

**Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Model
Skyline Heights Project
Riverside County, California**

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) is to quantifiably evaluate the potential impacts of the Skyline Heights project (project) on agricultural resources located on and adjacent to the project site.

Several factors are evaluated when determining whether implementation of a particular project would have a significant impact on agricultural resources. One factor is the existing land uses found on the project site. Another consideration is the project site's designation under the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, which produces maps and statistical data used for analyzing impacts on California's agricultural resources. Yet another factor is whether the project site is under a Williamson Act Land Contract, which enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners to restrict specific parcels to agricultural or compatible open space uses.

Preparation of a LESA is also a resource that may be used to determine whether a project would result in a significant impact on agricultural resources. The LESA uses a points-based approach for rating the relative importance of agricultural lands based upon specific quantifiable elements.

SECTION 2: PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Skyline Heights (Tentative Tract Map 36544) project is comprised of 270.9 acres of vacant land located in the foothills southwest of the City of Corona in Western Riverside County, California. The project site includes the area to be acquired by RCTC/City of Corona for the construction of the future Foothill Parkway westerly extension and the Mabey Canyon Debris Basin. The site is located approximately 3 miles south of State Route (SR) 71 and SR-91 freeways and approximately 4 miles west of Interstate (I) 15. The site is within the City of Corona's Sphere of Influence (SOI) and is proposed to be annexed into the City during the proposed project's entitlement process. The City is currently processing the Capital Improvement Project for the Foothill Parkway westerly extension between Green River Road and Trudy Way. Construction of the roadway extension is planned to be completed in the next few years. Foothill Parkway will border the eastern portion of the project site and will be the primary access to the site.

The Skyline Heights project is generally bounded to the north and east by single-family residences and on the south and west by the Cleveland National Forest and large, privately owned parcels. Within the general boundaries of the project site is an undeveloped 10.0-acre parcel that is owned by the U.S. Forest Service and considered "Not a Part" of the proposed project. Adjacent to the southeast portion of the project site is a single-family residential community which is currently graded and under construction (Tract Map 31955). The immediate surrounding project area consists of Low Density Residential (2 to 6 dwelling units per acre [du/ac]), as well as undeveloped open space, within the City of Corona. Skyline Drive, a graded forest service access road, is located just to the south of the project site. This road provides recreational hiking and mountain biking opportunities to residents on a local and regional level.

With the exception of dirt roads, the project site consists of sparsely vegetated and otherwise undeveloped land. The project site is characterized by steep topography, generally increasing in elevation from the northeast to the southwest. Several canyons and ravines are present that will convey natural drainage across the project site.

SECTION 3: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY

The Inland Empire comprises a small portion of California's agriculture industry. In 2009, the value of all agricultural production within the Inland Empire totaled \$1.4 billion, compared with \$41.4 billion in California as a whole (Chang & Adams Consulting 2011). On the County level, in 2011, Riverside County's total gross agricultural valuation was \$1.3 billion in 2011, an increase of 17 percent to \$188.6 million over 2010 values and a new record for the County. Agricultural Crops production rose 15 percent to \$990 million, while Livestock and Poultry increased 24 percent to \$292 million (County of Riverside 2012).

Agricultural crop values historically vary from year to year based upon factors such as production, market fluctuations, and weather. After three years of declines, 2011 presented generally favorable conditions for many of Riverside County's top agricultural producers. Nursery Stock, the highest valued crop in the County, increased 18 percent to just over \$200 million. Milk rose 32 percent to \$191.8 million, while Table Grapes increased 28 percent to \$118.5 million. Field and Seed Crops rose 84 percent in 2011, the greatest percentage increase of the year. Leading the way was Hay at just over \$101 million and now the fourth highest value commodity in the County. Rounding out the top five is Bell Peppers with a slight decrease of 5 percent to \$85.2 million (County of Riverside 2012).

Despite the recent turnaround in agricultural production and values in the County of Riverside, the regional agricultural industry currently faces several substantial challenges, including the stagnant economic climate, the price and availability of irrigation water, the increase in regulation, and the decrease in local support services (County of San Bernardino 2010).

