

3.2 - Agricultural Resources

This section describes the existing agricultural resources and potential effects from project implementation on the site and its surrounding area. Data collection was conducted through review of the following resources: soil classifications designated by the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Web Soil Survey (WSS); information from the California Department of Conservation regarding its Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Program (FMMP); Yolo County’s General Plan and associated elements and specific plans; and the County’s online GIS mapping to determine zoning districts and lands subject to Agricultural Land Conservation (Williamson Act) contracts; and aerial photography.

3.2.1 - Environmental Setting

Agricultural Economy

Agriculture is the primary business of Yolo County. According to the Yolo County General Plan, 85 percent of the County’s land used for agriculture. Between 2006 and 2010, the value of Yolo County agricultural commodities ranged from \$370 million to \$443 million. Table 3.2-1 summarizes agricultural production in the County between 2006 and 2010.

Table 3.2-1: Yolo County Agricultural Economy (2006–2010)

| Year | Value (millions of dollars) | Rank in State |
|------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 2006 | \$370 | 23 |
| 2007 | \$451 | 23 |
| 2008 | \$502 | 21 |
| 2009 | \$462 | 23 |
| 2010 | \$443 | 23 |

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture, 2007–2011.

Table 3.2-2 summarizes the top 10 agricultural commodities produced in Yolo County in 2010. Tomatoes, used for processing, are the leading commodity, with a 2010 production value of \$89 million.

Table 3.2-2: Yolo County Crop Summary (2010)

| Crop | Value (millions) |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Tomatoes (Processing) | \$89 |
| Rice | \$56 |
| Grapes (Wine) | \$46 |
| Alfalfa Hay | \$28 |

Table 3.2-2 (cont.): Yolo County Crop Summary (2010)

| Crop | Value (millions) |
|--|------------------|
| Organic Production | \$26 |
| Walnuts | \$24 |
| Almonds | \$17 |
| Corn (Field) | \$17 |
| Wheat | \$15 |
| Cattle and Calves | \$14 |
| Source: Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner, 2011. | |

California Farmland Classification

The California Department of Conservation FMMP classifies agricultural land into four categories, listed below:

- **Prime Farmland:** Land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain the long-term production of agricultural crops. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields.
- **Unique Farmland:** Land of lesser-quality soils used for the production of the State's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards, as found in some climactic zones in California.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Land similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture.
- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Land of importance in the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county's Board of Supervisors and a local advisory committee.
- **Grazing Land:** Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

Table 3.2-3 provides a summary of Important Farmland and Grazing Land acreage in Yolo County between 2000 and 2010. As shown in the table, Important Farmland acreage decreased during that period, while Grazing Land increased.

Table 3.2-3: Important Farmland Summary (2000–2010)

| Classification | Acres | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 |
| Prime Farmland | 261,461 | 261,648 | 259,637 | 257,893 | 255,193 | 252,083 |
| Unique Farmland | 54,533 | 54,586 | 53,157 | 50,198 | 45,750 | 43,629 |
| Farmland of Statewide Importance | 18,031 | 18,007 | 18,123 | 16,988 | 16,793 | 16,412 |
| Farmland of Local Importance | 75,771 | 67,546 | 66,619 | 65,171 | 60,345 | 62,410 |
| <i>Important Farmland Total</i> | <i>409,796</i> | <i>401,787</i> | <i>397,536</i> | <i>390,250</i> | <i>378,081</i> | <i>374,534</i> |
| Grazing Land | 143,365 | 143,268 | 145,228 | 150,340 | 157,963 | 160,450 |
| <i>Agricultural Land Subtotal</i> | <i>553,161</i> | <i>545,050</i> | <i>542,764</i> | <i>540,590</i> | <i>536,044</i> | <i>534,984</i> |
| Total County Area | 653,453 | | | | | |
| Source: California Department of Conservation, 2012. | | | | | | |

Williamson Act

As defined in the Williamson Act (California Government Code Section 51201), “prime agricultural land” means any of the following:

- All land that qualifies for rating as class I or class II in the NRCS LCC classifications.
- Land which qualifies for rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating (Grade One: Excellent).
- Land which supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and which has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by the USDA.
- Land planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes or crops which have a nonbearing period of less than five years and which normally return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than \$200 per acre.
- Land which has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plan products an annual gross value of not less than \$200 per acre for three for three of the previous five years.

