camping, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding,

picnicking, beachcombing, wildlife viewing, and many other activities associated with the beach, riparian and upland habitats.

## Local

### ***Local Coastal Programs***

Pursuant to the State Coastal Act (Public Resources Code section 30000 et seq.), each local government within the state coastal zone must prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP) for the portion of the coastal zone within its jurisdiction. The LCP must be certified by the California Coastal Commission. The LCP includes a land use plan and implementing ordinances and actions. The land use plan that is part of the LCP indicates the kinds, location, and intensity of land uses and applicable resource protection and development policies in the coastal zone.

Sonoma County developed a LCP, consistent with the Sonoma County General Plan that was certified by the CCC on December 12, 2001. The LCP covers an area which is 55 miles in length and extends inland generally 1000 yards from the mean tide line. In significant coastal estuarine habitat and recreational areas it extends inland to the first major ridgeline paralleling the sea or five miles from the mean high boundary is generally 3000 to 12,000 feet inland from shoreline, except around Duncans Mills, Willow Creek and Valley Ford, where it extends up to five miles inland.

The LCP consists of six chapters: Historic Resources, Environment, Resources, Recreation, Harbor, and Development. All of the chapters and sections within chapters must be considered together and not as separate, distinct units. Land Use is included as a subsection in the Development Chapter and identifies rural community and urban service boundaries for existing communities and urban subdivisions.

The Land Use section formulates development policies that, together with the Land Use Plan maps, indicate the type, location, and intensity of land uses permitted in the Coastal Zone. Development policies take into account resource and environmental protection issues development constraints, and recreation, access, and housing needs. Lands outside the urban service boundaries are not considered appropriate for urban development. Land inside urban service boundaries is appropriate for urban development consistent with Coastal Act policies. Land inside rural community boundaries is appropriate for development requiring public water but not public sewer, consistent with Coastal Plan policies.

### ***Sonoma County***

Local policies established in the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* that govern geologic resources in the project area are summarized in Section 4.6 in **Appendix 4.0, Local Regulatory Framework Governing Environmental Resources**. The Water Agency has relied on agencies with jurisdiction, including the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD), to make consistency determinations of projects with applicable policies. Historically, PRMD has determined artificially breaching activities to be consistent with General Plan and Local Coastal Program policies.

## 4.6.4 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This analysis considers the effect of the proposed project on existing land use planning and agriculture based on review of the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020*, farmland classifications established under the FMMP and proximity to lands enrolled under Williamson Act contracts.

### Significance Criteria

In accordance with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, an impact is considered significant if it would:

#### Land Use

1. Physically divide or disrupt an established community;
2. Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project, including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, local coastal plan, or zoning ordinance adopted for the purpose of avoiding of mitigating an environmental effect;
3. Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan.

#### Agriculture

1. Convert 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, to non-agricultural use;
2. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act Contract;
3. Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g));
4. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use;
5. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of designated farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.
6. Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland(as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g)).

Several of the criteria included in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines do not apply to this analysis and are not used, as explained below.

*Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.* The proposed project would not be located on land used for agricultural activities. The proposed project would

continue current barrier beach breaching practices in addition to maintaining an Estuary management plan, which would not involve changes that would result in the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use. Therefore, this significance criterion is not applicable to the proposed project.

## **Approach to Analysis**

As noted in **Chapter 2.0, Project Description**, the Water Agency would continue its current practice of artificial breaching outside of the lagoon management period of May 15 through October 15. Timing, implementation, access, sensitivity to pinniped haulout, personnel, equipment, and general procedures would be equivalent to current practices, as described in **Section 2.2.2**. No change to artificial breaching outside of the lagoon management period would occur under the Estuary Management Project.

### ***Land Use***

This analysis evaluates short-term impacts on existing land uses resulting from project implementation as well as long-term impacts resulting from the Estuary Management Project activities. Impacts specific to agricultural are discussed separately below.

Generally, creation and implementation of the Estuary Management Project components would occur within the Russian River Estuary and Goat Rock State Beach. Information regarding the proposed facility siting and construction information is described in **Chapter 2.0, Project Description**. Potential physical environmental effects on surrounding land uses resulting from implementation of the Estuary Management Project are also addressed in their respective sections, including **Sections 4.9, Noise; 4.10, Air Quality; 4.11, Transportation and Traffic; and Section 4.14, Aesthetic Resources**.

