

## **4.4 FARMLANDS**

This section presents a Tier 1/Program level assessment of potential impacts on farmland associated with the Parkway. Additional information on farmlands is provided in the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) Community Impact Assessment (CIA) (Mara Feeney & Associates and North Fork Associates, 2007), which is available at the locations identified in the Executive Summary, including the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA) website.

### **4.4.1 REGULATORY SETTING**

Both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) require consideration of impacts on farmlands. A general discussion of NEPA and CEQA requirements is provided in Chapter 1 of this Tier 1 EIS/EIR. In addition, other types of legislation influence farmlands. Relevant laws and guidelines are described below.

#### **4.4.1.1 Federal Regulations**

##### **Farmland Protection Policy Act**

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) is intended to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. It ensures that, to the extent practicable, federal programs are compatible with state and local units of government as well as private programs and policies to protect farmland. Projects are subject to FPPA requirements if they may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use and are completed by a federal agency or with assistance from a federal agency. For the purpose of the FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for crop production. In fact, the land can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land but does not include water bodies or land developed for urban land uses (i.e., residential, commercial, or industrial uses).

##### **Land Evaluation and Site Assessment**

Soon after the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) was designed in 1981 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), it was adopted as a procedural tool at the federal level for identifying and addressing the potential adverse effects of federal programs (e.g., funding of highway construction) on farmland protection. For the purposes of this project, a consistent LESA rating score for each alternative is not achievable because the Parkway has direct impacts on farmland in two counties. At this time, there are no federally or state-approved LESA models that calculate farmland impacts across multiple jurisdictions or that can accommodate data from multiple soil surveys. Therefore, no LESA was completed for this analysis. Additional discussion on LESA can be found in the CIA for this Tier 1 EIS/EIR.

#### **4.4.1.2 State Regulations**

##### **The California Land Conservation Act–Williamson Act**

The Williamson Act provides incentives, through reduced property taxes, to deter the early conversion of agricultural and open space lands. All private land defined by the state as “prime farmland” (see Section 4.4.2.3), “other than prime farmland,” and “open space land” is eligible for coverage by a Williamson Act contract. Such contracts are administered by the Office of Land Conservation within the Department of Conservation (DOC). Land not defined as prime farmland or open space land can be

placed under contract if the lands are in an area designated by a county or city as an agricultural preserve. The DOC estimates that more than half of California's irrigated farmland is protected by the act.

Williamson Act contracts specify that the owners will not convert their land to nonagricultural uses for a period of at least 10 years. At the end of each year within the 10-year contract period, the contract is automatically renewed for an additional year, unless the landowner or the local government moves to terminate the contract. Contracted land is assessed for county property tax purposes at its agricultural value rather than its full market value. That is, the value of the land is much lower than normal because it is based on farming and open space uses as opposed to full market (or speculative) value. Forty-eight of the state's counties, including Sutter, Placer, and Sacramento counties, participate in Williamson Act programs for unincorporated areas. The state of California makes partial payments annually ("subvention entitlements") to local governments for lost local property tax revenues that landowners would otherwise pay if the property were taxed at its market value. Fees are charged to landowners who prematurely cancel Williamson Act contracts, but not if the lands are taken in eminent domain or annexation by a city.

The act prohibits a public agency from acquiring prime farmland covered under the act for the location of a public improvement if there is other land within or outside the preserve on which it is reasonably feasible to locate the public improvement. The law generally exempts existing state highways from this provision but can apply to new highways or highway corridors.

Government Code Section 51295 states that when a project would condemn or acquire only a portion of a parcel of land subject to a Williamson Act contract, the contract is deemed null and void with respect to that portion only. The remaining land continues to be subject to the contract unless it is adversely affected by the condemnation. In such cases, the contract for the remaining portion may be canceled.

Government Code Section 51291(b) requires an agency to notify the DOC and the local governing body responsible for the administration of the Williamson Act (usually the county planning department) proposed for acquisition for a public improvement project (regardless of whether it is a state or federally funded project or the amount of total acreage involved). This notification will occur via the process of submitting the Tier 1 EIS/EIR to the DOC for review.

### **Super Williamson Act**

Senate Bill 1182, commonly known as the "Super Williamson Act," was signed into law in 1992. This law provides a method for landowners to convert existing Williamson Act contracts to 20-year "Farmland Security Zone" (FSZ) contracts that provide additional property tax savings of approximately 35 percent. However, this additional tax reduction can only be realized if farmers and ranchers keep their property in the conservation program for at least 20 years. FSZ contracts are comparable to the Williamson Act contracts in that each year another year is added to the agreement unless the landowner or county does not renew the contract. Additionally, Senate Bill 1182 prohibits the annexation of land enrolled in a 20-year contract to a city or a special district that provides non-agricultural services or for use as a public school site. According to the DOC, more than 806,000 acres statewide are enrolled in this program. Also, the California Farm Bureau Federation states that currently only 19 counties in the state have adopted this FSZ program. There is no Super Williamson Land Act contracted land within the study area; thus, it is not discussed further in this impact evaluation.

#### **4.4.1.3 General Plans and Policies**

The study area includes agriculturally designated lands under the jurisdiction of both Sutter and Placer counties. The General Plan policies identified in Table 4.4-1 below were considered to be relevant to the evaluation of agricultural resources with respect to Placer Parkway.

#### 4.4.2 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The majority of the study area is within rural, unincorporated portions of Sutter and Placer counties. Sections of the corridor alignment alternatives are adjacent to the City of Roseville (or within its Sphere of

**Table 4.4-1  
Sutter and Placer Counties Agricultural Policies**

Jurisdiction	Policy Number	Policy
<b>Sutter County General Plan</b>	1.F-1	The County shall require that new development adjacent to agricultural areas be designed to minimize conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses.
	1.F-2	The County shall require that all lands set aside or utilized for mitigation of development in Sutter County or the Natomas Basin demonstrates that its creation and existence will not adversely impact existing and/or future planned agriculture or urban development.
	1.F-3	The County shall continue to implement its Right to Farm Ordinance. (Agricultural Operations Disclosure, Ordinance Code 1013, Chapter 1330 or its successor.)
	1.F-4	The County shall protect agricultural operations from conflicts with nonagricultural uses by requiring buffers between proposed nonagricultural uses and adjacent agricultural operations.
	6.A-1	The County shall preserve agriculturally designated areas for agricultural uses and direct nonagricultural development to areas designated for urban/suburban growth or rural communities and/or cities.
	6.A-2	The County shall balance the needs of proposed urban and suburban development with the need to preserve agricultural lands.
	6.A-6	Minimum parcel sizes in agriculturally designated areas shall be 20 acres in those areas containing orchard compatible soil and 80 acres in those areas with soils used primarily for row crops, field crops, and range land as shown on the Land Use Diagram. Historical uses and physical boundaries may be considered on a case-by-case basis. All parcels resulting from subdivisions or parcel maps shall contain the minimum required acreage for land use designation. Homesite parcels, as permitted in Policy 6.A-4, shall not exceed 2 acres unless the Environmental Health program grants a waiver for sewage disposal, in which case the parcel may be allowed for up to 5 acres. Remainder parcels shall meet the minimum parcel size of the agricultural land use designation.
6.A-7	Agriculturally designated parcels (not located in a rural community) that do not meet the minimum acreage requirement, as specified by the land use policies of the General Plan, may be adjusted by lot line adjustment pursuant to §65412(d) of the Government Code under the following conditions as specified in the Zoning Code: Are in conformance with the General Plan policies for home sites; or Are for agricultural support facilities that have been approved by use permit; or Are necessary in order to comply with the requirements of the Sutter County Ordinance Code provision pertaining to Environmental Health, Zoning, or Building regulations for the maintenance or expansion of existing improvements; or Are an adjustment between two adjoining lots, one or both of which are less than 20 or 80 acres in area as identified on the General Plan land use diagram.	
<b>Placer County General Plan</b>	7.A.1	The County shall protect agriculturally designated areas from conversion to nonagricultural uses.
	7.A.2	The County shall ensure that unincorporated areas within city spheres of influence that are designated for agricultural uses are maintained in large parcel sizes of 10-acre minimum or larger.
	7.A.3	The County shall encourage continued and, where possible, increased agricultural activities on lands suited to agricultural uses.

