

## **7.4 AGRICULTURAL AND AGGREGATE RESOURCES**

This chapter focuses on the impacts to agricultural and aggregate resources associated with the implementation of the alternatives carried forward for review under the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines. In general, most impacts to aggregate and agricultural resources are outside the USACE's statutory authority and responsibility under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The primary responsibility of evaluating and regulating impacts to non-aquatic biological resources resides with the County of Orange. As part of the NEPA review, the USACE is analyzing impacts on the environment associated with projects that receive authorizations under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

### **7.4.1 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **7.4.1.1 Agricultural Thresholds of Significance**

A project alternative would have a significant impact on agricultural resources if it would:

- Convert farmlands listed as "Prime," "Unique," or of "Statewide Importance," as shown on the State Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, to non-agricultural use.
- Conflict with existing Williamson Act contract.

#### **7.4.1.2 Aggregate Thresholds of Significance**

A project alternative would result in a significant impact if it would:

- Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state; or
- Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan.

### **7.4.2 SAMP PROPOSED PERMITTING PROCEDURES**

As discussed previously, the proposed RGP and LOP procedures have been developed for future participants and current participants in the SAMP. The future participants have not yet defined projects for permitting by the RGP or LOP procedures. For projects eligible for authorization by the maintenance RGP, impacts to agricultural and aggregate resources would be minimal. Such activities would be associated with small maintenance projects, resulting in temporary impacts to a small area located in a mostly degraded landscape without where agricultural and aggregate resources are expected to be absent. Impacts to agricultural and aggregate resources are not expected under the RGP. For projects proposed by future participants that would be eligible for authorization by the LOP procedures, not enough is known about the project size and location or potential impacts to analyze potential impacts to agricultural and aggregate resources. Such projects eligible for authorization by the LOP procedures will be subject to future NEPA review before a final permit decision can be made.

Current participants have analyzed their activities (including SMWD Proposed Project, RMV Proposed Project, and alternatives) that may have significant effects on the environment as noted in Chapter 6.0. Therefore, the authorization pursuant to the proposed permitting procedures may also have an effect on the environment per the thresholds of significance.

These potential effects on agricultural and aggregate resources and minimization/mitigation measures applicable to these potential effects are further discussed below.

### **7.4.3 SMWD PROPOSED PROJECT**

The SMWD Proposed Project, which includes the proposed Upper Chiquita domestic water storage reservoir and ongoing operation and maintenance activities, would have minimal impact on agricultural and aggregate resources. None of the three reservoir sites are proposed in locations designated as Important Farmland. The Upper Chiquita reservoir site would not remove or interfere with agricultural activities.

The SMWD Proposed Project would not have impacts on aggregate resources. The Upper Chiquita reservoir site is not located in an area with important aggregate resources. Its construction and use would not eliminate or preclude extraction activities.

### **7.4.4 ALTERNATIVE B-10 MODIFIED**

#### **7.4.4.1 Impacts**

##### ***Impact***

**7.4.4-1** *The B-10 Modified Alternative would result in the development of urban uses on lands designated as Important Farmland in the RMV Planning Area. This alternative would result in the removal of 278 acres of Prime Farmland, 38 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 529 acres of Unique Farmland. Implementation of the B-10 Modified Alternative would result in the loss of 845 acres of Important Farmland.*

#### **Conversion of Important Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use**

The potential impact associated with the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use are evaluated for the direct conversion impacts (i.e., conversion associated with development of Alternative B-10 Modified), as well as indirect impacts (i.e., pressure on adjacent land to convert to non agricultural use). Implementation of the B-10 Modified Alternative in the RMV Planning Area would result in the development of urban uses on lands designated as Important Farmland. This alternative would result in the removal of 278 acres of Prime Farmland, 38 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 529 acres of Unique Farmland. Therefore, the B-10 Modified Alternative would result in the loss of 845 acres of Important Farmland.