Local planning documents and maps, like those described above in **Section 4.6.3, Regulatory Framework**, were reviewed to characterize existing land uses and agricultural land uses proximate to the phased project components. The evaluation of plan consistency is based on the applicability of relevant land use plans and policies to the implementation of the proposed project. The board or commission that enacted the plan or policy generally determines the meaning of such policies and these interpretations prevail if they are “reasonable”, even though other reasonable interpretations are also possible.

### ***Agricultural Resources***

For the purposes of this analysis, each project element was considered in relation to farmland (identified on the FMMP Map) in the immediate site vicinity to identify any potential disruption that might be caused temporarily (during channel creation) or permanently. In addition, each project component was examined for its potential to affect land under a Williamson Act contract.

## Impact Analysis

Impacts associated with land use and agriculture are summarized and categorized as either “no impact,” “less than significant,” “less than significant with mitigation,” or “significant and unavoidable.”

### **Impact 4.6.1: Divide an Existing Community. The proposed project would physically divide or temporarily disrupt an established community. (Less than Significant)**

The Estuary Management Project would require continued artificial breaching of the barrier beach at the mouth of the Russian River, in addition to creation, and maintenance of an outlet channel during the lagoon management period. The Estuary Management Project’s activities would not permanently divide an established community because all actions occur at one location away from most visitor serving facilities at Goat Rock State Beach and away from the community of Jenner. During creation of the outlet channel, excavation would generate similar noise, dust, and utilize the similar construction equipment as is currently used. These activities could temporarily affect adjacent land uses such as recreation depending on the time of day, the season, the weather and Park visitor attendance. As noted in **Chapter 2.0, Project Description**, the frequency of equipment operation to maintain the outlet channel during the lagoon management period may be incrementally increased compared to existing conditions, and could include up to 18 maintenance activities, depending upon the performance of the outlet channel. These activities could temporarily affect adjacent land uses such as recreation and represents a potential increase over existing artificial breaching activities; however, they would not divide surrounding land uses or established communities. Please refer to **Section 4.2, Hydrology and Flooding**, for a discussion of potential impacts to private property surrounding the Estuary.

As stated in **Section 4.11, Transportation and Traffic**, the Estuary Management Project would continue to use heavy equipment, such as a bulldozer or excavator to move sand to create the proposed outlet channel, as well as the use of four to five additional vehicles as are currently used to breach the beach. The same safety protocols would also continue to be used at the excavation site. Safety protocols listed in **Section 4.13, Public Services and Utilities and Public Safety** include: restricted beach access with barricade tape and signage; assigning an onsite contact for emergency response and/or rescue procedures and to perform site control during heavy equipment operation; and posting of warning signs prior to the breaching event 750 feet on each side of the proposed channel location. Hence, there would not be a significant increase in traffic or traffic safety hazards on Goat Rock State Beach near the project site. Access to Goat Rock State Beach and north parking lot would be maintained during construction and all equipment and materials would be removed at the end of daily construction activities.

As described in **Section 4.9, Noise**, construction activities associated with creation of the outlet channel would be short-term and distant relative to surrounding land uses, consistent with existing conditions. Maintenance activities, though distracting, on the beach would not be significantly different from what they are now, nor would noise affect the adjacent land uses. As noted in **Chapter 2.0, Project Description**, the frequency of equipment operation on the barrier during the lagoon management period may be incrementally increased compared to existing conditions,

and could include up to 18 maintenance activities over the course of the lagoon management period, depending upon the performance of the outlet channel. This represents a potential increase over existing artificial breaching activities.

As described in **Section 4.10, Air Quality**, construction activities could generate fugitive dust during ground disturbance activities (though not likely in wet beach sand) and greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle use and impacts would be similar to existing conditions and would not exceed threshold standards. Therefore, air quality impacts would be less than significant impact on the adjacent land uses.

In consideration of the beach environment, the amount and frequency of mechanical intervention would be minimized, thereby reducing disturbances to seals and other wildlife, as well as State Park's visitors on the beach. Therefore, although the construction activities may be inconvenient to adjacent land uses, they would be similar to current activities, would be temporary and would not significantly disrupt established land uses surrounding the project site.