Farmland Classifications

Grasslands Site

Exhibit 3.2-1a depicts the Important Farmland designations for the Grasslands project site. As shown in the exhibit, the Grasslands project site consists of 41.02 acres of Farmland of Local Potential and 0.05 acres of Other Land.

Exhibit 3.2-2a provides the agricultural soil mapping for the Grasslands project site. As shown in the exhibit, the Grasslands project site contains primarily Brentwood silty clay loam of 0 to 2 percent slopes and a small area of Marvin silty clay loam.

Williamson Act Contracts

As indicated by the Yolo County General Plan, 67 percent of unincorporated Yolo County is protected under Williamson Act contracts. As illustrated on Exhibit 3.2-3a, there are no Williamson Act contracts in effect for the Grasslands project site. Williamson Act prime agricultural land surrounds the Grasslands site.

Surrounding Agricultural Land Uses

Farming operations in the Grasslands project site vicinity generally consist of small to medium-scale inter-row cropping systems, grazing lands, and fallow or bare parcels formerly under agricultural use. A single rural residence and associated livestock operation exist to the southwest of the project site. The FMMP classifies land immediately to the north, east, and west as Prime Farmland (FMMP 2011). Lands to the west are classified as a mixture of Prime Farmland, Grazing Land, Unique Farmland, and Urban and Built-Up Land by the FMMP (FMMP 2011).

Beamer/Cottonwood Site

Exhibit 3.2-1b depicts the Important Farmland designations for the Beamer Cottonwood project site. As shown in the exhibit, the entire project site is designated as Urban and Built-Up Land.

Exhibit 3.2-2b provides the agricultural soil mapping for the Beamer Cottonwood project site. As shown in the exhibit, the project site is almost entirely Brentwood silty clay loam of 0 to 2 percent slopes and a very small portion in the southeast corner consists of Marvin silty clay loam.

Williamson Act Contracts

As illustrated on Exhibit 3.2-3b, there are no Williamson Act contracts in effect for the Beamer Cottonwood project site and there are no adjacent Williamson Act encumbered lands. The nearest Williamson Act lands are located to the west of the City of Woodland.

Surrounding Agricultural Land Uses

There are no farming operations surrounding the Beamer Cottonwood site. Surrounding land uses consist of residential neighborhoods and County offices. The FMMP designates lands surrounding the Beamer Cottonwood site as Urban and Built-Up Land (FMMP 2011).



Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2010.
 MBA Field Survey and GIS Data, 2012.