The conversion to non-agricultural uses would be limited to those areas within Alternative B-10 because of the lack of agricultural uses adjacent to the RMV Planning Area. The surrounding uses are either urban or open space uses and are not currently in agricultural production. The RMV Planning Area is surrounded by urban development in the Ladera Ranch Planned Community and the cities of Mission Viejo, San Juan Capistrano, Rancho Santa Margarita, and San Clemente. MCB Camp Pendleton, Caspers Wilderness Park, and the Cleveland National Forest are also contiguous to the RMV Planning Area and are in public ownership. Although there are large agricultural leases on MCB Camp Pendleton, the closest being in the San Mateo Valley south of the SAMP Study Area, urban development in Orange County would not influence the continuation of this agricultural uses because the base would not be available for urban development. The Department of the Navy controls the allowed uses on MCB Camp Pendleton. Therefore, there would be no significant indirect (off-site) agricultural impacts.

## **Crops and Nursery**

As indicated in Chapter 4.1.6, within the SAMP Study Area, there are citrus and avocado orchards, limited row crops, as well as nursery operations. Agricultural land in locations proposed for development as a part of the RMV Proposed Project would be converted to a non-agricultural use. Implementation of the B-10 Modified Alternative would result in the removal of majority of the orchards, the nurseries, and row crops. Of the approximately 482 acres of existing agricultural activity on the RMV Planning Area, approximately 65 acres would be retained.

All of the nursery operations are on leaseholds in areas proposed for development. The leases are proposed to expire by 2006. While the leases may be extended a short time to allow the continuation of the nursery stock production while development is phased, this would be an interim use. Ultimately, Alternative B-10 Modified would result in the removal of the approximately 325 acres of commercial nursery uses.

The amount of barley that is planted each year varies. In 2003, 886 acres were planted. In 2004 only 500 acres of barley was cultivated because of heavy rains areas were washed out. Using the 2003 footprint as a basis for evaluating the potential impact of Alternative B-10 Modified, which is reflective of a more typical year, more than 400 acres of area used for planting barley would be displaced.

## **Ranching Operations**

The California Department of Conservation does not consider grazing land an Important Farmland. Based on the current practice of livestock grazing, only portions of the grazing area are in use at any given time. Throughout the RMV Planning Area, livestock grazing is conducted on a rotating schedule, thereby allowing areas to replenish their vegetation while active grazing is occurring elsewhere within the RMV Planning Area. As with farmland, all grazing lands located within areas proposed for development would be eliminated over time. Implementation of the B-10 Modified Alternative would eliminate grazing in substantial portions of the Lower Chiquita, Gobernadora, Rinconada, and Talega pastures. This alternative assumes the continuation of grazing practices in open space areas. The alternative would result in a loss of approximately 7,300 acres land currently designated as grazing land.

Future grazing would maintain the existing grazing pattern. Cattle would still use the natural southern pastures in the fall and winter months and rotate to the north in spring and summer months. To protect biotic resources, some fencing improvements would occur to ensure exclusion of the cattle from certain areas supporting sensitive resources, as well as developed areas. The project provides for a phased dedication of open space as urban land uses are developed. Though grazing would be allowed in the open space areas, with the phased dedication of open space both seasonal and permanent exclusions are proposed. Generally, the areas proposed for permanent exclusion include GERA and the Donna O'Neill Conservation area. Within these areas, cattle would only be used for limited fuel management periods.

The number of cattle that can be supported within the RMV Planning Area without substantially degrading the biotic resources within the open space areas is dependent upon the amount of residual dry matter available. The Grazing Management Plan, which would be coordinated with the Adaptive Management Plan adopted by the County of Orange as a mitigation measure for the GPA/ZC, establishes standards for residual dry matter needed to support each head of cattle. Therefore, the stocking rates are designed to be adapted to the conditions in any given year to ensure the recommended residue is maintained. Other factors that influence the

decision of how many cattle to stock are related to expenses, such as insurance, interest, utilities, health costs, transportation, materials, and labor. The combination of forage availability, expenses, and market demand for beef ultimately would determine the herd size. Based on the evaluation in the Grazing Management Plan, the grazing areas that would be retained after development would support at a minimum the 500 head of cattle currently grazing on the RMV Planning Area. Although there would be no reduction in current stocking levels, there would be a reduction in the overall carrying capacity of the RMV Planning Area because there would be a reduction in the amount of grazing lands available. This would not be a significant impact.

### **Conflict with Williamson Act Contract**

Although there are areas within the Alternative B-10 Modified footprint that are currently in Agricultural Preserve, implementation under this alternative scenario would not require cancellation of the Williamson Act contract. Notices of non-renewal have been filed for all the areas on the RMV Planning Area. The lands will be removed from the Agricultural Preserve between December 31, 2005 and December 31, 2008. The phasing of development would avoid any conflict with the current Williamson Act contract.