**Table 4.4-1  
Sutter and Placer Counties Agricultural Policies (Continued)**

Jurisdiction	Policy Number	Policy
<b>Placer County General Plan (Continued)</b>	7.A.7	The County shall maintain agricultural lands in large parcel sizes to retain viable farming units.
	7.A.12	The County shall actively encourage enrollments of agricultural lands in its Williamson Act program.
	1.H.3	The County will maintain large-parcel agricultural zoning and prohibit the subdivision of agricultural lands into smaller parcels unless such development meets the following conditions: The subdivision is part of a cluster project and such a project is permitted by the applicable zoning; The project will not conflict with adjacent agricultural operations; and The project will not hamper or discourage long-term agricultural operations either on site or on adjacent agricultural lands.
	1.H.4	The County shall allow the conversion of existing agricultural land to urban uses only within community plan areas and within city spheres of influence where designated for urban development on the General Plan Land Use Diagram.
<b>Sunset Industrial Area Plan</b>	1.E.1	The County shall protect agriculturally designated areas from conversion to nonagricultural uses.
	1.E.2	The County shall ensure that unincorporated areas within the city spheres of influence that are designated for agricultural uses are maintained in large parcel sizes of 10-acre minimum or larger.
	1.E.3	The County shall encourage continued and, where possible, increased agricultural activities on lands suited to agricultural uses.
	1.E.4	The County shall maintain agricultural lands in large parcel sizes to retain viable expanded farming units.
Sources: Sutter and Placer County General Plans and Agricultural Elements; Sunset Industrial Area Plan		

Influence) and Sacramento County. A small portion of the Eastern Segment is within the City of Rocklin. The farmland impact analysis focuses on impacts to farmland in Sutter and Placer counties only. There are no agriculturally designated lands or agricultural land uses in the cities of Roseville and Rocklin, so there would be no impacts to farmland in either jurisdiction. In addition, no impacts on Sacramento County's agricultural resources are anticipated, as none of the alignment alternatives would physically (directly or indirectly) affect any agricultural or farming operations in that county. This section describes existing farming operations in southeastern Sutter County and southwestern Placer County through consideration of the acreages and types of cultivated agriculture, crop values, and trends in agriculture.

The information contained in this section draws from several sources, of which the primary source is the *Western Placer Agricultural Study* (NFA, 2003). The study provides an overview of existing agricultural land characteristics, farm ownership and operations, and farm economics in western Placer County. Other sources of information include the DOC FMMP, crop reports prepared by the Sutter County and Placer County Agricultural Commissions, and consultation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture–NRCS.

#### 4.4.2.1 Existing Agricultural Activities

##### Sutter County Agricultural Production Values

Agricultural production in southwestern Sutter County consists mainly of large rice-growing operations. The county's 2004 Annual Crop Report states that farmers and ranchers produced \$299,219,300 in gross agricultural products, down slightly from 2003, when the total gross value of agricultural products reached \$307,322,200. Rice, walnuts, peaches, almonds, and tomatoes were the most valuable commodities, accounting for approximately 70 percent of the total gross value in crops for all of Sutter County.

Table 4.4-2 shows the gross value of the top five crops in 2004 for Sutter County. Table 4.4-3 displays the gross value of agricultural production for the five-year period between 2000 and 2004.

**Table 4.4-2  
Top Five Crops for Sutter County in 2004**

Crop/Agricultural Product	Total Value (\$)
Rice	111,189,200
Walnuts	38,925,500
Peaches	31,594,800
Almonds	15,082,300
Tomatoes	12,535,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>209,327,400</b>

Source: Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner, 2004

**Table 4.4-3  
Five-Year Comparison of Sutter County Agricultural Production**

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Agricultural Value	\$340,176,000	\$264,673,000	\$291,061,100	\$307,322,300	\$299,219,300

Source: Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner, 2004

Sutter County's economy is strongly tied to and dependent on the agricultural industry. Although the costs to produce agricultural products increased (i.e., labor costs, fuel and electricity costs to run equipment and to process crops) and the prices of the agricultural products have not kept up with inflation, the relative size of the agricultural operations in Sutter County has kept agriculture production as a valuable asset to the county's economic base. According to the 2004 Crop Report, the agricultural industry returned more than \$1.05 billion to the county's economy.

##### Placer County Agricultural Production Values

Agricultural production in southwestern Placer County is typified by large rice and field crop operations as well as pasture/grazing land, with a small amount of acreage left fallow. According to the 2003 Annual Crop Report for Placer County, farmers and ranchers produced \$73,182,400 in gross agricultural products, down slightly from 2002, when the total gross value of agricultural products reached \$76,278,600. Rice, nursery products, cattle/calf operations, timber, and irrigated pasture produced the

most valuable commodities and accounted for approximately 69 percent of the total gross value in crops for all of Placer County.

Table 4.4-4 shows the gross value of the top five crops in 2003 for Placer County. Table 4.4-5 displays the gross value of agricultural production for the five-year period between 1999 and 2003.

**Table 4.4-4  
Top Five Agricultural Operations for Placer County in 2003**

Crop/Agricultural Product	Total Value (\$)
Rice	15,732,500
Nursery Products	14,046,000
Cattle and Calf Operations	11,407,500
Timber Production <sup>1</sup>	6,763,700
Irrigated Pasture	2,400,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,349,700</b>
Source: Placer County Agricultural Commissioner, 2003	
Note:	
1. There is no timber production within the project area.	

**Table 4.4-5  
Five-Year Comparison of Placer County Agricultural Production**

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Agricultural Value	\$70,195,421	\$68,933,500	\$75,036,970	\$76,278,600	\$73,182,400
Source: Placer County Agricultural Commissioner, 2003					

As the tables show, the gross value of agricultural production has fluctuated only slightly (due to factors such as climatic conditions in a given growing season) in recent years. However, the values in these tables do not reflect the net income or costs for all agricultural production. As documented in the *Western Placer Agricultural Study*, the net income to producers actually has declined recently (into negative territory for some commodities). Prices received for agricultural products at the farm level have not kept pace with inflation. As a result, higher prices for inputs have reduced net income substantially. That is, the prices paid for inputs such as fuel, electricity, labor, and water reflect increased prices in local markets, yet the prices received for agricultural products reflect global market conditions that have held down the price received for the agricultural products (NFA, 2003).

