

## 3.2 AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

This section describes the environmental and regulatory setting for agricultural and forestry resources. It also describes the existing conditions and potential impacts relative to agricultural and forestry materials that would result from implementation of the proposed project, and mitigation for potentially significant impacts, where feasible.

### 3.2.1 Environmental Setting

#### Regional Agriculture Setting

Agriculture production is an important component of both the local economy and community character. The total agricultural acreage in the County in 2008 was approximately 345,238 acres, covering 15 percent of the County's total land area. There were no substantial conversions of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses between 2008 and 2016 (at the time of drafting of the County General Plan EIR), so total agricultural acreage in 2016 is still about 15 percent of the total land area (Humboldt County 2017c). Since the adoption of the County General Plan, agricultural acreage still remains about 15 percent of the total acreage.

#### Regional Forestry Setting

There are 1.9 million acres of forested land in the County, covering more than 80 percent of the County's total land area. National Forests encompass nearly 338,000 acres within the County. National and state parks include 70,000 and 72,000 acres, respectively, while national and state wildlife areas cover 2,600 and 2,000 acres, respectively. County parks and community parks account for 1,000 acres. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) forest reserves encompass 7,600 acres. Altogether, these public forested lands (including reserves, parks, and other holdings) total more than 679,500 acres, or 35.5 percent, of all forested lands in the County (Humboldt County 2017c).

The County has one of the highest value timber harvests each year, as compared to any county in California, due to the mild and wet climate that is conducive to timber production. Of the 1,900,000 acres of forestland in the County, 1,700,000 acres are considered suitable for timber production. About 1,000,000 acres are designated by the County as a TPZ. This acreage is equal to 45 percent of the total land acreage in the County (Humboldt County 2017c).

#### Local Agriculture and Forestry Setting

The project area consists primarily of trees, and the site has historically been used for commercial timber harvesting in the past. The entire site has been harvested at least two times, beginning with the old-growth forest and, more recently, the second-growth forest. The last timber harvest appears to have occurred approximately 30 years ago, according to historical aerial photography (Google Earth) and the uniform size and age of trees across the site. Currently, the entire site is dominated by dense, third-growth redwood and mixed conifer forest, with drainages occasionally dominated by red alder. The proposed project parcels are zoned as Residential One-Family (R-1), with combining zones indicating Planned Unit Development (P), Recreation (R), and Greenway and Open Space (GO). The water storage tank parcel is zoned as TPZ.



The proposed project area does not contain any prime farmland according to the County General Plan (Humboldt County 2017d, 2020). Additionally, no Williamson Act contracted lands occur within the project area (Humboldt County 2014, 2020).

### **3.2.2 Regulatory Setting**

#### **State**

##### ***Z'Berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973***

The Forest Practice Act was enacted in 1973, to ensure that logging is done in a manner that will preserve and protect California's fish, wildlife, forests and streams. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) ensures that private landowners abide by these laws when harvesting trees. Although there are specific exemptions in some cases, compliance with the Forest Practice Act and the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) rules apply to all commercial harvesting operations for landowners of small parcels, ranchers owning hundreds of acres, and large timber companies with thousands of acres.

The Timber Harvest Plan (THP) is the environmental review document submitted by landowners to CAL FIRE outlining the timber proposed for harvest, how it would be harvested, and the steps that will be taken to prevent damage to the environment. THPs are prepared by Registered Professional Foresters who are licensed to prepare these comprehensive, detailed plans. Timber harvest activities must be performed by a Licensed Timber Operator. THPs are the functional equivalent of an EIR, in that they evaluate the potential impacts of a proposed project regarding logging and timber harvesting. A THP can implement feasible mitigation measures that can reduce potentially significant impacts to a less than significant level, similar to that of an EIR.

PRC Section 4628 and CCR Title 14 Section 1104.1(b) exempt public agencies from the requirement to file an application for Timberland Conversion or a THP when they construct or maintain rights-of-way on their own property or that of another public agency. This exemption extends to easements over lands owned in fee by private parties. However, if the harvested trees are sold, bartered, or traded for commercial purposes, a timber operation has occurred pursuant to PRC Section 4527, and a notice of exemption is required to be filed by the timber owner. This is true if the timber is owned by the public agency, sold or given by the agency to another party, or if the timber is owned by a private landowner subject to a public agency easement. If the harvested trees are not sold, bartered, or traded for commercial purposes, a notice of exemption is not required.

##### ***California Public Resources Code***

The California PRC defines forest land, timberland, and TPZs as the following:

California PRC Section 12220(g): "Forest land" is 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.



California PRC Section 4526: "Timberland" means land, other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the Board as experimental forest land, which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of a commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees. Commercial species shall be determined by the Board on a district basis.