#### **Impact**

**7.4.4-2** *The inability to extract the resources at the ONIS site would be a loss of a resource of value to Orange County.*

#### **Impact**

**7.4.4-3** *Implementation of Alternative B-10 Modified on the RMV Planning Area would result in the inability to extract the sand and gravel within San Juan Creek. The California Geological Survey identifies this resource as a locally important mineral resource recovery site.*

### **Mineral Extraction Opportunities**

The Oglebay-Norton Industrial Sands (ONIS) operation in Trampas Canyon would be displaced by proposed urban development associated in the RMV Planning Area. The lease/license on this property extends to 2013. Based on discussions with Michael Miclette, Director of Production for Building Materials at ONIS, mining operations are planned to continue through the end of the lease/license period. There are sufficient resources that would allow continued mining operations past the 2013 lease. However, with the expiration of the lease/license and the anticipated phasing of development these resources would not be available for extraction. The resources at the ONIS location have not been identified in the County of Orange General Plan or by the California Geological Survey as being an important resource. However, given the local demand for building materials, this resource would be considered of value to the region.

The California Geological Survey Updated Special Report 143 (1994) projected the demand for aggregate resources in Orange County to be between 73 and 80 million tons annually for the next 40 years. The inability to extract the resources at the ONIS site beyond 2013 would be considered a significant impact. Although the lease with ONIS is scheduled to end in 2013, the B-10 Modified Alternative would preclude the future extraction of resources by ONIS or other entity. Extraction and processing of sand and gravel material in conjunction with grading operations is allowed; however, there would be a long-term loss of resources.

San Juan Creek traverses the SAMP Study Area in a generally east-west direction. According to the California Geological Survey Updated Special Report 143, prepared in 1994, San Juan Creek contains aggregate resources equaling 120 million short tons. Currently there are no

aggregate extraction activities in the creek. The depiction of a Mineral Resource Zone in the California Geological Survey report is not intended to represent a commitment to mineral extraction for those areas but rather as a response to the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act's (SMARA) mandate to recognize mineral resource areas. Resources include reserves as well as all potentially usable aggregate materials that may be extracted in the future, but for which no permits allowing extraction have been granted or for which marketability has not been established. Extraction of sand and gravel resources within San Juan Creek would be incompatible with the open space use identified for the San Juan Creek area. The County of Orange evaluated the loss of this resource as part of their action that removed the S&G, Sand and Gravel Extraction zoning district on this portion of the RMV Planning Area. As part of the County's need to balance conflicting demands and in recognition that there would also be significant biological impacts, specifically to the arroyo toad, if the sand and gravel resources in San Juan Creek were to be mined, the S&G, Sand and Gravel Extraction zoning was removed. By removing the zoning designation, the local agency determined that preservation of these resources was a higher priority than sand and gravel extraction. At that same time, the County of Orange removed the designation as an important resource in the Resource Element of the General Plan. However, since the state still designates this area as a Mineral Resource Zone the loss of this resource would be considered a significant impact.

#### **7.4.4.2 Mitigation Program**

In conjunction with the approval of the GPA/ZC, the County of Orange adopted a mitigation program to reduce the impacts associated with impacts on agricultural and aggregate resources. These measures are listed below to provide the reader context of the mitigation program, although these measures would be implemented as part of the development project and would be the responsibility of the County of Orange for monitoring. No additional mitigation is required as part of the SAMP.

### **Project Design Features**

#### **Agricultural Resources**

PDF 4.2-1 The project has incorporated provisions into the project design to continue the cattle ranching activities and maintain the agricultural operation or portions of The Ranch. The ongoing grazing will be conducted in compliance with the Grazing Management Plan proposed as part of the Adaptive Management Plan (Appendix J of Final EIR 589) to ensure protection of sensitive species.

PDF 4.2-2 The project provides for continued citrus production in Planning Areas 2, 7, and 10 and avocado orchards in Planning Areas 2 and 7. The location and amounts of the agricultural resources shall be identified as part of the Master Area Plan for Planning Areas 2, 7, and 10.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Aggregate Resources**

PDF 4.13-1 The project would provide for the ONIS surface mining to continue within Planning Area 5<sup>2</sup> as an interim use until such time as development is proposed.