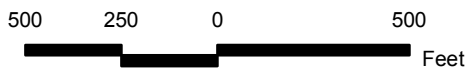
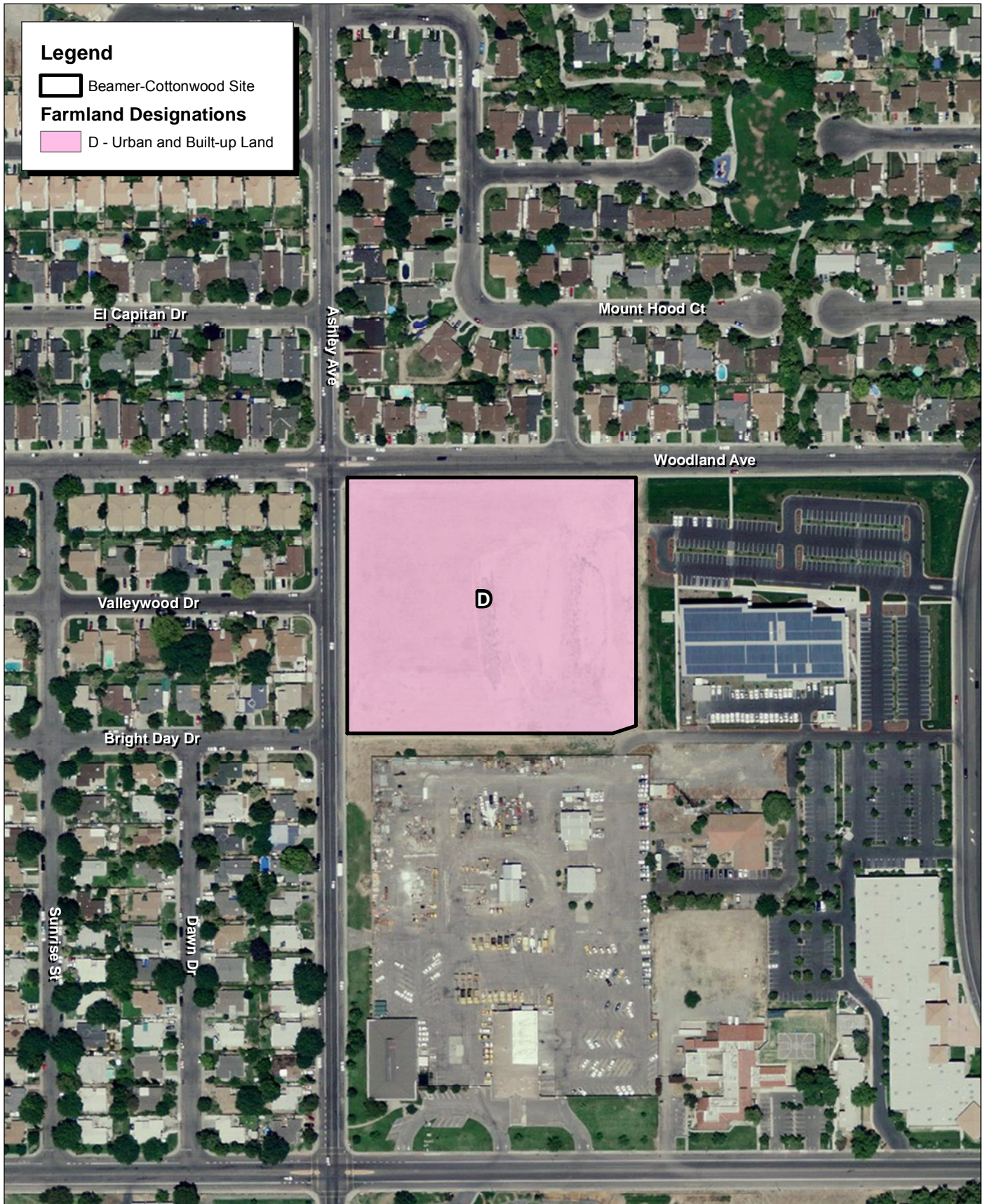


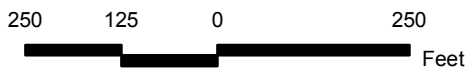
Exhibit 3.2-1a Important Farmland Designations Grasslands Site