#### 4.4.2.2 Trends in Agricultural Production and Farmland Conversion

##### Sutter County Trends in Agriculture

The agricultural outlook in Sutter County is quite different from that in Placer County. According to the University of California Agricultural Extension March 2005 report, *The Changing Face of Agriculture in the Lower Sacramento Valley*, the agricultural income in Sutter County grew by 100 percent between 1983 and 2003. The latest agricultural census, in 2003, showed an increase in the size of the average farm from 234 acres in 1992 to an average size of 267 acres in 2003. In addition, there were 505 farms with annual sales at \$100,000 or more. This is 36 percent of the 1,391 farms in the county, and is relatively unchanged from the 1997 level of 37 percent.

Market conditions have led to changes in the types of crops being produced in Sutter County. Agricultural production has begun to shift from vegetable crop production to tree crops due to the lack of profitability over the past several years for the former (UC Agricultural Extension, 2005). Acreage devoted to growing tomatoes is about half that of the previous five-year average and about 25 percent of what it was 10 years ago. Driving forces for this decline include the distance from processing facilities as well as disease (soil-borne pathogens) and problems associated with Sutter County growing conditions. Similar problems are also affecting the local melon industry.

Tree crops such as peaches, prunes, walnuts, and almonds have shown a modest increase in both acreage and value. This industry has always been important to the local agricultural economy and continues to provide the county with approximately one-third of its total agricultural income. It is likely that the number of acres planted in prunes and peaches will be reduced in response to market conditions, while the number of acres devoted to almonds and walnuts probably will increase.

The value of rice to lower Sacramento Valley economies has continued to rise. The crop value of rice has increased by 100 percent over the past 10 years and there has been a 50 percent increase in acreage devoted to rice in the county. Rice also accounts for nearly one-third of all crop value in the county.

The Sutter–Yuba University of California Agricultural Extension (UC Agricultural Extension, 2005) has forecast that vegetables and agronomic (scientific agriculture) crops will continue to decrease in importance as tree crops occupy more of the landscape. This transition has changed aspects of the local agricultural economy, and the area continues to see positive growth in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, if government policies and other conditions are favorable, rice will continue to be a dominant crop and a strong contributor to local agricultural economies.

### **Placer County Trends in Agricultural Production**

According to the Placer County Agricultural Study prepared by the University of California Davis Extension program in 2000, 90 percent of the county's farms are family owned. In addition, the operations that are corporately owned are generally owned by family corporations. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the average farm size in Placer County has decreased dramatically from approximately 140 acres in 1997 to 91 acres in 2003. Also, the NASS has estimated that only 62 of the 1,438 farms in the county, or 4 percent, earned \$100,000 or more in agricultural sales. Additionally, agricultural-related employment has fallen from 5.1 percent in 1970 to 2.6 percent of total employment in Placer County in 2005.

The Placer County Industry Structure Study, prepared by the Sacramento Regional Research Institute in March 2006, discusses conflicting economic indicators. This report states that in 2004 agriculture constituted only 0.5 percent of the industry composition in Placer County. Yet between 1994 and 2004, agricultural employment grew by 133.3 percent, as local farmers sought more intensive ways to increase agricultural production. In addition, this report forecasts agricultural employment to continue to grow by approximately 2.9 percent from 2004 to 2009.

Even with the decreasing scale of farming (i.e., size of farms) in Placer County, some large-scale producers are beginning to seek opportunities for developing small-scale, intensively farmed enterprises, such as strawberry production, as reflected in agricultural industry specialization, which grew over 100 percent between 1999 and 2004 (SRRI, 2006). Such small-scale operations can market directly to consumers through on-farm sales, community supported agriculture subscriptions, and farmers markets. Although Placer County farmers and ranchers produce a variety of agricultural products, the size of the farms in the area and the unlikely ability to expand (due to urban growth pressures) will challenge the ability of these farms to remain viable. Long-time agricultural operators who were consulted during the course of this study reported increasing conflicts between essential farm operations and urban uses (such

as movement of farm equipment on local roadways where commuter traffic is increasing, increased incidences of vandalism, and increased costs for utilities such as water as local demand increases). The declining presence of local agricultural processing centers also adversely affects farm economics.

The future of agriculture in the county probably will depend on efforts by local farmers/ranchers to increase their ability to market commodities locally and diversify their products. Diversification of products could include marketing tourism and recreation opportunities on their properties. Examples include allowing hunting in field crops, farm stays, farm tours, fishing, and operating Christmas tree farms.

### **Sutter County Farmland Conversion**

The pace of urbanization in Sutter County from 1998 to 2000 increased in comparison to the rate of development between 1996 and 1998. In Sutter County, approximately 692 acres were urbanized in the three-year period beginning in 1998, in contrast to the 51 acres during the reporting period from 1996 to 1998. The majority of this development occurred on the fringe of existing urban development areas near Yuba City and the unincorporated community of Sutter. According to the DOC Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP), since 1990, 9,333 acres of farmland have gone out of production in Sutter County and 2,354 acres of new urban land have been created (DOC, 2002a).

Sutter County will continue to face development pressure in the foreseeable future. Sutter County's 2005 population was 87,342 (SACOG, 2004). Growth projections from the state Housing and Community Development Department (HCD) show a population of 100,437 in 2010 and 116,408 in 2020, while the California Department of Finance projects that the county's population will grow to 161,600 in 2020. This growth probably will lead to a decline in the size of farming operations and increase the subdivision of farm units for urban/suburban development.

The Sutter County Board of Supervisors set aside more than 10,500 acres of land near the southeastern border with Placer/Sacramento County (including portions of the project study area) for the South Sutter County Industrial/Commercial Reserve. The County is currently in the process of preparing a specific plan for approximately 7,500 acres, the Sutter Pointe Specific Plan portion of the 10,500-acre reserve.

### **Placer County Farmland Conversion**

As indicated by the DLRP, the pace of urbanization from 1998 to 2000 increased substantially in Placer County compared to the period between 1996 and 1998 (DOC, 2002a). The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), overseen by the DLRP, maps millions of acres of California's public and private land and produces a major study that evaluates farmland conversion in California counties, including Placer County.

In Placer County, 3,840 acres of undeveloped land were urbanized during the 2000 mapping cycle compared to 2,607 acres during the 1998 cycle; a 47 percent increase. Between 1998 and 2000, a total of 1,162 acres of farmland, 2,106 acres of grazing land, and 572 acres of land classified as "other" (a category that includes wetlands, low-density residential areas, and brush or timberlands unsuitable for grazing) were rezoned to urban uses.

Since the FMMP began tracking changes in 1984, more than 18,000 acres of farmland and grazing land have been converted to urban uses in Placer County. This growth rate earned the county a top 10 ranking among counties statewide in terms of acreage of land developed since 1994. Much of this growth occurred in the Roseville-Lincoln-Rocklin area, and the West Roseville Specific Plan area, approved and annexed into the City of Roseville, will convert 3,162 acres of agricultural land and open space to urban uses in the near future.

Placer County's agricultural land will continue to face development pressure in the future. Placer County's 2005 population was 301,560 (SACOG, 2004). HCD projects that the county's population will grow to 325,648 by 2010 and to 391,245 by 2020.

#### 4.4.2.3 Farmland Classifications and Soil Patterns

##### Farmland Classifications

The DOC administers the FMMP, which produces maps and statistical data for California's agricultural resources. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality and irrigation status. The best quality land is called Prime Farmland, while rural land less suited for crop production is usually categorized as grazing land. The following DOC-defined categories of farmland exist within Sutter and Placer counties and are shown in DOC's most recently published Important Farmlands Map (Figure 4.4-1).