<sup>1</sup> Planning Areas 2 and 10 corresponds to Cañada Chiquita sub-basin watershed; Planning Area 7 is within the Cristianitos and Gabino and Blind Canyon sub-basin watersheds.

<sup>2</sup> Planning Area 5 is within Trampas Canyon.

PDF 4.13-2 Temporary excavation/extraction of construction aggregate or construction-related materials extraction shall be allowed during construction grading and on-site earthmoving activities to promote project construction efficiencies and limit long distance transportation of construction aggregate and construction related material.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### **Agricultural Resources**

MM 4.2-1 Prior to planting of the planned orchards in Planning Area 7, a qualified biologist shall survey the site for listed species to avoid potential environmental impacts. Should any listed species be identified the location of the planned orchards will be modified to avoid the resources or a mitigation plan consistent with the applicable requirements outlined in Section 4.9, Biological Resources (of GPA/ZC EIR 589), shall be developed and implemented.

#### **Aggregate Resources**

No additional feasible mitigation was identified.

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

Alternative B-10 Modified would result in the elimination of 845 acres of Important Farmland. There are no feasible mitigation measures that would reduce the loss of Important Farmland to less than significant. The identification of development areas took into consideration the need to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive habitat and species. Relocation of agriculture to other locations within the SAMP Study Area is limited because consideration must be given to the sensitive habitat, suitable soils, topography, and availability of water. Therefore, the impacts to Important Farmland would be considered a significant, unavoidable impact. It should also be noted that while the nurseries are located on what is considered Important Farmland, the plant material is being grown in containers, although the impact on Important Farmland is unaffected. These uses would be able to relocate outside of the RMV Planning Area and continue operation elsewhere.

Alternative B-10 Modified would result in significant unavoidable impacts by precluding the extraction of mineral resources in San Juan Creek, an area designated as a Mineral Resource Zone by the state. There are no mitigation measures that can reduce this impact to a level of less than significant. Additionally, implementation of this alternative would curtail the extraction of resources at the ONIS site, a locally important resource. In this latter instance, Project Design Features can help to reduce the level of impact, but not to a level of less than significant.

#### **7.4.5 ALTERNATIVE B-12**

##### **7.4.5.1 Impacts**

###### ***Impact***

**7.4.5-1** *The B-12 Alternative would result in the development of urban uses on lands in the RMV Planning Area designated as Important Farmland. This alternative would result in the removal of up to 307 acres of Prime Farmland, 48 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 584 acres of Unique Farmland. In total, implementation of*

*the B-12 Alternative would result in the loss of up to 939 acres of Important Farmland.*

### **Conversion of Important Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use**

It should be noted that for the B-12 Alternative, an overstated impact analysis is discussed in this chapter for development proposed in Planning Areas 4 and 8 and for the orchards proposed in Planning Areas 6 and 7. The final footprint of future development/orchards within these planning areas is undefined at this time because the precise location of future development/orchards is not known. In order to provide an analysis of possible impacts to Important Farmland, the impacts in Planning Area 4<sup>3</sup> are assumed to affect a larger “impact area” of approximately 1,127 acres and the impacts for Planning Area 8 are assumed to affect a larger “impact area” of approximately 1,349 acres. The impact areas in Planning Areas 6 and 7 are approximately 249 acres and 182 acres, respectively. This impact analysis overstates the possible impacts to Important Farmlands and agricultural uses because, ultimately, Rancho Mission Viejo is limited to developing a maximum of 550 acres in Planning Area 4, 500 acres in Planning Area 8, and a total of 50 acres of orchards in either/or Planning Area 6 and 7, as well as all necessary supporting infrastructure in addition to the proposed development in the other planning areas.

Indirect impacts associated with conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use in the RMV Planning Area would be similar to Alternative B-10 Modified. Implementation of this alternative scenario would result in the development of urban uses on lands designated as Important Farmland. The alternative would result in the removal of 307 acres of Prime Farmland, 48 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 584 acres of Unique Farmland. In total, the B-12 Alternative would result in the loss of up to 939 acres of Important Farmland.