Aside from declining production values and profits, the agriculture industry has experienced large shifts in production as a result of agricultural land conversion. Between the period of 1990 to 2004, approximately 105,583 acres of agricultural land uses in Southern California were converted to urbanized uses (American Farmland Trust 2007). Regionally, the conversion of agricultural land uses to other uses has become increasingly common. Accordingly, although the project site may ultimately produce a higher LESA Score, there are additional factors that must be considered when evaluating the site as a agricultural resource of significance. These factors include such things as the size of the project site and the present economic viability of onsite agricultural production.

3.1 - Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

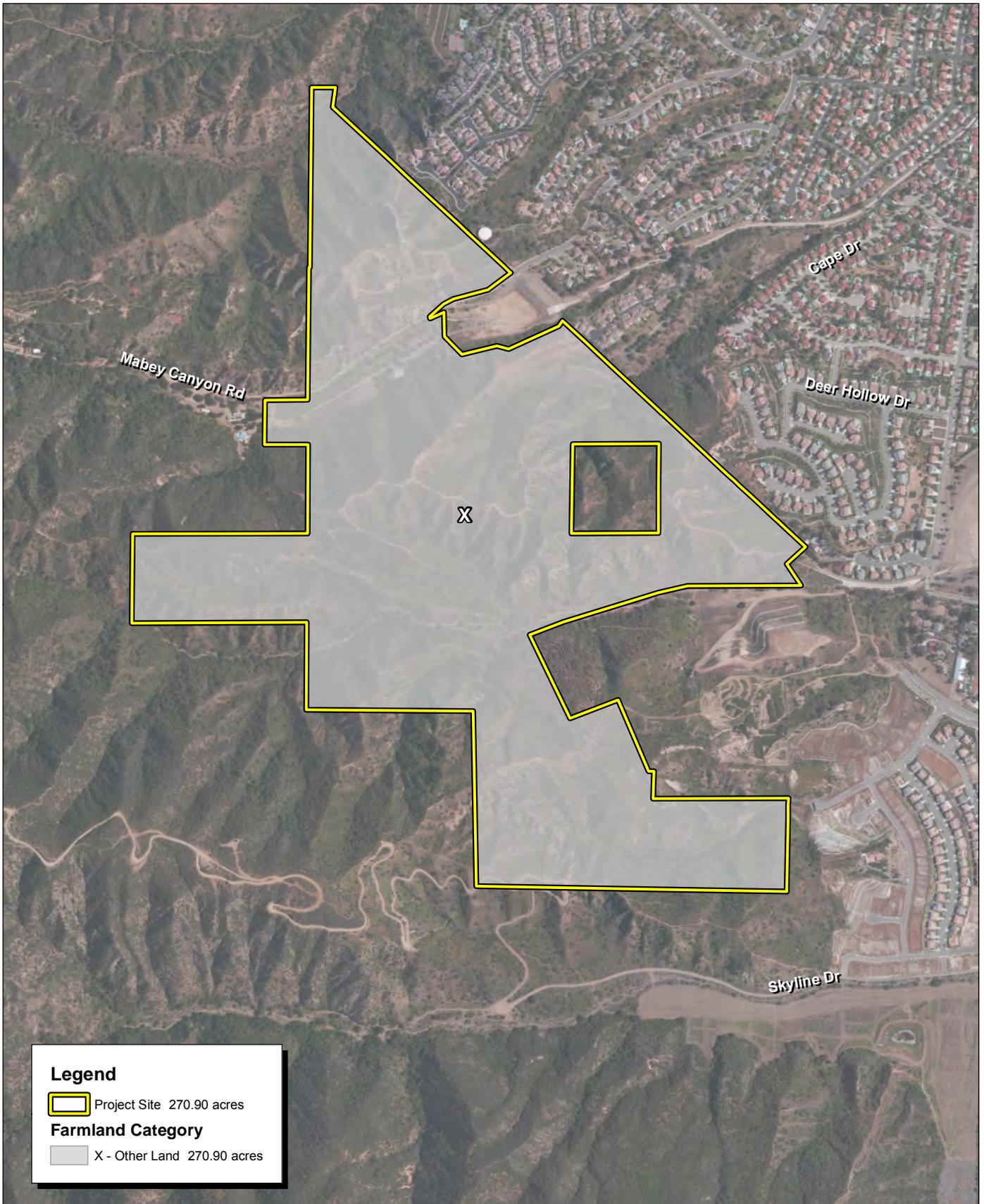
The California Department of Conservation established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) in 1982. The FMMP is a non-regulatory program and provides a consistent and impartial evaluation of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California. The FMMP produces maps and statistical data used for analyzing impacts on California's agricultural resources. Agricultural lands are rated according to soil quality and irrigation status. The best quality land is called Prime Farmland, which is further broken down into additional categories, including Farmland

of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance. FMMP maps are updated every two years with the use of aerial photographs, a computer mapping system, public review, and field reconnaissance. The last mapping cycle was for 2008-2010.