**Prime Farmland** is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to current farming methods. Prime Farmland must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use. Prime Farmland also includes Prime Agricultural Farmland and must meet any of the following qualifications:

- All land which qualifies for rating as Class I or Class II in the Natural Resource Conservation Service land use capability classifications.
- Land that qualifies for rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating. The Storie Index expresses numerically the relative degree of suitability of a soil for general intensive agriculture as it exists at the time of evaluation. The rating is based on soil characteristics only and is obtained by evaluating such factors as soil depth, surface layer texture, subsoil characteristics, drainage, salts and alkali, and relief.
- 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 U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Land planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes or crops that have a nonbearing period of less than 5 years and that normally will return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than two hundred dollars (\$200) per acre.
- Land that has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant products an annual gross value of the previous 5 years. That is land that is planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes or crops that is currently being cultivated.

**Farmland of Statewide Importance** is land with a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It must have been used for the production of irrigated crops within the last three years. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

**Unique Farmland** is land that does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance but that is currently used for the production of specific crops having high economic value (as listed in the last three years of *California Agriculture* produced by the California Department of Food and

Agriculture). It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. Examples of such crops may include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agriculture use.

**Farmland of Local Importance** is currently producing crops or has the capability of production. Farmland of Local Importance is land other than Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland. This land may be important to the local economy due to its productivity. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

**Grazing Land** is land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock. The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres. (Due to variations in soil quality, smaller units of Grazing Land may appear within larger irrigated pastures.)

### **Soils in Southern Sutter County**

The NRCS has established a Geographic Information System (GIS) database that identifies soil units for several counties in California, including Sutter County. This GIS database, like the 1980 Placer County Soil Survey, is used as guidance to determine the agricultural potential of the soils within the project area and aids the NRCS in its evaluation of the potential types of farmland in Sutter County.

Soils classifications for the study area, including southwestern Placer County, northwestern Sacramento County, and southeastern Sutter County, are shown on Figure 4.4-2. Soil types serve as partial indicators for growing agricultural products; however, crop production also depends on access to water, slope and aspect, and other local influences, in addition to its soil characteristics. Therefore, soil types are shown on Figure 4.4-2 for information only and are used to assess the Parkway's farmland impacts.

### **Soils in Southwestern Placer County**

The NRCS and the University of California Davis, Agricultural Extension Program completed a soil survey of the western portion of Placer County in 1980. This report serves as the framework for determining the agricultural potential of the soils within the project area and aids the NRCS in its evaluation of the potential for farmland in Placer County.

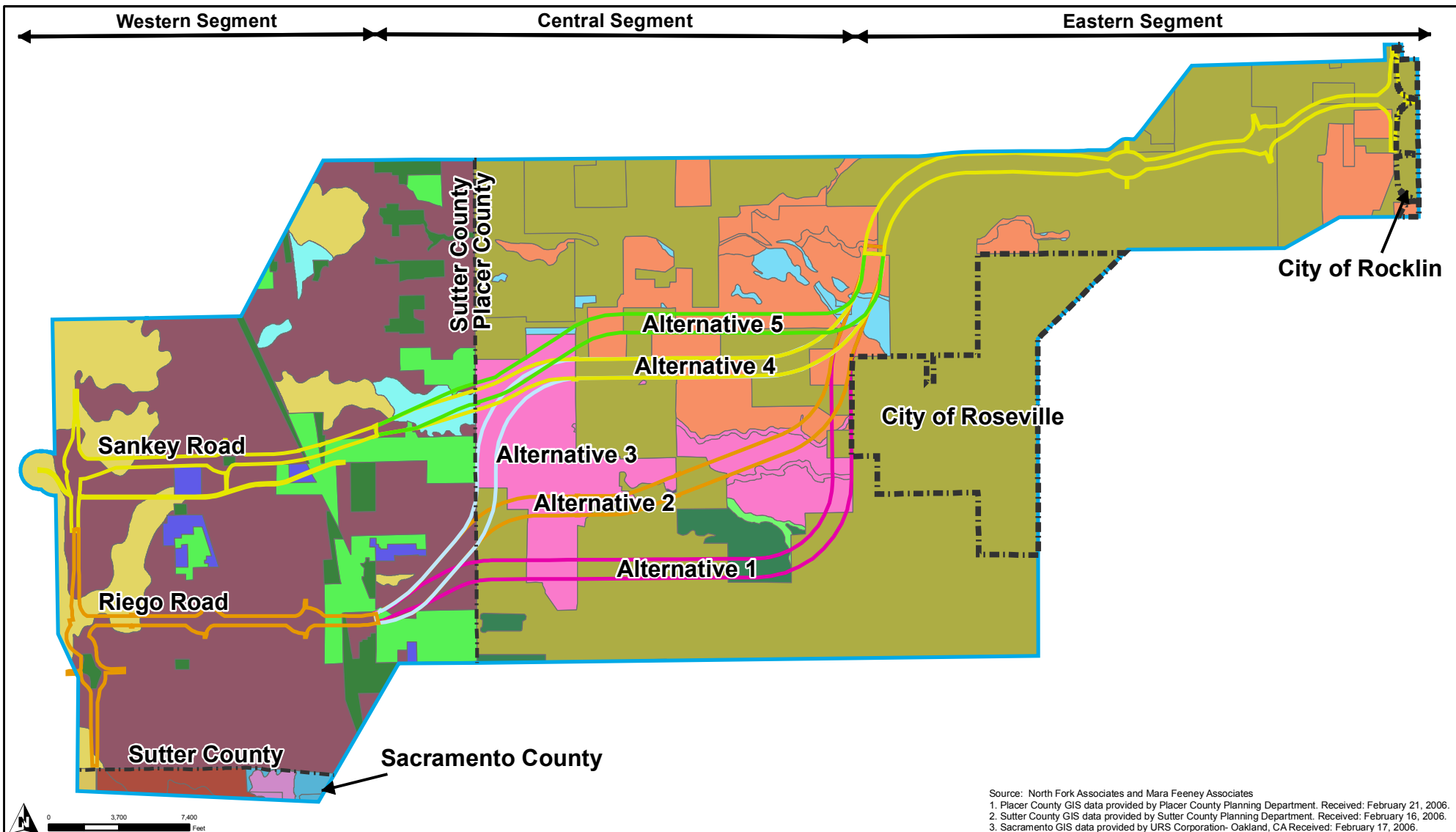
Soils classifications for the project area, including southwestern Placer County and southeastern Sutter County, are shown on Figure 4.4-2. The Soil Survey also provides some indication of the varieties of crops that can be grown on each soil type.

#### **4.4.2.4 Williamson Act Lands**

Williamson Act lands constitute a substantial portion of both Placer and Sutter counties. This section identifies current and historical trends in Williamson Land Act contract enrollment. Data regarding Williamson Act Land contract status in Placer and Sutter counties was acquired from the NRCS GIS database, the Placer County Planning Department GIS database, and the Sutter County Planning Commission files regarding Williamson Land Act contract status.

#### **Williamson Act Contracted Land in Sutter County**

Sutter County only recently (in January 2001) began participating in the Williamson Act. Table 4.4-6 shows the amount of newly enrolled acreage in Sutter County during the first three years of participation in the program, as well as the county's statewide ranking in newly enrolled acreage.