The conversion to non-agricultural uses would be limited to those areas within Alternative B-12 because of the lack of agricultural uses adjacent to the RMV Planning Area. With Alternative B-12, there would be no significant indirect (off-site) agricultural impacts.

### **Crops and Nursery**

Impacts associated with Alternative B-12 would be similar in nature as the impacts that would occur with Alternative B-10 Modified. Agricultural land in locations proposed for development would be converted to a non-agricultural use. The proposed development would result in the removal of majority of the orchards, nurseries, and row crops. Of the approximately 482 acres of existing agricultural activity on the RMV Planning Area, approximately 20 acres would be retained compared to the 65 acres for Alternative B-10 Modified. All 325 acres of commercial nursery uses would be displaced by development. Using the footprint of the 2003 barley plantings, Alternative B-12 would displace approximately 627 acres of area previously used for planting barley. As previously noted, this represents an overstated impact.

### **Ranching Operations**

Impacts on ranching operations would be similar in nature those associated with Alternative B-10 Modified. However, this alternative would not eliminate as much land designated for grazing because less land would be developed. The existing grazing pattern would be maintained and would support at a minimum the 500 head of cattle currently grazing on the RMV Planning Area. There would still be a reduction in the overall carrying capacity of the RMV

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that only Planning Area 4 includes Important Farmlands.

Planning Area because there would be a reduction in the amount of grazing lands available. This would not be a significant impact.

### **Conflict with Williamson Act Contract**

Similar to Alternative B-10 Modified, implementation of Alternative B-12 would not conflict with existing Agricultural Preserves. It would not require cancellation of the Williamson Act contract. The phasing of development would avoid any conflict with the current Williamson Act contract.

#### ***Impact***

**7.4.5-2** *The inability to extract the resources at the ONIS site would be a loss of a resource of value to Orange County.*

#### ***Impact***

**7.4.5-3** *Implementation of Alternative B-12 would result in the inability to extract the sand and gravel within San Juan Creek. The California Geological Survey identifies this resource as a locally important mineral resource recovery site.*

### **Mineral Extraction Opportunities**

Alternative B-12 would have the same impacts, to the same level of intensity, as Alternative B-10 Modified. This alternative would also displace the ONIS operation in Trampas Canyon and result in protection of San Juan Creek. These impacts would be considered significant.

#### **7.4.5.2 Mitigation Program**

The mitigation program adopted by the County of Orange in conjunction with the approval of the GPA/ZC would apply to Alternative B-12 (see subchapters 7.4.4.3 and 7.4.4.4, above). As with Alternative B-10 Modified, these measures would be implemented as part of the development project and would be the responsibility of the County of Orange for monitoring. No additional mitigation is required as part of the SAMP.

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

Alternative B-12 would result in the elimination of up to 939 acres of Important Farmland. There are no feasible mitigation measures that would reduce the loss of Important Farmland to less than significant. The identification of development areas took into consideration the need to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive habitat and species. Relocation of agriculture to other locations within the SAMP Study Area is limited because consideration must be given to the sensitive habitat, suitable soils, topography, and availability of water. Therefore, the impacts to Important Farmland would be considered a significant, unavoidable impact. It should also be noted that while the nurseries are located on what is considered Important Farmland, the plant material is being grown in containers, although the impact on Important Farmland is unaffected. These uses would be able to relocate outside of the RMV Planning Area and continue operation elsewhere.

Alternative B-12 would result in significant unavoidable impacts by precluding the extraction of mineral resources in San Juan Creek, an area designated as a Mineral Resource Zone by the state. There are no mitigation measures that can reduce this impact to a level of less than significant. Additionally, the alternative would curtail the extraction of resources at the ONIS site, a locally important resource. In this latter instance, a Project Design Feature can reduce the level of impact, although not to a level of less than significant.

## **7.4.6 ALTERNATIVE A-4**

### **7.4.6.1 Impacts**

#### ***Impact***

**7.4.6-1** *The A-4 Alternative would result in the development of urban uses on lands within the RMV Planning Area designated as Important Farmland. This alternative would result in the removal of 278 acres of Prime Farmland, 38 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 529 acres of Unique Farmland. In total, development of the A-4 Alternative would result in the loss of 845 acres of Important Farmland.*

### **Conversion of Important Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use**

Indirect impacts associated with conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use would be the same as Alternative B-10 Modified. Impacts would be limited because of the lack of agricultural uses adjacent to the RMV Planning Area. With Alternative A-4, there would be no significant indirect (off-site) agricultural impacts.