The FMMP Important Farmland categories are defined as:

- **Prime Farmland** is defined by the FMMP as farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time in the four years prior to the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance** is defined by the FMMP as farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Local Importance** is defined as land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.
- **Other Land** is defined as land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low-density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing; confined livestock, poultry or aquaculture facilities; strip mines, borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than forty acres. Vacant land and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than forty acres is also mapped as other land.

According to the 2010 FMMP maps, the project site is entirely comprised of 270.9 acres identified as Other Land (Exhibit 1).



Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. Riverside County FMMP Data, 2010.

3.2 - Williamson Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space uses. In return, the landowners receive property tax assessments based on farming and open space uses, as opposed to full market value, thus resulting in a lower tax burden. These contracts are for 10 years at a time, and roll into the next year unless the owner files a “notice of nonrenewal.” The purpose of the Williamson Act is to preserve agricultural and open space lands by discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses. The minimum preserve size is 100 acres. The landowner can petition to cancel a contract, although the presiding jurisdiction must make a finding based on substantial evidence that supports the cancellation of the contract. Upon approval, the landowner must pay a fee equal to 12.5 percent of the unrestricted, current fair market valuation of the property.

According to the Technical Background Report for the City of Corona General Plan (City of Corona 2004b), no parcels under Williamson Act contract are currently located on or adjacent to the project site.

3.3 - LESA Model

The LESA was developed to provide a lead agency with an optional methodology to ensure that potentially significant effects on the environment of agricultural land conversions are quantitatively and consistently considered in the environmental review process (Public Resources Code Section 21095), including during California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) reviews. As a lead agency, the City of Corona depends on the LESA to evaluate the significance of agricultural land conversions.

The LESA evaluates and measures a project site’s size, soil resource quality, water resource availability, surrounding agricultural lands, and surrounding protected resource lands. These factors are then rated, weighted, and combined, resulting in a single numeric score. This score becomes the basis for making a determination of significance for a project’s potential impacts on agricultural resources.

Using the LESA, a project would result in a significant impact on agricultural resources if the project meets the threshold criteria provided in Table 1. The criterion includes a Land Evaluation (LE) scoring threshold and a Site Assessment (SA) scoring threshold. The LESA worksheets prepared for the project to evaluate the project’s potential impacts are provided in Appendix A.

Table 1: California LESA Model Scoring Thresholds

Total LESA Score	Scoring Decision
0 to 39 points	Not considered significant.
40 to 59 points	Considered significant only if LE and SA subscores are each greater than or equal to 20 points.
60 to 79 points	Considered significant unless either LE or SA subscores is less than 20 points.
80 to 100 points	Considered significant.
Source: California Department of Conservation 1997.	

3.4 - Land Evaluation

There are two Land Evaluation (LE) factors used in the LESA to determine whether a project would have a significant impact on agricultural resources:

- Land Capability Classification Rating
- Storie Index Rating

3.4.1 - Land Capability Classification

The Land Capability Classification (LCC) Rating is based on the suitability of onsite soils for growing crops. The LCC Rating includes eight classes of soil designations (identified as Class I through Class VII), with soils identified as “Class I” having the fewest limitations, and soils designated as “Class VIII” being the least suitable for cropland. The types of onsite soils serve as an indicator of how valuable the project site is as an agricultural resource, and thus, serve as a measure of the capacity of a parcel to produce agricultural products. As such, a parcel with highly valued agricultural soils would rate higher in terms of land capability than a parcel with poorly valued soils. Classes I through Class IV are generally considered arable land suitable for cropland (although Class IV contains severe limitations on the types of plants that can be grown), and Class V through Class VIII are generally considered to be unsuitable for cropland, but may have uses for pasture, range, woodland, or grazing. The criteria used to determine a particular soil class is based on landscape location, slope of field, depth, texture, and reaction of the soil.