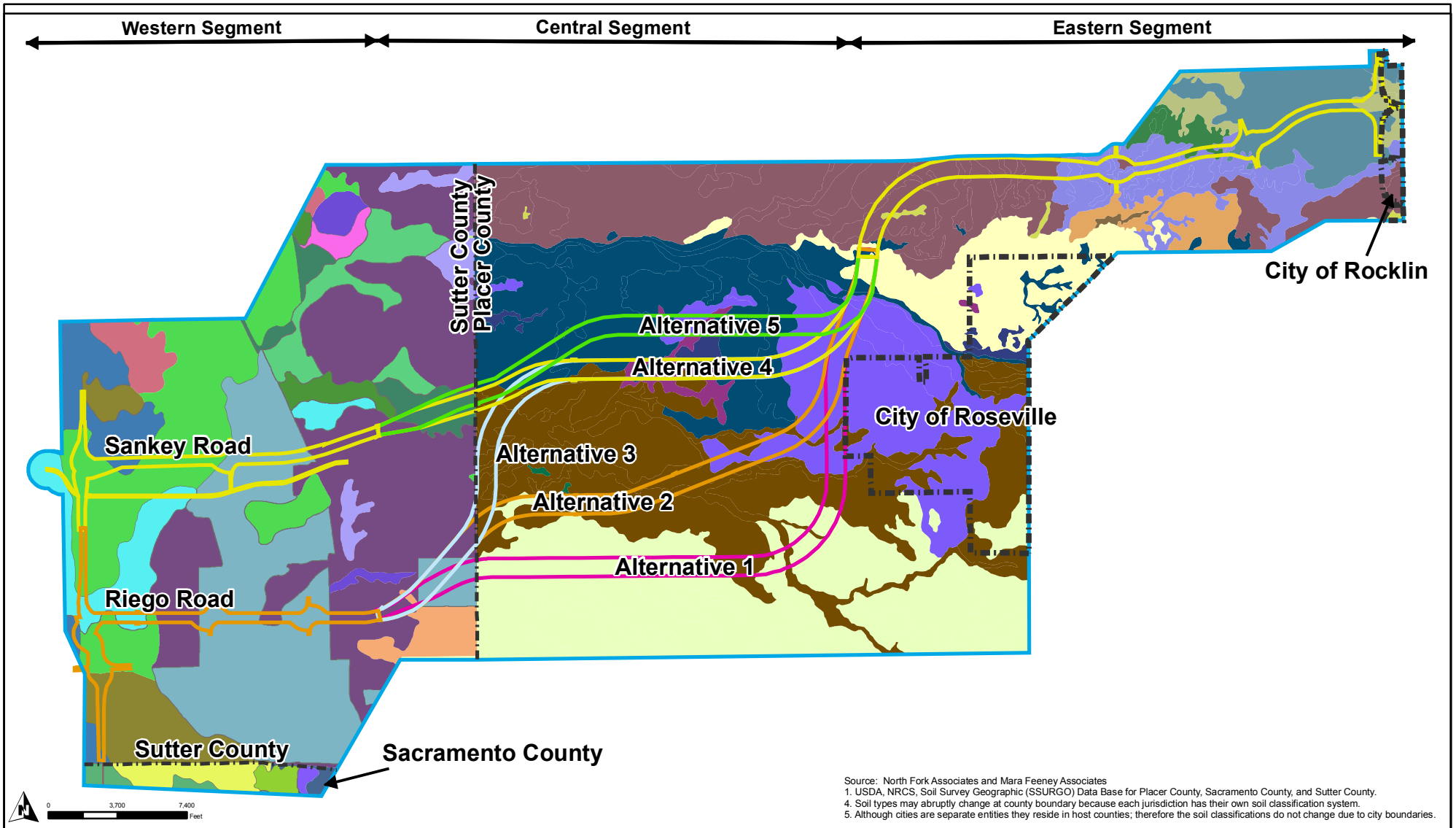


Source: North Fork Associates and Mara Feeney Associates  
 1. Placer County GIS data provided by Placer County Planning Department. Received: February 21, 2006.  
 2. Sutter County GIS data provided by Sutter County Planning Department. Received: February 16, 2006.  
 3. Sacramento GIS data provided by URS Corporation- Oakland, CA Received: February 17, 2006.

Placer County Important Farmland		Sacramento County Important Farmland		Sutter County Important Farmland	
Farmland of Local Importance	Prime Farmland	Farmland of Local Importance	Other Land	Prime Farmland	Prime Farmland
Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland
Grazing Land	Urban AND Built Up Land	Grazing Land	Unique Farmland	Grazing Land	Urban AND Built Up Land
			Grazing Land	Other Land	



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Source: North Fork Associates and Mara Feeney Associates  
 1. USDA, NRCS, Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Data Base for Placer County, Sacramento County, and Sutter County.  
 4. Soil types may abruptly change at county boundary because each jurisdiction has their own soil classification system.  
 5. Although cities are separate entities they reside in host counties; therefore the soil classifications do not change due to city boundaries.

Placer County Soil Types		Sutter County Soil Types		Sacramento County Soil Types	
104-ALAMO-FIDDYMENT COMPLEX, 0 TO 5 PERCENT SLOPES	162-KILAGA LOAM	104-CAPAY SILTY CLAY, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	114-CLEAR LAKE CLAY, HARDPAN SUBSTRATUM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	115-CLEAR LAKE CLAY, HARDPAN SUBSTRATUM, DRAINED, 0 TO 1 PERCENT SLOPES	134-DIERSSEN SANDY CLAY LOAM, DRAINED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES
140-COMETA SANDY LOAM, 1 TO 5 PERCENT SLOPES	175-RAMONA SANDY LOAM, 2 TO 9 PERCENT SLOPES	105-CAPAY SILTY CLAY, OCCASIONALLY FLOODED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	123-COMETA LOAM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	135-DIERSSEN SANDY CLAY LOAM, DRAINED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	152-GALT CLAY, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES
141-COMETA-FIDDYMENT COMPLEX, 1 TO 5 PERCENT SLOPES	181-SAN JOAQUIN SANDY LOAM, 1 TO 5 PERCENT SLOPES	109-CAPAY CLAY, HARDPAN SUBSTRATUM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	128-EXETER SANDY LOAM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	161-JACKTONE CLAY, DRAINED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	214-SAN JOAQUIN SILT LOAM, 0 TO 3 PERCENT SLOPES
142-COMETA-RAMONA SANDY LOAMS, 1 TO 5 PERCENT SLOPES	182-SAN JOAQUIN-COMETA SANDY LOAMS, 1 TO 5 PERCENT SLOPES		129-GALT CLAY, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES	24-WATER	
145-EXCHEQUER-ROCK OUTCROP COMPLEX, 2 TO 30 PERCENT SLOPES	193-XEROFLUENTS, OCCASIONALLY FLOODED		130-GALT CLAY, FREQUENTLY FLOODED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES		
146-FIDDYMENT LOAM, 1 TO 8 PERCENT SLOPES	194-XEROFLUENTS, FREQUENTLY FLOODED		137-JACKTONE CLAY, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES		
147-FIDDYMENT-KASEBERG LOAMS, 2 TO 9 PERCENT SLOPES	195-XEROFLUENTS, HARDPAN SUBSTRATUM		140-MARCUM CLAY LOAM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES		
154-INKS-EXCHEQUER COMPLEX, 2 TO 25 PERCENT SLOPES	198-WATER		142-MARCUM CLAY LOAM, OCCASIONALLY FLOODED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES		
			158-SAN JOAQUIN SANDY LOAM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES		
			159-SAN JOAQUIN SANDY LOAM, OCCASIONALLY FLOODED, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES		
			160-SAN JOAQUIN-ARENDS-DUROCHREPTS COMPLEX, 0 TO 1 PERCENT SLOPES		
			194PL-XEROFLUENTS, FREQUENTLY FLOODED		



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Soil Types in Sutter, Placer, and Sacramento Counties

Figure 4.4-2

June 2007

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**Table 4.4-6  
Sutter County Williamson Act Newly Enrolled Land**

Year Enrolled	Acreage	Statewide Ranking
2001	6,802	6
2002	31,844	3
2003	12,620	2
Source: DOC, 2002.		