### **Crops and Nursery**

Impacts associated with Alternative A-4 would be the same as the impacts that would occur with Alternative B-10 Modified because the land area proposed for development is the same with both alternatives. Alternative A-4 would remove the majority of the orchards, nurseries, and row crops; only 65 acres would be retained. Alternative A-4 would displace approximately 400 acres of area previously used for planting barley.

### **Ranching Operations**

As with agricultural operations, the impacts on ranching operations would be the same as with Alternative B-10 Modified because the same land area is proposed for development. Implementation of the A-4 Alternative would result in a loss of approximately 7,300 acres land designated as grazing land. While there would be a reduction in the overall carrying capacity of the RMV Planning Area because there would be a reduction in the amount of grazing lands available, the RMV Planning Area would support at a minimum the 500 head of cattle currently grazing on the RMV Planning Area. This would not be a significant impact.

### **Conflict with Williamson Act Contract**

Alternative A-4 would not conflict with existing Agricultural Preserves. It would not require cancellation of the Williamson Act contract. The phasing of development would avoid any conflict with the current Williamson Act contract.

#### ***Impact***

**7.4.6-2** *The inability to extract the resources at the ONIS site would be a loss of a resource of value to Orange County.*

#### ***Impact***

**7.4.6-3** *Implementation of Alternative A-4 would result in the inability to extract the sand and gravel within San Juan Creek. The California Geological Survey identifies this resource as a locally important mineral resource recovery site.*

## **Mineral Extraction Opportunities**

Alternative A-4 would have the same impacts, to the same level of intensity, as Alternative B-10 Modified and Alternative B-12. This alternative would also displace the ONIS operation in Trampas Canyon and result in protection of San Juan Creek. These impacts would be considered significant impacts.

### **7.4.6.2 Mitigation Program**

The mitigation program adopted by the County of Orange in conjunction with the approval of the GPA/ZC would apply to Alternative A-4 (see subchapters 7.4.4.3 and 7.4.4.4). As with Alternative B-10 Modified, these measures would be implemented as part of the development project and would be the responsibility of the County of Orange for monitoring. No mitigation measures are required as part of the SAMP.

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

Alternative A-4 would result in the elimination of 845 acres of Important Farmland. There are no feasible mitigation measures that would reduce the loss of Important Farmland to less than significant. The identification of development areas took into consideration the need to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive habitat and species. Relocation of agriculture to other locations within the SAMP Study Area is limited because consideration must be given to the sensitive habitat, suitable soils, topography, and availability of water. Therefore, the impacts to Important Farmland would be considered a significant, unavoidable impact. It should also be noted that while the nurseries are located on what is considered Important Farmland the plant material is being grown in containers, although the impact on Important Farmland is unaffected. These uses would be able to relocate outside of the RMV Planning Area and continue operation elsewhere.

Alternative A-4 would result in significant unavoidable impacts by precluding the extraction of mineral resources in San Juan Creek, an area designated as a Mineral Resource Zone by the state. There are no mitigation measures that can reduce this impact to a level of less than significant. Additionally, the project would curtail the extraction of resources at the ONIS site, a locally important resource. In this latter instance, a Project Design Feature can help to reduce the level of impact, though not to a level of less than significant.

## **7.4.7 ALTERNATIVE A-5**

### **7.4.7.1 Impacts**

#### ***Impact***

**7.4.7-1** *The A-5 Alternative would result in the development of urban uses on lands within the RMV Planning Area designated as Important Farmland. This alternative could result in the removal of up to 273 acres of Prime Farmland, 45 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 512 acres of Unique Farmland. In total, development of the A-5 Alternative could result in the loss of up to 830 acres of Important Farmland.*

## **Conversion of Important Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use**

Indirect impacts associated with conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use would be the same as Alternative B-10 Modified. Impacts would be limited because of the lack of

agricultural uses adjacent to the RMV Planning Area. With Alternative A-5, there would be no significant indirect (off-site) agricultural impacts.