Subclasses designated with a lower case letter (identified as e, w, s, or c) are typically used in conjunction with the roman numerals to further describe soil limitations. The letter “e” shows that the main limitation of the soil is erosion; “w” shows that the presence of water either within or on the soil causes limitation in plant growth; “s” shows that the soil is shallow, droughty, or stony; and “c” shows that the limitation is a climate that is generally too cold or hot for many plants. There are no subclasses for Class I because these soils are considered to have few limitations.

Soil designations can be further broken down into capability units that are designated with a number (identified as 0 through 9). These numbers correspond to the actual soil content, and generally show limitations caused by gravelly soil, erosive soils, flooded soil, slow permeability, salt or alkali soil, low fertility, or other issues that limit effective rooting depth. Table 2 provides various combinations of LCCs and their associated LCC Rating.

Table 2: Land Capability Classification and LCC Rating

Land Capability Classification	LCC Rating
I	100
IIe	90
IIs, w	80
IIIe	70
IIIs, w	60
IVe	50
IVs, w	40
V	30
VI	20
VII	10
VIII	0

Soils found on the project site consists of LCC Class IVe, VIe, VIIe, and VIIs soils (Exhibit 2). Table 3 provides the soils found on the project site and their respective LCC Class and LCC Rating.

Table 3: Project Soils

Soil Name (Map Unit)	Acreage	LCC	LCC Rating
Cieneba Sandy Loam (142)	244.98	VIIe	10
Exchequer-Rock Outcrop Complex (152)	0.28	VIIs	10
Soboba Gravelly Loam Sand (197)	17.81	IVe	50
Yorba Gravelly Loam Sand (222)	6.30	IVe	50
Yorba Cobbly Sand Loam (226)	1.53	VIe	20
Weighted LCC Score			13.62

The data provided in Table 2 was used to derive an LCC Score based on the LCC Rating and the proportion of the project site covered by each soil (calculated by multiplying the LCC Rating by the proportion of the project area covered by a particular soil). The results of these calculations are provided in Appendix A. As provided in Table 3, the weighted LCC Score for the project site is 13.62.