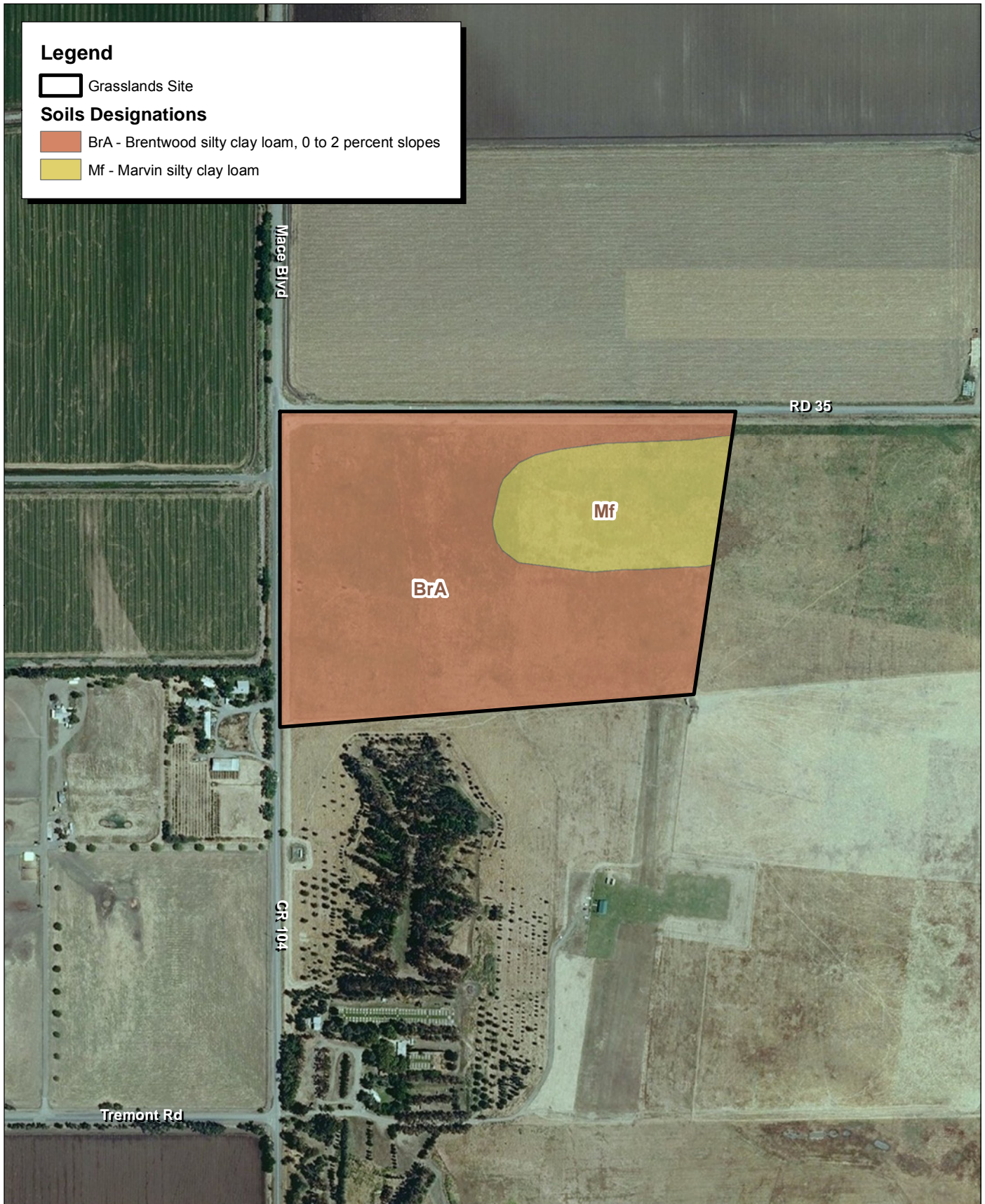


Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. USDA Soils Data. MBA Field Survey and GIS Data, 2012.

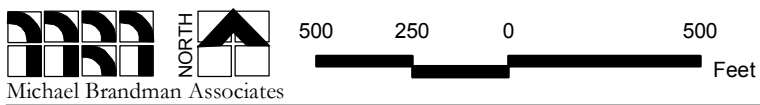
Exhibit 3.2-1b

Important Farmland Designations Beamer-Cottonwood Site





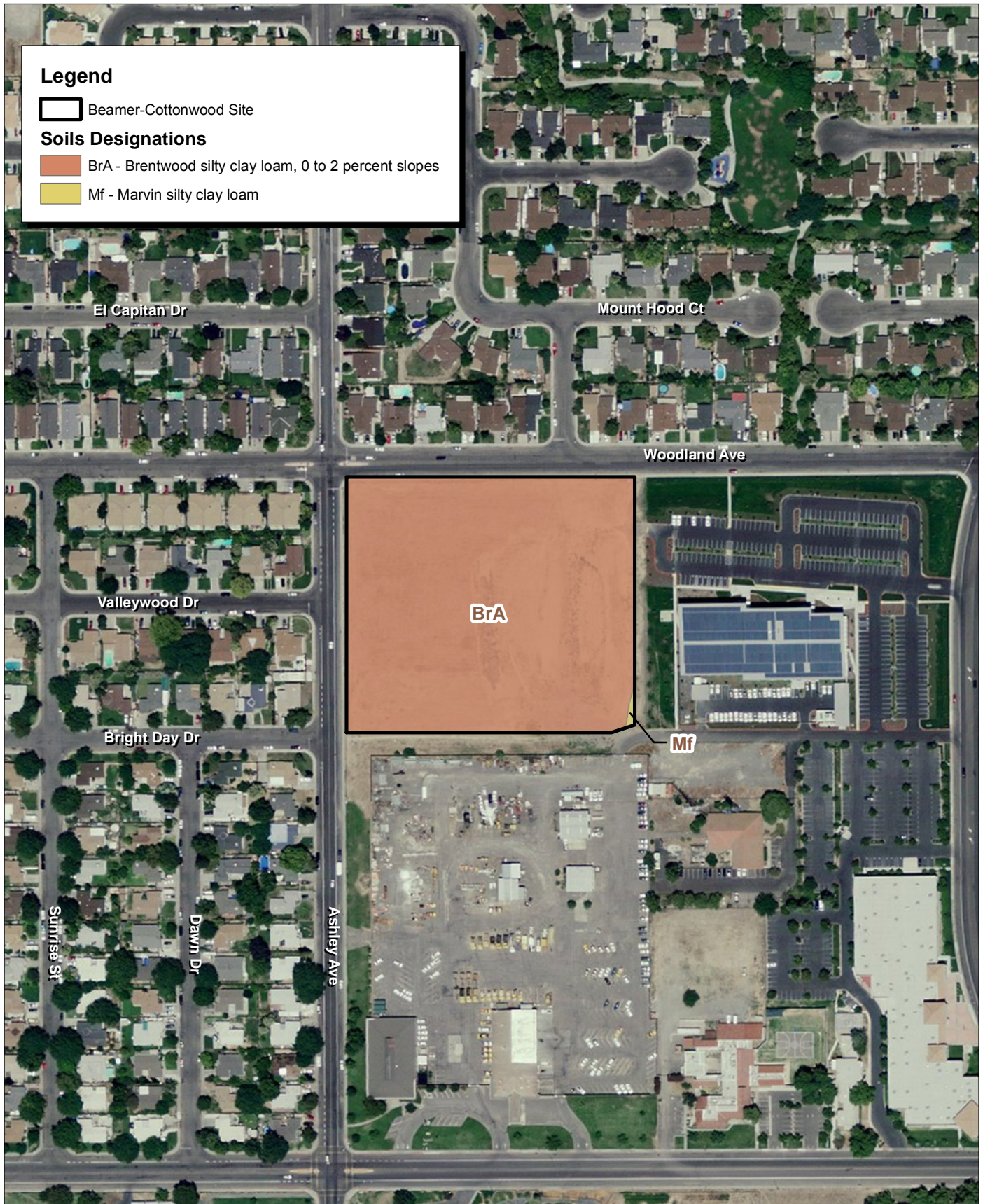
Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. USDA Soils Data. MBA Field Survey and GIS Data, 2012.