As previously addressed in Chapter 5.0, for Alternative A-5, low density residential development would occur within approximately 8,000 acres (35 percent) of the 22,815-acre RMV Planning Area. Alternative A-5 assumes a maximum of 3,000 estate lots (assuming that a portion of the undevelopable portion of the lot would extend into open space areas and that other avoidance areas such as in Planning Area 3 would be included within the development envelope as community open space amenity areas. Approximately 14,824 acres (65 percent) of the RMV Planning Area would be in some form of open space. Because Alternative A-5 assumes a maximum of 3,000 estate lots within a 8,000-acre development area, the potential conversion of all 830 acres of Important Farmland (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland) to nonagricultural uses represents a worst-case scenario. The 830 acres is inclusive of 273 acres of Prime Farmland, 45 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 512 acres of Unique Farmland. This would be a significant impact.

### **Crops and Nursery**

Impacts associated with Alternative A-5 would be potentially greater than the impacts that would occur with Alternative B-10 Modified because the land area proposed for development with Alternative A-5 is the area that would not affect regulated waters and avoidance of state and federal threatened/endangered species. Because the area currently under cultivation is already disturbed, these areas would be developed with Alternative A-5. Alternative A-5 would remove the majority of the orchards, nurseries, and row crops; only 65 acres would be retained. Alternative A-5 could displace up to 530 acres of area previously used for planting barley.

### **Ranching Operations**

As with agricultural operations, the impacts on ranching operations would be less with Alternative A-5 than with Alternative B-10 Modified. Under the worst-case scenario, implementation of the A-5 Alternative could result in a loss of approximately 4,771 acres land designated as grazing land. While there would be a reduction in the overall carrying capacity of the RMV Planning Area because there would be a reduction in the amount of grazing lands available, the RMV Planning Area would support at a minimum the 500 head of cattle currently grazing on the RMV Planning Area. This would not be a significant impact.

### **Conflict with Williamson Act Contract**

Alternative A-5 would not conflict with existing Agricultural Preserves. It would not require cancellation of the Williamson Act contract. The phasing of development would avoid any conflict with the current Williamson Act contract.

#### **Impact**

**7.4.7-2** *The inability to extract the resources at the ONIS site would be a loss of a resource of value to Orange County.*

#### **Impact**

**7.4.7-3** *Implementation of Alternative A-5 would result in the inability to extract the sand and gravel within San Juan Creek. The California Geological Survey identifies this resource as a locally important mineral resource recovery site.*

## **Mineral Extraction Opportunities**

Alternative A-5 would have the same impacts, to the same level of intensity, as previously discussed alternatives. Alternative A-5 would also displace the ONIS operation in Trampas Canyon and result in protection of San Juan Creek. As a result of the ongoing aggregate extraction activities, the ONIS site is highly disturbed. With Alternative A-5 this area could be developed without impacting threatened and endangered species or regulated waters. Because of the resources in San Juan Creek, Alternative A-5 would preclude the extraction of aggregate from San Juan Creek, a designated Mineral Resource Zone. These impacts would be considered significant impacts.

### **7.4.7.2 Mitigation Program**

This alternative is very different from the land use plan adopted by the County of Orange. There would be no assurances that the mitigation program adopted by the County of Orange in conjunction with the approval of the GPA/ZC would apply to Alternative A-5. This alternative was developed to protect aquatic resources. There are no reasonable mitigation measures to avoid or reduce the impacts to Important Farmland and aggregate resources for this alternative.

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

Alternative A-5 would result in the elimination of 830 acres of Important Farmland. There are no feasible mitigation measures that would reduce the loss of Important Farmland to less than significant. The identification of development areas took into consideration the need to avoid and minimize impacts to aquatic resources. Relocation of agriculture to other locations within the SAMP Study Area is limited because consideration must be given to the sensitive habitat, suitable soils, topography, and availability of water. Therefore, the impacts to Important Farmland would be considered a significant, unavoidable impact. It should also be noted that while the nurseries are located on what is considered Important Farmland the plant material is being grown in containers, although the impact on Important Farmland is unaffected. These uses would be able to relocate outside of the RMV Planning Area and continue operation elsewhere.

Alternative A-5 would result in significant unavoidable impacts by precluding the extraction of mineral resources in San Juan Creek, an area designated as a Mineral Resource Zone by the state. There are no mitigation measures that can reduce this impact to a level of less than significant. Additionally, the project would curtail the extraction of resources at the ONIS site, a locally important resource.