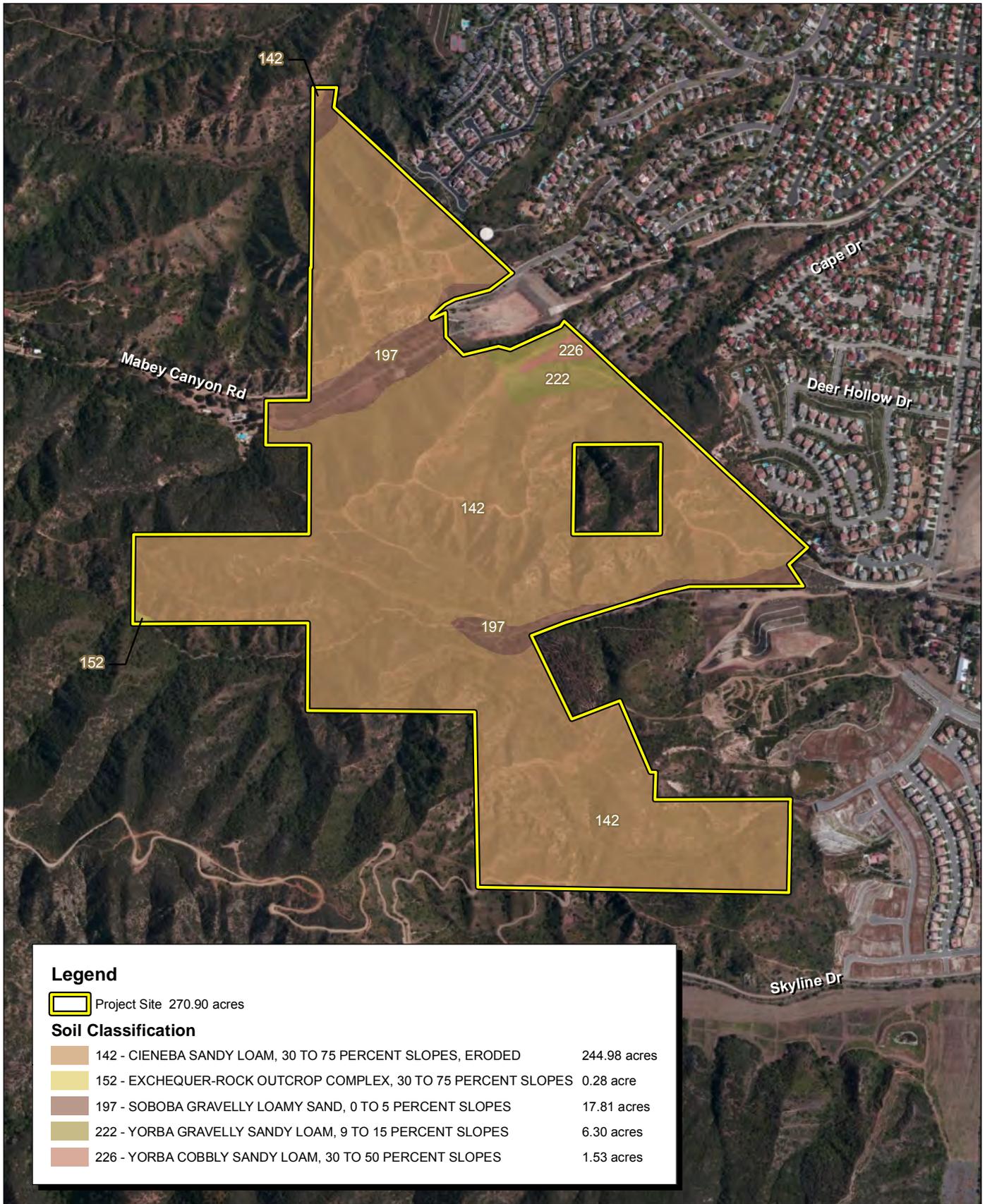
3.4.2 - Storie Index

The Storie Index numerically represents the relative degree of suitability of a soil for general intensive agricultural production. The Storie Index is based on a 100-point scale and uses soil characteristics such as soil depth, texture of the surface soil, density of the subsoil, drainage, salts and alkali, and relief. As part of the LESA, the Storie Index is used to determine a Storie Index Score (calculated by multiplying the Storie Index by the proportion of the project area covered by a particular soil). The index rating for a soil component of a map unit is obtained by multiplying the percentage rating values given to its four factors - A, B, C, and X; factor “A” is the soil profile characteristics, factor “B” is the texture of the surface layer, factor “C” is the slope of the soil, and factor “X” is other soil conditions that would limit the use of the soil. If more than one condition is recognized for the “X” factor for a soil, the value for each individual condition acts as a multiplier. Therefore, any of the general factors, or “X” factor conditions, may dominate or control the final overall rating.

Table 4: Storie Index

Soil Name (Map Unit)	Storie Index	Storie Index Score
Cieneba Sandy Loam (142)	11	9.95
Exchequer-Rock Outcrop Complex (152)	8	0.01
Soboba Gravelly Loam Sand (197)	33	2.17
Yorba Gravelly Loam Sand (222)	54	1.26
Yorba Cobbly Sand Loam (226)	28	0.16
Storie Index Total		13.55

As provided in Table 4, the project site received a Storie Index Score of 13.55.



Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. USDA Soils Data.



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Exhibit 2 USDA Soils Map

SECTION 4: SITE ASSESSMENT

There are four Site Assessment (SA) factors in the LESA that are used to determine whether a project would have a significant impact on agricultural resources:

- Project Size Rating.
- Water Resource Availability Rating.
- Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating.
- Surrounding Protected Resource Land Rating.

4.1 - Project Size Rating

The Project Size Rating is determined by first looking at the LCC acreage figures tabulated under the LE portion of the LESA, and then using these acreages to determine which grouping generates the highest Project Size Score. This score is a function of the agricultural production potential of soil on the project site and within the project vicinity. The Project Size Rating depends on the acreage figures that were tabulated under the LCC Rating. The Project Size Rating is based upon identifying acreage figures for three separate groupings of soil classes within the site, and then determining which grouping generates the highest Project Size Score. Table 5 provides the Project Size Score associated with the amount and quality of soils found on a particular site.