California PRC Section 51104(g): "Timberland production zone" or "TPZ" means an area which has been zoned pursuant to Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses, as defined in subdivision (h). With respect to the general plans of cities and counties, "timberland preserve zone" means "timberland production zone".

## Local

### **Humboldt County General Plan**

The County General Plan, adopted October 23, 2017, contains several policies that directly pertain to agricultural and forestry resources, including the following:

**Goal CO-G5. Open Space and Residential Development.** Orderly residential development of open space lands that protects natural resources, sustains resource production, minimizes exposure to natural hazards, and seeks to minimize the cost of providing public infrastructure and services.

- **Policy CO-P7: Development within Community Separation Areas.** Retain a rural character and promote low intensities of development in community separation areas consistent with the Local Agency Formation Commission process. Provide opportunities for transfer of development rights in exchange for permanent open space preservation within community separation areas.

**Goal FR-G4. Incompatible and Conflicting Uses.** Timberlands protected from the encroachment of incompatible uses and managed for the inclusion of compatible uses.

### **3.2.3 Methodology for Analysis**

The applicable agricultural and forestry regulations were reviewed as well as the applicable farmland database searches in order to complete the analysis portion of this section. These regulations and databases were analyzed in conjunction with the thresholds of significance identified below.

### **3.2.4 Thresholds of Significance**

The CEQA Guidelines' Appendix G Environmental Checklist was assessed during the NOP scoping process to identify the proposed project components that have the potential to cause a significant impact. The following thresholds of significance were used to determine if further evaluation within this EIR was warranted to ascertain whether the proposed project may:

- 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 [refer to Section 7, Effects Found Not To Be Significant]
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract [refer to Section 7, Effects Found Not To Be Significant]



- Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in PRC Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by PRC Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))
- Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use
- 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

### 3.2.5 Project Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

This section analyzes the proposed project's potential to result in significant impacts to forestry resources. When a potential impact was determined to be potentially significant, feasible mitigation measures were identified to reduce or avoid that impact.

#### *Forest Land or Timberland Zoning*

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**Impact AG-1:** The proposed project would not 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)).

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#### **Impact Analysis**

The proposed project parcels are primarily zoned as Residential One-Family (R-1), with combining zones indicating Planned Unit Development (P), Recreation (R), and Greenway and Open Space (GO). Portions of the site are proposed to change to Apartment Professional (R-4) and C-1. The water storage tank parcel is zoned as a TPZ. The project area consists primarily of lands that have historically been used for timber harvesting. However, based on the current zoning, the project area is planned for development. The Eureka Community Plan also considered the rezoning of the site from its historical TPZ use to a subdivision development, which has since occurred since the Eureka Community Plan was adopted (Humboldt County 1995). Therefore, the proposed project would have a less than significant impact related to conflict with existing zoning of forestland.

#### **Level of Significance Before Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact.

#### **Mitigation Measures**

None required.

#### **Level of Significance After Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact.



### Loss or Conversion of Forest Land

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**Impact AG-2: The proposed project would not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.**

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#### Impact Analysis

Although the proposed project area is not zoned as a TPZ, it meets the definition of “forest land” (PRC Section 12220[g]), since the majority of the site includes land that can support 10 percent native tree cover. The majority of the project site meets the definition of forest land. As noted in Section 2.0, Project Description, approximately 21.73 acres of land within the project area would be designated as permanent open space which would be preserved through a permanent easement dedicated to the County or conveyed in fee. Therefore, as a conservative assumption in this analysis, it is assumed approximately 59.27 acres of land that meets the definition of forest land (PRC section 12220[g]) would be converted to non-forest use as a result of implementation of the proposed project.

A Timberland Conversion Permit (TCP) was approved in August 1995 for the project site to remove approximately 90 acres of forest land from the TPZ (CAL FIRE 1995). The approval of timberland conversion concurred with the finding that the conversion would not have a substantial or unmitigated adverse effect upon continued timber growing use or open space use of other land zoned timberland production within one mile of the project site on which the immediate rezoning is proposed. As per the TCP application, and as part of the Eureka Community Plan process, the project site completed an immediate rezone out of TPZ. Subsequent to approval of the TCP, impacts to loss of forest land would be considered less than significant.

#### Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

#### Mitigation Measures

None required.

#### Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

#### Change to Existing Environment

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**Impact AG-3: The proposed project would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of forest land to non-forest use.**

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#### Impact Analysis

As discussed under impact AG-2 above, the proposed project would result in the conversion of forest land to non-forest use; however, this conversion would be consistent with the zoning and land use designations of the area. The proposed project is planned for development in the Eureka Community Plan. Once constructed, the proposed project would not result in any additional changes to the surrounding environment, as the surrounding areas are already developed or zoned as TPZ. Therefore, the proposed project would not convert additional forest land to non-forest use, and impacts would be less than significant.



**Level of Significance Before Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact.

**Mitigation Measures**

None required.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact.