**Impact Significance:** Less than Significant; no mitigation required.

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**Impact 4.6.2: Conflict with Applicable Plans and Policies. The proposed project may conflict with applicable state and/or local land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project, including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, local coastal plan, or zoning ordinance adopted for the purpose of avoiding of mitigating an environmental effect. (Less than Significant)**

The Estuary Management Project would require continued artificial breaching of the barrier beach at the mouth of the Russian River, in addition to installation, monitoring, and minor maintenance of lagoon outlet channel. The project area is primarily designated for agricultural land use but also has designations for rural residential, public/quasi-public, limited commercial uses in unincorporated Sonoma County. The proposed outlet channel is located in public/quasi-public land use, which is defined as land that serves the community or public need and are owned or operated by government agencies, non profit entities, or public utilities. The project would not extend the existing footprint of current maintenance practices at the mouth of the Russian River and it would be consistent with existing land uses.

The purpose of *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* is to express policies which guide decisions on future growth, development, and conservation of resources in a manner consistent with the goals and quality of life desired by the county's residents (Sonoma County, 2009). The Estuary Management Project supports the land use objectives and policies of the Sonoma County General Plan. The project does not facilitate growth and is consistent with the existing land uses including maintaining the Estuary as public/quasi-public land use. The proposed project would conform to the broader goals of the General Plan to protect and conserve the quality of ocean, marine, and estuarine environments and maintaining water quality. For the foregoing reasons, the Estuary Management Project is consistent with the Sonoma County General Plan.



The Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan brings local government plans in conformance with the State Coastal Act policies. Therefore if the Estuary Management Project conforms to the Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan, it likewise conforms to the California Coastal Act. The Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan establishes policies to regulate coastal development, protects the overall quality of the coastal zone, and maximizes public access to and along the coast (Sonoma County, 2001). The Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan Land Use Section formulates development policies that indicate the type, location, and intensity of land uses permitted in the Coastal Zone. As stated in **Impact 4.6.1**, the Estuary Management Project site is adjacent to the Goat Rock State Beach and project construction activities could be inconvenient to adjacent land uses; however, it would not significantly disrupt access or use of the existing beach facility. Generally, the Estuary Management Project would not conflict with the Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan because project implementation would not convert any existing land uses or disrupt public access to the coast. The Estuary would not effect development within the coastal area, nor prevent construction of future development.<sup>2</sup>

The Sonoma Coast State Park General Plan provides guidelines for future land use management and designation, including land acquisition and the facilities required to accommodate expected increases in visitation (CSPRC, 2007). As stated in **Section 4.8, Recreation**, the project would not cause an increase in the use of existing recreation facilities nor would it cause any accelerated physical deterioration of existing recreation facilities. Additionally, the Estuary Management Project would not conflict with existing land use management designations of Sonoma Coast State Park. Therefore, the potential impacts would be less than significant.

**Impact Significance:** Less than Significant; no mitigation required.

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**Impact 4.6.3: Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan. The proposed project may conflict with applicable habitat conservation plan or document which aims to protect threatened or endangered species and/or their critical habitat. (Beneficial Impact)**

Although there is no specific habitat conservation plan affecting the project area, the NMFS' Russian River Biological Opinion (Russian River Biological Opinion) has a similar intent to managing the Estuary for the benefit of threatened and endangered species (NMFS, 2008). The Estuary Management Project would include installation, monitoring, and minor maintenance of a lagoon outlet channel on the barrier beach. These actions would implement management strategies listed in Russian River Biological Opinion which would create a brackish/freshwater lagoon environment in the Russian River Estuary to support the development for rearing juvenile steelhead, Chinook salmon, and coho salmon smolts. The Estuary Management Project is consistent with NMFS management strategies and implements requirements of the Russian River Biological Opinion. Therefore, project impacts are considered beneficial.

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<sup>2</sup> Potential for conflict with Coastal Act policies related specifically to recreational facilities is discussed in **Section 4.7, Recreation**.

**Impact Significance:** Beneficial Impact.

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**Impact 4.6.4: Permanent Conversion of Important Farmland. The proposed project could convert 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, to non-agricultural use. (No Impact)**

The Estuary Study Area is adjacent to approximately 120 acres of farmland of Local Importance, as well as land designated as grazing land; however there are no designations for Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, which are considered “important farmland”, near the Estuary. The Estuary Management Project would include installation, monitoring, and minor maintenance of a lagoon outlet channel on the barrier beach. The proposed management activities would not be located on or adjacent to existing farmland (**Figure 4.6.2**), and would not affect directly Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance located near the Estuary. Implementation of the Estuary Management Project would not involve changes that would result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use; therefore there is no adverse impact to important farmland.