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Exhibit 3.2-2a Agricultural Soils Map Grasslands Site



Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. USDA Soils Data. MBA Field Survey and GIS Data, 2012.



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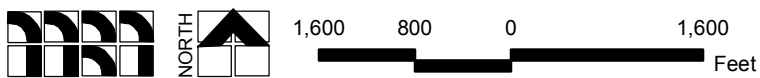
Exhibit 3.2-2b Agricultural Soils Map Beamer-Cottonwood Site

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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABILITY PARK PROJECT
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT



Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. Williamson Act Land Data, 2009. MBA Field Survey and GIS Data, 2012.

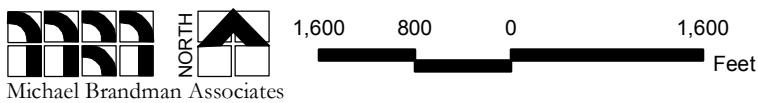
Exhibit 3.2-3a
Williamson Act Lands
Grasslands Site





Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. Williamson Act Land Data, 2009. MBA Field Survey and GIS Data, 2012.

Exhibit 3.2-3b
Williamson Act Lands
Beamer-Cottonwood Site



3.2.2 - Regulatory Framework

State

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program was established in 1982 to continue farmland mapping efforts initiated in 1975 by the Soil Conservation Service (since renamed Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS]) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Since 1980, the State of California has assisted the NRCS with completing its mapping in the state. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program was created within the California Department of Conservation to carry on the mapping activity on a continuing basis and with a greater level of detail.

Williamson Act

In 1965, The California Land Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, was adopted. This voluntary program allows property owners to have their property assessed on the basis of its agricultural production rather than at the current market value. The property owner is thus relieved of having to pay higher property taxes, as long as the land remains in agricultural production. The purpose of the Act is to encourage property owners to continue to farm their land, and to prevent the premature conversion of farmland to urban uses. Participation requires that the area consist of 100 contiguous acres of agricultural land under one or more ownerships.

Upon approval of an application by the Board of Supervisors, the agricultural preserve is established, and the land within the preserve is restricted to agricultural and compatible uses for at least 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, and a substantial penalty for the cancellation is assessed. Generally, the specific findings to justify cancellation are extremely difficult to make and contracts are rarely cancelled.

Local

Yolo County

General Plan

The General Plan establishes the following goals and policies related to agricultural resources that are applicable to the proposed project.