Table 5: Project Size Scoring

LCC Class I or II Soils		LCC Class III Soils		LCC Class IV or Lower	
Acres	Score	Acres	Score	Acres	Score
80 or above	100	160 or above	100	320 or above	100
60-79	90	120-159	90	240-319	80
40-59	80	80-119	80	160-239	60
20-39	50	60-79	70	100-159	40
10-19	30	40-59	60	40-99	20
Fewer than 10	0	20-39	30	Fewer than 40	0
		10-19	10		
		Fewer than 10	0		

The inclusion of the measure of a project site's size in the LESA acknowledges the role that size plays in the viability of commercial agricultural operations. In general, larger farming operations can provide greater flexibility in farm management and marketing decisions. Certain economy of scale for equipment and infrastructure can also prove more favorable for larger operations. Additionally, larger operations typically have greater impacts upon the local economy through direct employment,

as well as impacts upon support industries (e.g., fertilizers, farm equipment, and shipping) and food processing industries.

Table 6: Project Specific Size Score

Soil Name (Map Unit)	LCC Class I - II	LCC Class III	LCC Class IV-VIII
Cieneba Sandy Loam (142)	—	—	244.98
Exchequer-Rock Outcrop Complex (152)	—	—	0.28
Soboba Gravelly Loam Sand (197)	—	—	17.81
Yorba Gravelly Loam Sand (222)	—	—	6.3
Yorba Cobbly Sand Loam (226)	—	—	1.53
Total Acres	—	—	270.90
Project Size Scores	—	—	80
Highest Project Score			80

As provided in Table 6, the project site received a Project Size Score of 80.

4.2 - Water Resource Availability Rating

The Water Resource Availability Rating is based upon identifying the possible water sources that may supply a given property, and then determining whether different supply restrictions have the potential to occur during years characterized as being periods of either drought or non-drought. The project site currently consists of vacant, undeveloped land and does not include land uses that typically require a water supply such as agricultural operations. A review of historical aerial photographs of the project site and surrounding area found that while extensive agricultural operations have historically occurred east of the site, no such operations have occurred onsite since at least 1948 (Nationwide Environmental Title Research, LLC 2009). Although an existing active agricultural operation is located southeast of the project boundary and is likely being served by a domestic water supply, recycled/irrigation water supply, and/or onsite groundwater well, no water delivery infrastructure presently extends beyond this operation and onto the project site. As such, based on historical and existing conditions, it is assumed that the project site lacks any form of water supply or water delivery infrastructure.

According to the California Department of Conservation’s LESA Model Instruction Manual’s Table 5 and based upon the lack of existing onsite water supply, irrigated production on the project site is currently considered infeasible, although the region’s average annual precipitation rate of 10.43 inches of rainfall (The Weather Channel, LLC 2012) may be considered at least adequate for dryland production during non-drought years (but not in drought years). The assumption that dryland agricultural operations could potentially occur on the project site under the existing conditions is a

broadminded approach because the irregular and occasionally steep topography of the project site would likely restrict any such operations from occurring over most of the site.

Table 7: Water Resources Availability Rating

Project Portion	Water Source	Proportion of Project Area	Water Score Availability	Weighted Availability Score
1	N/A	1.0	20	20
Totals		1.0	Total Water	20

As provided in Table 7, the project site received a Water Resource Availability Rating of 20.

4.3 - Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating

The Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating is based upon identifying the project’s “Zone of Influence” (ZOI), which consists of the land near a given project site that is likely to influence, and to be influenced by, the agricultural use of the subject site. The ZOI is determined by creating the smallest rectangle that would completely contain the project site, then creating a second rectangle that extends one-quarter mile beyond the first rectangle, including each parcel that is completely or partially within the one-quarter mile buffer (Exhibit 3). The percentage of total land within the ZOI (minus the subject property) that is under agricultural production is then determined.

Table 8 demonstrates how the ZOI is calculated for a project’s Surrounding Protected Resource Land Rating.