In 2002, Sutter County quintupled the amount of land enrolled in the act, as shown in Table 4.4-6, followed by a sharp decline in newly enrolled acreage. Statewide, the Williamson Act program grew by 215,699 acres during 2002 and 2003. In comparison, the Williamson Act program grew by 367,317 acres during 2000 and 2001. The amount of newly enrolled counties, including Sutter County, and the sharp spikes in enrollment suggests that new enrollment levels are headed back down to pre-2001 averages. This represents a return to “normal” rates of increase after an enrollment increase spike from 2001, when four new counties began participating in the program. To date there has only been one cancellation (for 1 acre of land) in Sutter County.

#### **Williamson Act Contracted Land in Placer County**

During the spring of 2000, Placer County compiled a GIS database of Williamson Act contract information that identified each parcel under contract, the parcel size, its existing zoning, the date of enrollment, and the contract status. Conversion of the data into digital maps portraying contract status trends for the period from 1967 to 2000, including the information in the *Western Placer County Agricultural Land Assessment and Agricultural Land Conservation Evaluation Criteria*, confirmed a precipitous increase in the amount of land that was being taken out of Williamson Land Act contract (NFA, 2003).

#### **Enrollment and Non-Renewal Trends**

Placer County data indicates that the vast majority of acreage was placed under contract during the first 13 years of the program (1967-1980); acreage figures peaked around 1980 with a substantial decline by the end of the following decade (-17 percent) and a second, less substantial decline (-4 percent), during the 1990s (see Table 4.4-7).

**Table 4.4-7  
Placer County Williamson Act Contract Status Trends (Acres)**

Status	1967-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000
Active	18,695	53,230	44,058	42,244
New	18,695	39,808	11,342	3,777
Existing	0	13,422	32,718	38,467
Non-Renewal	0	5,273	19,251	3,308
Expired (out)	0	0	6,536	32,262
Source: NFA, 2003.				

Table 4.4-7 appears to substantiate a trend in declining enrollment since non-renewal acreage increased 265 percent during the period between 1980 and 1990 with only a slight increase in non-renewals between 1991 and 2000. (Note: a nine-year non-renewal process accounts for the lag time between notice of non-renewal filing and expired status.)

County records show that no land was removed from Williamson Act protection until after 1980. Over the next 10 years, 6,536 acres, or 12 percent of the previous decade's acreage, was removed through expired contracts. In addition to non-renewal, more land was removed through cancellation, annexation, or public acquisition. The period between 1991 and 2000 saw the most substantial increase in expired contracts. The result was removal of 32,262 acres of land, or 73 percent of the previous decade's land, from the program. This substantial drop was largely offset by the amount of new enrollments into the program during the 10-year period, as evidenced by a mere 4 percent decrease in enrolled acres overall.

According to the *Williamson Land Act 2002 Progress Report*, prepared by the California DOC, over the past decade non-renewal of contracts has been the largest reason for the termination of Williamson Act contracted land. Statewide, an average of 67,813 acres of land expired annually from 1991 to 2001. In 1999, the greatest amount of land contracts expired, 118,391 acres, while 1993 was the year with the least amount of expired acreage with only 19,242 acres. Placer County ranked among the top ten counties with the most non-renewals. In 1999, Placer County ranked 15th in the state for contract non-renewal, while in 2000 and 2001 it ranked 5th in the state with 2,658 acres and 1,306 acres of Williamson Land Act contract non-renewed land, respectively.

As indicated by the *Western Placer County Agricultural Land Assessment and Agricultural Land Conservation Evaluation Criteria* (NFA, 2003), the removal of farmland from Williamson Act protection in Placer County cannot be attributed to any single factor. It appears that it is the cumulative effect of several contributing factors, including suburbanization and fringe growth patterns, land speculation, infrastructure development, water availability, increasing age of farmers, and the economics of agricultural production.

#### **4.4.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS**

##### **4.4.3.1 Methodology for Impact Evaluation**

For the proposed action, potential substantial impacts to farmlands have been evaluated on a preliminary basis using the evaluation criteria listed below.

Impacts on agriculture and farmland within the study area were assessed by tabulating and comparing directly affected farmland associated with each of the project alternatives. DOC maps and statistical data prepared for the FMMP and recent aerial photograph interpretation were used to determine the categories of farmland that exist within the study area as well as to quantify the potential impacts each alternative would have on all types of farmland.

The amount of Williamson Land Act land that may be affected by the Parkway was quantified, as the intent of the legislation is to deter early conversion of agricultural or open space land, and conversion of contracted land to highway uses would require the premature termination of these contracts, resulting in early conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. The potential disruption of agricultural activities for each of the build alternatives was considered at a general level of detail. The types and extent of potential impacts to agricultural operations were evaluated in the context of existing and future development within the study area; however, this analysis does not include evaluation of parcel-specific impacts, since it is not known at this time where the roadway might ultimately be built within the conceptual corridor alignments.

#### 4.4.3.2 Evaluation Criteria

The project could have an impact on agriculture if it would:

- Convert substantial amounts of farmland to nonagricultural uses;
- Convert more than 100 acres of Williamson Act contracted land to nonagricultural uses (in the absence of any existing guidelines or policies with which to establish significance thresholds for determination of potential impacts to Williamson Act contracted land, the CEQA 100-acre threshold for assessing a project's potential to be of statewide, regional, or areawide significance was used in evaluating farmland impacts); or
- Conflict with adopted plans or policies pertaining to agriculture.

#### 4.4.3.3 Direct Impacts

The alternatives under evaluation involve land that is designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land as well as farmland that is under Williamson Act contracts.

##### **No-Build Alternative**

Under the No-Build Alternative, land for the Parkway would not be acquired and the Parkway would not be constructed. There would not be any impacts on farmland under the No-Build Alternative. Section 2.3-1 provides additional details of the No-Build Alternative.

##### **Alternative 1 – the Red Alternative**

Alternative 1 would impact approximately 806.83 acres of farmland within the study area, including 355.60 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, Prime Farmland, and Grazing land in the Western Segment; 422.61 acres of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Grazing land in the Central Segment, and 28.62 acres of Unique Farmland in the Eastern Segment.

Alternative 1 has the potential to affect two properties that are currently under Williamson Act protection, although cancellation of these two contracts has been proposed as part of the Placer Ranch Specific Plan development process. As shown in Table 4.4-9, 119.85 acres of land would be affected. Both of the affected properties lie within the Eastern Segment of Alternative 1. The Western and Central segments of Alternative 1 do not pass through land that is protected by the act.