- **Goal AG-1:** Preservation of Agriculture. Preserve and defend agriculture as fundamental to the identity of Yolo County.
- **Policy AG-1.2:** Maintain parcel sizes outside of the community growth boundaries large enough to sustain viable agriculture and discourage conversion to non-agricultural home sites.
- **Policy AG-1.3:** Prohibit the division of agricultural land for non-agricultural uses.
- **Policy AG-1.4:** Prohibit land use activities that are not compatible within agriculturally designated areas.

- **Policy AG-1.5:** Strongly discourage the conversion of agricultural land for other uses. No lands shall be considered for redesignation from Agricultural or Open Space to another land use designation unless all of the following findings can be made:
 - A. There is a public need or net community benefit derived from the conversion of the land that outweighs the need to protect the land for long-term agricultural use.
 - B. There are no feasible alternative locations for the proposed project that are either designated for non-agricultural land uses or are less productive agricultural lands.
 - C. The use would not have a significant adverse effect on existing or potential agricultural activities on surrounding lands designated Agriculture.
- **Policy AG-1.10:** Protect agricultural lands from urban encroachment by limiting the extension of urban service facilities and infrastructure, particularly sewers.
- **Policy AG-1.22:** Protect the integrity of irrigation conveyance systems and related infrastructure from the impacts of adjoining non-agricultural development.
- **Goal AG-2:** Natural Resources for Agriculture. Protect the natural resources needed to ensure that agriculture remains an essential part of Yolo County's future.
- **Policy AG-3.2:** Allow uses that support agriculture, such as agricultural commercial uses, agricultural industrial uses, direct product sales, processing, farm-based tourism, agricultural research, and farm worker housing, on agricultural land subject to appropriate design review and development standards.
- **Policy AG-3.16:** Promote agricultural innovation, including research and development, biotechnology, sustainable farm practices, agri-tourism and nontraditional agricultural operations in order to expand and improve business and marketing opportunities for those engaged in agriculture.
- **Goal AG-4:** Education and Awareness. Support education to ensure continued public recognition of the important role that agriculture plays in Yolo County.
- **Policy AG-4.2:** Work with Natural Resources Conservation Service, Yolo County Resource Conservation District, Center for Land Based Learning, UC Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau and similar organizations to increase awareness of actions that may affect farming, including the involvement of an agricultural issues curriculum in the public schools.
- **AG-4.3:** Encourage ongoing public education programs by such organizations as Agricultural Commissioner's Office, UC Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Yolo County Resource Conservation District, 4-H Club, Future Farmers of America, Ag Futures Alliance, Center for Land Based Learning and other related organizations.

Yolo County Right to Farm Ordinance

Yolo County's Right to Farm Ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 6, Article 1 of the Yolo County Municipal Code) establishes agriculture as a local priority and protects farmers from nuisance lawsuits. The Right to Farm Ordinance requires that as a condition of discretionary approvals, applicants be notified about the possible negative effects of adjacent agricultural activities such as odors, dust, and

chemicals. The Right to Farm Ordinance contains formal mediation procedures for handling complaints against farm practices.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Section 8-2.2416 of the Yolo County Code consists of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The purpose of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is to implement the agricultural land conservation policies contained in the Yolo County General Plan to permanently protect agricultural land located within the unincorporated areas of the County. The Program defines agricultural land or farmland as, “Those land areas . . . that are either currently used for agricultural purposes or that are substantially undeveloped and capable of agricultural production.” Public uses, such as parks, and habitat restoration are exempt from the Program.

3.2.3 - Methodology

Assessing impacts to agricultural resources involves examining both the environmental characteristics of those resources and their current and historic use. The strictly environmental components of agricultural resources include physical characteristics such as soil and water quality. The current and historic use of agricultural resources on a project site inherently involves the interaction of these environmental characteristics with economic factors. Using these factors, the impacts of the projects on agricultural resources can be examined in three basic ways: considering the potential value of the farmland and its soils, considering the history and performance of the land, or using a combination of these two methods. Michael Brandman Associates evaluated the proposed project’s impacts on agricultural resources by considering information provided by the California Department of Conservation and the Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner as well as consideration of existing site conditions and surrounding land uses.

3.2.4 - Thresholds of Significance

According to Appendix G, Environmental Checklist of the CEQA Guidelines, agricultural impacts resulting from the implementation of the proposed project would be considered significant if the project 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?
- c) 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))? (Refer to Section 7.0, Effects Found Not To Be Significant.)

- d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? (Refer to Section 7.0, Effects Found Not To Be Significant.)
- 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? (Refer to Section 7.0, Effects Found Not To Be Significant.)