Table 8: Surrounding Protected Resource Land Rating

Percent of Project's Zone of Influence	Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score
90 to 100%	100 points
80 to 89	90
75 to 79	80
70 to 74	70
65 to 69	60
60 to 64	50
55 to 59	40
50 to 54	30
45 to 49	20
40 to 44	10
Less than 40	0

Table 9: Zone of Influence

Total Acres	Acres in Agriculture	Acres of Protected Resource	Percent (%) in Agriculture (A/B)	Percent (%) Protected Resource Land (A/C)	Surrounding Agricultural Land Score	Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score
1,845.49	49.33	0	2.67	0	0	0

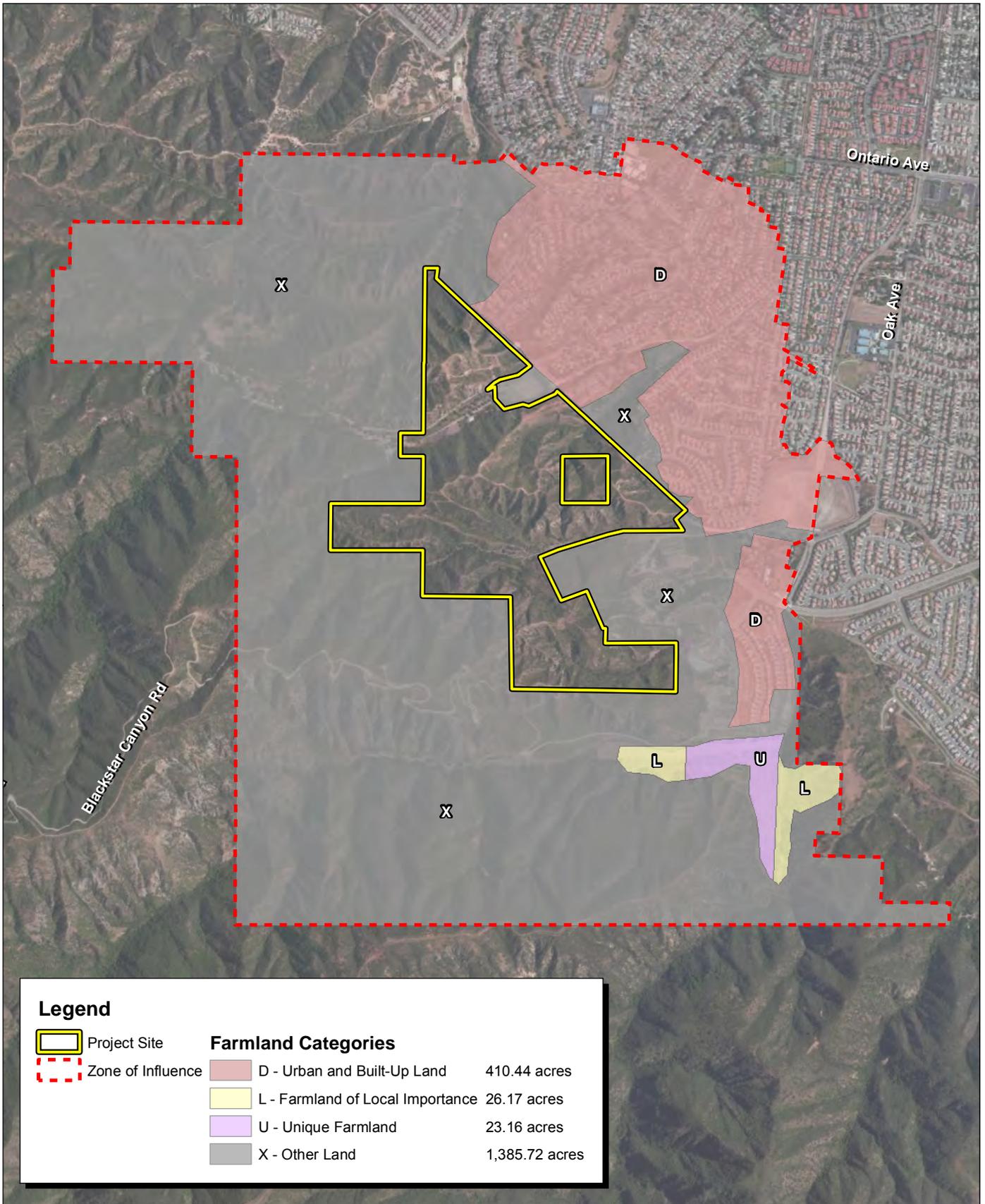
As provided in Table 9, the total acreage of the project’s ZOI (excluding the project site) is 1,845.49 acres. Approximately 49.33 acres, or 2.67 percent, of the land within the ZOI are currently under agricultural production. This results in a score of zero, since less than 40 percent of the surrounding parcels are under agricultural production.