##### **Alternative 2 – the Orange Alternative**

Alternative 2 would potentially impact 990.06 acres of farmland, the most of any alternative. It would affect eight parcels and 243.7 acres of land currently under Williamson Act contract, all in Placer County. Farmland impacts in the Western and Eastern segments would be the same as described for Alternative 1. A total of 605.84 acres of all farmland categories would be impacted in the Central Segment. Alternative 2 would pass through six parcels in the Central Segment with 123.85 acres of contracted land,

##### **Alternative 3 – the Blue Alternative**

Alternative 3 would impact 965.10 acres of important farmlands within the study area. In addition, it would affect three parcels and 240.56 total acres of land currently under contract, all within Placer County. Alternative 3 farmland impacts in the Western and Eastern segments would be identical to those

identified for Alternative 1. A total of 580.88 acres of all the farmland categories within the Central Segment would be affected, except for Farmland of Local Importance. The Alternative 3 alignment would pass through one parcel under contract in the Central Segment, affecting 120.71 acres of land.

#### **Alternative 4 – the Yellow Alternative**

Alternative 4 would impact the least amount of farmland (792.46 acres) within the study area. This includes 304.68 acres of impacts to Farmland of Statewide Importance, Prime Farmland, and Grazing land in the Western Segment, and a total of 459.16 acres of all the farmland categories within the Central Segment except for Farmland of Local Importance. Farmland affected in the Eastern Segment of Alternative 4 would be the same as for Alternative 1.

Alternative 4 would affect a total of four parcels and 240.62 acres of land currently under contract. The Sankey Road interchange in the Western Segment potentially would impact 0.06 acre of contracted land in Sutter County. Impacts in the Central Segment would be the same as for Alternative 3, and impacts in the Eastern Segment would be the same as Alternative 1.

#### **Alternative 5 – the Green Alternative**

Alternative 5 would impact 909.04 acres of farmland within the study area. This includes the same 304.68 acres of impacts to Farmland of Statewide Importance, Prime Farmland, and Grazing land as in Alternative 4 in the Western Segment; a total of 575.74 acres inclusive of all the farmland categories within the Central Segment except for Farmland of Local Importance; and the same 28.62 acres of Unique Farmland impacts in the Eastern Segment as in all the corridor alignment alternatives.

Alternative 5 would affect four parcels and 240.26 total acres of land currently under contract. The Western Segment impacts would be the same as for Alternative 4, and Eastern Segment impacts would be the same as Alternative 1. Alternative 5 passes through two parcels in the Central Segment, affecting 120.35 acres of contracted land.

#### **Comparison of Alternatives**

All of the build alternatives would affect more than 100 acres of Williamson Act contracted land; therefore, all are considered to have an impact on Williamson Act contracted land. The potential conversion of farmland associated with the alternatives (ranging from 792.46 to 990.06 acres) is considered “substantial.”

Alternative 1 would potentially affect 806.83 acres of farmland and the least amount of Williamson Act protected property at 119.85 acres.

Alternative 2 would potentially affect the greatest amount of farmland at 990.06 acres. This alternative would also impact the greatest amount of Williamson Act contracted land, 243.70 acres.

Alternative 3 would potentially affect 965.10 acres of farmland and 240.56 acres of Williamson Act land.

Alternative 4 would potentially affect the least amount of farmland at 792.46 acres and would affect 240.62 acres of Williamson Act land.

Alternative 5 would potentially affect 909.04 acres of farmland and 240.26 acres of Williamson Act land.

Table 4.4-8 shows the amount of important farmland that potentially would be converted by each corridor alignment alternative and segment. Table 4.4-9 shows the amount of Williamson Act contracted lands

that would be affected by each corridor alignment alternative. These project-related impacts to farmland are discussed by alternative below.

**Table 4.4-8  
Important Farmland Potentially Affected by Alignment Alternatives**

Placer Parkway Segment	Type of Farmland					
	Farmland of Local Importance	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Prime Farmland	Unique Farmland	Grazing Land	Total Farmland
Western Segment – Alternatives 1, 2, and 3	0	280.81	62.88	0	11.91	<b>355.60</b>
Western Segment – Alternatives 4 and 5	0	239.10	32.64	0	32.94	<b>304.68</b>
Central Segment – Alternative 1	0	141.19	132.19	139.25	9.98	<b>422.61</b>
Central Segment – Alternative 2	1.58	183.32	246.72	162.49	11.73	<b>605.84</b>
Central Segment – Alternative 3	0	191.96	202.32	174.64	11.96	<b>580.88</b>
Central Segment – Alternative 4	0	66.8	128.71	260.6	3.05	<b>459.16</b>
Central Segment – Alternative 5	0	79.91	135.45	360.07	.31	<b>575.74</b>
Eastern Segment – All Alternatives	0	0	0	28.62	0	<b>28.62</b>

Source: DOC FMMP-2002 data for Placer County and 2004 data for Sutter County; and California Spatial Information Library GIS database.

**Table 4.4-9  
Potentially Affected Williamson Act Land (in Acres)**

Segments	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Western Segment–Riego Road	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Western Segment – Sankey Road	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.06
Central Segment	0.00	123.85	120.71	120.71	120.35
Eastern Segment	119.85	119.85	119.85	119.85	119.85
<b>Total</b>	<b>119.85</b>	<b>243.70</b>	<b>240.56</b>	<b>240.62</b>	<b>240.26</b>

Source: DOC Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Program GIS data; Placer County, 2002; Sutter County, 2004

### Consistency with Plans and Policies

The policies listed in Table 4.4-1 were evaluated to assess the project's potential to conflict with adopted policies pertaining to agriculture or farmland within the study area. The consistency analysis, which is contained in the CIA for this Tier 1 EIS/EIR, concludes that the proposed action may conflict with numerous adopted local policies aimed at protecting agricultural activities in Sutter and Placer counties.

Specifically, the project would be inconsistent with Sutter County agricultural policies 6.A-1, 6.A-6 and 6.A-7. In addition, the proposed action would be inconsistent with Placer County policies 7.A.1, 7.A.3, 7.A.7, 1.H.3, and 1.H.4. The Parkway would also have inconsistencies with the Sunset Industrial Area Plan policies 1.E.1, 1.E.2, 1.E.3, and 1.E.4. These policies are aimed generally at preserving farmland and agricultural uses in the study area, as well as protecting large parcel sizes and preventing parcel fragmentation to enhance the viability of agricultural uses. It should be noted, however, that some of the farmland in question is already proposed for urban development (e.g., land within the Sutter Pointe Specific Plan area of Sutter County and the Placer Ranch Specific Plan area of Placer County). Thus, potentially affected farmland in the study area would not be preserved even if the project is not built (see discussion of Cumulative Impacts below).

#### **4.4.3.4 Secondary and Indirect Impacts**

##### **No-Build Alternative**

Under the No-Build Alternative (see Section 2.3-1), land for the Parkway would not be acquired and the Parkway would not be constructed. The No-Build Alternative would not have any secondary or indirect effects on existing farmland within the study area.

##### **Build Alternatives 1 Through 5**

Build Alternatives 1 through 5 could result in secondary and indirect impacts on farmland. These impacts would be similar for all build alternatives. Potential secondary and indirect impacts associated with growth are discussed in Section 6.1, Growth. The indirect impacts of the Parkway would include the disruption of existing agricultural activities, fragmentation of farmland, adverse transportation effects, and the potential loss of agricultural support services. At this time, there is only program level information and no site-specific roadway features are designed, so it is not possible to analyze impacts on the viability of specific farm units. The conclusions reached in the *West Placer Agricultural Study* (summarized below under Section 4.4.4.1, Farmland Conversion), however, provide insight into the potential secondary and indirect effects that this project and planned future development within the study area may have on existing agricultural activities.