**Impact Significance:** No Impact.

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**Impact 4.6.5: Conflict with Williamson Act Contracts. The proposed project would conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act Contract. (Less than Significant)**

The Estuary Study Area is adjacent to approximately 1.5 miles of Williamson Act Prime Agricultural Land and approximately 3.0 miles of Williamson Act Non-Prime Agricultural Land. However, the Estuary Management Project required implementation and maintenance activities would occur at the mouth of the Russian River, which is not located on or near Williamson Act enrolled agricultural land. Implementation of the Estuary Management Project would not involve changes that would conflict with existing Williamson Act Contracts; therefore the impact to Williamson Act Contracts or existing agricultural uses is less than significant.

**Impact Significance:** Less than Significant; no mitigation required.

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**Impact 4.6.6: Loss or conversion of Forestland. The proposed project would result in loss of designated forest land. (Less than Significant)**

CA Public Resources Code Section 12220 g: defines “forest land” as land that can support 10 percent native tree cover 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.<sup>3</sup> Portions of the Russian River Estuary are adjacent to forest land. In particular, the Willow Creek and Freezeout Creek watersheds, which were newly acquired as part of the Sonoma Coast State Park, and areas between the towns of Jenner and Duncans Mills are considered forest land. The Sonoma Coast State Park lands are protected by the SCAPOSD and the California State Parks. The Estuary Management Project would require implementation and maintenance activities at the mouth of the Russian River, which is not located on or near designated forest land. Implementation of the Estuary Management Project would not result in the loss of existing designated forest land or the conversion of forest land to non-forest use; therefore the impact to forest land is less than significant.

Secondary effects to parcels meeting the definition of forest land under CA Public Resources Code Section 12220 g could occur due to increased duration of inundation at water surface elevations between 7 and 9 feet. As previously described in **Section 4.4, Biological Resources**, this would increase the duration of inundation of approximately 3.6 and 0.4 acres of North Coast Riparian Forest and Mixed Evergreen Forest, respectively, and could potentially result in conversion of these vegetation types to freshwater marsh or other vegetation types over time. However, because of their prevalence within the region relative to available forest lands, the potential conversion of this level of acreage, if it were to occur, would not be considered significant.

**Impact Significance:** Less than Significant.

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## 4.6.5 References

California Coastal Commission, California Coastal Act, Public Resources Code Division 20, Chapter 3, Section 30200, Coastal Resources Planning and Management Policies, 1976, revised 2010.

California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection. *2004-2006 Farmland Conservation Report*, 2008.  
[http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/pubs/2004-2006/Pages/FMMP\\_2004-2006\\_FCR.aspx](http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/pubs/2004-2006/Pages/FMMP_2004-2006_FCR.aspx). Accessed July 8, 2010.

California State Lands Commission (CSLC), Regulations, Article 2, Leasing and Permits, 2007, available online [http://www.slc.ca.gov/Regulations/Regulations\\_Home\\_Page.html](http://www.slc.ca.gov/Regulations/Regulations_Home_Page.html), Accessed, October 18, 2010.

California State Park and Recreation Commission (CSPRC), Sonoma Coast State Park Final General Plan and Environmental Impact Report. May 2007.

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<sup>3</sup> The Sonoma County General Plan 2020 also protects timber land (classified differently than “forest land”): “For purposes of the above regulations, “timberlands” are generally considered to be those lands that are capable of and available for growing a commercial species of timber such as Redwoods and Douglas Fir”(Sonoma County, 2008). According to the Sonoma County General Plan 2020, in Sonoma County, these lands are predominantly in the northwest part of the County. There are approximately 232,000 acres of timberland in the County. Sonoma County is unique among many counties in California because 94 percent of the timberlands are privately owned (Sonoma County, 2008).

County of Sonoma, *Local Coastal Program*, December 12, 2001.

Sonoma County Permits and Resources Management Department, *Sonoma County General Plan 2020*, adopted September 23, 2008.

Sonoma County Permits and Resources Management Department, *Sonoma County General Plan 2020*, Land Use Element, adopted September 23, 2008, amended March 17, 2009.

Sonoma County Water Agency. Letter to NMFS: Russian River Estuary Flood Risk Management Feasibility Study. March 22, 2010.

Sonoma Land Trust. Acquisition of the Jenner Headlands Press Release December 17, 2009, [http://www.sonomalandtrust.org/news\\_room/press\\_releases/100424\\_Jenner\\_celebration.html](http://www.sonomalandtrust.org/news_room/press_releases/100424_Jenner_celebration.html) Accessed on August 6, 2010

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Russian River Basin Study Northern California Streams Investigation Final Report, San Francisco District, San Francisco, CA, 1982.