3.2.5 - Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section discusses potential impacts associated with the development of the project and provides mitigation measures where appropriate.

Convert Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

Impact AG-1: **The project would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use.**

Impact Analysis

Grasslands Site

Implementation of the Grasslands portion of the proposed project would result in the construction and operation of a photovoltaic (PV) facility and environmental education center at the site. The PV facility would allow for an experimental laboratory for the feasibility of crop production and sheep grazing beneath the solar panels.

As shown in Exhibit 3.2-1a, the Grasslands site contains 41.02 acres of Farmland of Local Potential and does not contain any Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. In addition, the agricultural land uses at the Grasslands site are restricted by the National Park Service through a quitclaim deed. Deed restrictions on the site require the property to be used and maintained for public purposes in perpetuity. As such, exclusive agricultural activities are not allowed onsite. However, the site has been used for grazing within the past year.

Section 21060.1 of the CEQA Guidelines defines agricultural land as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California. Farmland of Local Importance, such as the Grasslands site, is not included as a category of Important Farmland, consistent with the CEQA Guidelines Appendix G checklist. Furthermore, the experimental crop production and sheep grazing beneath the PV facility would allow minor agricultural activities to be conducted in a feasible manner. As such, conversion of Important Farmland at the Grasslands site would not occur and impact would be less than significant.

Beamer/Cottonwood Site

As shown in Exhibit 3.2-1b, the Beamer/Cottonwood site is designated as Urban and Built-Up land and does not contain any lands designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of

Statewide Importance. The Beamer/Cottonwood site is located within the Woodland City limits and is surrounded by urban land uses. As such, no impacts to Important Farmlands would occur.

Summary

The proposed project would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use. The Grasslands site has been used for grazing in the past and would be continued to be used for such purposes in conjunction with the proposed PV facility. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

Grasslands Site

No mitigation is necessary.

Beamer/Cottonwood Site

No mitigation is necessary.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Conflict with Existing Zoning or Williamson Act Contract

Impact AG-2: **The project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.**

Impact Analysis

Grasslands Site

The Grasslands site is zoned Agricultural General (A-1) and has been used for grazing within the past year. The Grasslands site is not encumbered by a Williamson Act contract. Under the proposed project, the Grasslands site would be developed with a PV facility and an experimental plot to research the compatibility of agricultural production, such as sheep grazing.

The Yolo County Solar Facilities Ordinance (Section 8-2.2420 of the Municipal Code) permits the installation and operation of medium-sized solar energy systems (such as the proposed project) in all agricultural zones, including the Agricultural General (A-1) zone. Land uses at the Grasslands site are restricted by the National Park Service through a quitclaim deed. Deed restrictions on the site require the property to be used and maintained for public purposes in perpetuity. As such, exclusive agricultural activities are not allowed onsite despite the Agricultural General (A-1) zoning. Accordingly, the proposed PV facility and experimental agricultural production would not conflict with existing agricultural zoning.

As shown on Exhibit 3.2-3a, while the project site and Grasslands Regional Park are surrounded by Williamson Act lands, there are no active Williamson Act contracts in effect on the project site. Therefore, no conflicts with a Williamson Act contract would occur.

Because the underlying zoning would remain and the site would continue to be used for agriculture, the project would not conflict with existing agricultural zoning. Furthermore, the project site is not encumbered by a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Beamer/Cottonwood Site

The Beamer Cottonwood site is zoned as Single-Family (R-1) and, as shown in Exhibit 3.2-3b, is not encumbered by a Williamson Act contract. The project site has not been used for agricultural purposes in the recent past and is surrounded by developed lands. Under the proposed project, the Beamer Cottonwood site would be developed with a small-sized PV facility to provide energy to adjacent County Facilities.

The Yolo County Solar Facilities Ordinance (Section 8-2.2420 of the Municipal Code) permits the installation and operation of small-sized solar energy systems (such as the proposed project) in all residential districts, including the Residential One Family (also referred to as Single Family) (R-1) zone. Because the Beamer Cottonwood site is not zoned for agricultural use and is not encumbered by a Williamson Act contract, no impact would occur.

Summary

The proposed project would not conflict with existing agricultural zoning or Williamson Act contracts. The Grasslands site has been used for grazing in the past and would be continued to be used for such purposes in conjunction with the proposed PV facility. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

Grasslands Site

No mitigation is necessary.

Beamer/Cottonwood Site

No mitigation is necessary.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.