4.4 - Surrounding Protected Resource Land Rating

The Surrounding Protected Resources Land Rating is scored in a similar manner as the Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating. “Protected Resource Lands” are those with long-term use restrictions that are compatible with or supportive of agricultural uses of land and include the following:

- Williamson Act contracted lands.
- Publicly owned lands maintained as park, forest, or watershed resources.
- Lands with agricultural, wildlife habitat, open space or other natural resource easements that restrict the conversion of such lands to urban or industrial uses.

None of the acres within the ZOI consist of protected resource lands, publicly owned lands maintained as parks, or Williamson Act contracted lands. Since none of the surrounding parcels contain protected resources lands, the Surrounding Protected Resources Land Rating is zero.



Source: ESRI Aerial Imagery. Riverside County FMMP Data, 2010.



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Exhibit 3 Zone of Influence

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LAND EVALUATION AND SITE ASSESSMENT

SECTION 5: FINAL LESA SCORE

A single LESA Score is generated for a project after all of the individual Land Evaluation (LE) and Site Assessment (SA) factors have been scored and weighted. Scores are based on a scale of a maximum 100 points. As presented in Section 3.3 above, Table 1 provides the ratings that determine whether a project would result in a significant impact on agricultural resources.

Table 10: Final LESA Score Sheet

	Factor Scores	Factor Weight	Weighted Factor Scores
LE Factors			
Land Capability Classification	13.62	0.25	3.40
Storie Index	13.55	0.25	3.39
LE Subtotal		0.50	6.79
SA Factors			
Project Size	80.00	0.15	12.00
Water Resource Availability	20.00	0.15	3.00
Surrounding Agricultural Land	0.00	0.15	0.00
Surrounding Protected Resource Land	0.00	0.05	0.00
SA Subtotal		0.50	15.00
Final LESA Score			21.79

As provided in Table 10, the LE and SA Scores for the project site are 6.79 and 15.00, respectively. The final LESA Score for the project, as provided in both Table 10 and the worksheets included as Appendix A, is 21.79. The project has a total LESA Score between 0 and 39 points. Therefore, based on the LESA significance thresholds provided in Table 1, the project’s impact on agricultural resources is not considered significant.

SECTION 6: REFERENCES

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Appendix A: LESA Model Worksheets

Site Assessment Worksheet 2.- Water Resources Availability

A	B	C	D	E
Project Portion	Water Source	Proportion of Project Area	Water Availability Score	Weighted Availability Score
1	N/A	1.000	20	20.000
3	0	0.000	0	0.000
3	0	0.000	0	0.000
4	0	0.000	0	0.000
5	0	0.000	0	0.000
6	0	0.000	0	0.000
7	0	0.000	0	0.000
8	0	0.000	0	0.000
9	0	0.000	0	0.000
10	0	0.000	0	0.000
Totals:		1.0	Total Water Resource Score	20

Site Assessment Worksheet 3.
 Surrounding Agricultural and Surrounding Protected Resource Land

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Zone of Influence					Surrounding Agricultural Land Score (From Table)	Surrounding Protected Resource Land Score (From Table)
	Acres in Agriculture	Acres of Protected Resource	Percent in Agriculture (A/B)	Percent Protected Resource Land (A/C)		
Total Acres	49.33	0	2.67%	0.00%	0	0

Final LESA Score Sheet

	Factor Scores	Factor Weight	Weighted Factor Scores
<u>LE Factors</u>			
Land Capability Classification	13.62	0.25	3.40
Storie Index	13.55	0.25	3.39
LE Subtotal		0.50	6.79
<u>SA Factors</u>			
Project Size	80	0.15	12.00
Water Resource Availability	20	0.15	3.00
Surrounding Agricultural Land	0	0.15	0.00
Surrounding Protected Resource Land	0	0.05	0.00
SA Subtotal		0.50	15.00
		Final LESA Score:	21.79