In addition to reducing the inventory of agricultural land, conversion reduces opportunities for remaining operations. Land fragmentation increases conflicts with neighbors, reduces economies of scale, increases traffic on rural roads, and reduces the support services available to farmers and ranchers. While population growth may enhance marketing opportunities for some growers, the conversion of surrounding lands generally discourages farmers and ranchers from remaining in or entering the agricultural industry (NFA, 2003).

The fragmentation of agricultural land within the study area could affect remaining farms through parcel size reduction, which consequently reduces the amount of land available for agricultural production. This could decrease the ability of a farm to compete in the local market against larger agricultural producers. Uses that require large contiguous amounts of land, such as rice cultivation and cattle ranching, would be more susceptible to fragmentation than other types of agricultural activities, because large tracts of land are needed to sustain a high enough yield to hold down per-unit production costs.

Increased urbanization also introduces conflicts between commuting workers and agricultural machinery operators who may have to compete with residential and commercial traffic on local roadways. The differences in vehicle speeds and size can create potentially dangerous and frustrating situations for both suburban residents and agricultural equipment operators. Also, as more land in a region is converted from agricultural to urban uses, providers of agricultural support services can find their customer base and economic viability eroding. If support services were to close or relocate farther from their existing

locales, there would be an additional adverse effect on agricultural producers associated with transportation.

#### **4.4.3.5 Cumulative Impacts**

##### **No-Build Alternative**

Under the No-Build Alternative (see Section 2.3-1), land for the Parkway would not be acquired and the Parkway would not be constructed. There would not be any cumulative impacts on farmlands under the No-Build Alternative.

#### **Alternatives 1 Through 5**

Potential adverse impacts on farmlands associated with the Parkway could contribute to cumulative impacts associated with planned and proposed development in the study area. The combined effects of farmland conversion and Williamson Act contract cancellation or nonrenewal could increase adverse impacts associated with individual projects, through the loss of agricultural resources or support services and increasing conflicts with urban development. All five alternatives would cross the Central Segment in a generally east-west direction, potentially intensifying the farmland fragmentation impacts and agricultural viability of farms affected by existing and planned high capacity power lines in the western portion of the Central Segment, since these facilities are generally aligned in a north-south direction and can impede agricultural activities such as rice seeding or crop dusting.

Depending on the alternative, the project could impact between 792.46 and 990.06 acres of farmland and between 119.85 and 243.70 acres of Williamson Act contracted land. As shown on Table 4.4-10, other anticipated urban development and roadway projects (excluding the Parkway) in the study area would convert an additional 5,203 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 1,429 acres of Prime Farmland, 6,687 acres of Unique Farmland, and 250 acres of Grazing Land. The converted farmland would also include nearly 717 acres of Williamson Act contracted land within Sutter and Placer counties, as shown in Table 4.4-11.

#### **4.4.4 AVOIDANCE, MINIMIZATION, AND/OR MITIGATION STRATEGIES**

##### **4.4.4.1 Farmland Conversion**

###### **Tier 1 – Avoidance/Minimization Strategies**

- During the development of alternatives, in order to reduce environmental impacts, avoidance alternatives were also considered (see Section 2.5.4). These alternatives did not meet the project Purpose and Need and were therefore eliminated from further consideration.
- During the alternatives screening process, efforts were made to avoid environmental impacts, including farmland impacts. Examples of such efforts included modification and/or elimination of Project Study Report (PSR) Conceptual corridor alignments (see Section 2.5). These efforts include:
  - Elimination of a northern alignment between State Route (SR) 70/99 and Amoruso Acres, and a connection to SR 70/99 north of Sankey Road, because of a number of impacts including effects on farmland.
  - Modifications to generally avoid or minimize impacts to farmland.

**Table 4.4-10  
Cumulative Impacts to Farmland (Acres)**

Type of Farmland	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Cumulative Projects (excluding Placer Parkway)
Farmland of Local Importance	0	1.58	0	0	0	0
Farmland of Statewide Importance	425.35	464.24	472.77	305.90	319.01	5,203.00
Prime Farmland	195.90	309.46	265.20	45.35	168.09	1,429.00
Unique Farmland	168.69	190.70	174.64	289.22	388.69	6,687.00
Grazing Land	22.28	23.83	23.87	35.99	32.25	250.00
Total of all types of Farmland	<b>806.83</b>	<b>990.06</b>	<b>936.48</b>	<b>792.46</b>	<b>908.04</b>	<b>13,569.00</b>
Total for Cumulative Projects, including Placer Parkway	<b>14,375.83</b>	<b>14,559.06</b>	<b>14,505.48</b>	<b>14,245.46</b>	<b>14,477.04</b>	<b>N/A</b>

Source: URS and NFA GIS database, with NFA data analysis

**Table 4.4-11  
Cumulative Impacts to Williamson Act Land (Acres)**

Land	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Cumulative Projects
Williamson Act Land	119.85	243.70	240.56	240.62	240.26	717
Total Including Cumulative Scenario	836.85	960.70	957.56	957.62	957.26	N/A

Source: URS and NFA GIS database, with NFA data analysis

- During development of the Tier 1 conceptual design of the Parkway, efforts were made to avoid impacts on farmlands. These efforts included:
  - The restriction of access between Pleasant Grove Road and Fiddymont Road to avoid inducing urban growth in areas not designated for development in existing general plans and to maintain the rural character of western Placer County and south Sutter County.
  - The location of the Parkway within a no-development buffer zone (see Section 2.5) that will preserve open space and agricultural uses adjacent to the Parkway and limit future development in the buffer zone.
- During the Tier 1 environmental review process, PCTPA worked with local jurisdictions and agricultural property owners to plan for the Parkway and planned/proposed development to reduce the likelihood of environmental impacts, including farmland

impacts. Results of this coordination included modification and elimination of alternatives and refinement of corridor alignments.

### **Tier 2 – Consultation/Coordination**

- PCTPA will continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions in Tier 2 to reduce the likelihood of farmland impacts. Coordination will include development of specific project design details for the Parkway and other proposed projects to minimize impacts, including locating the roadway footprint to minimize bisecting farm units, identifying local access requirements, and retaining farming within corridor buffers where feasible.

### **Tier 2 – Mitigation Commitments**

- To maintain existing and future local roadway connectivity (for emergency access, farming operations and community access), which will help to avoid/minimize future farmland impacts, over-crossings will be constructed, as appropriate, to convey traffic over the Parkway. These over-crossings will not connect to the Parkway.

### **Tier 2 – Mitigation Considerations**

- Based on consultation with local jurisdictions, Tier 2 mitigation strategies will include the development of design improvements to reduce farmland impacts, such as:
  - Appropriate adjustments to the location of the actual roadway within the Parkway corridor alignment;
  - Partnering with local jurisdictions to institute land use controls (if local jurisdictions deem these necessary or desirable), such as general plan amendments, zoning/overlay zoning changes, covenants/deed restrictions, agricultural/conservation easements, and urban growth boundaries; and
  - Determination of the number, location and design of specific project features such as over-crossings.
- Farmland impacts could be reduced via land purchase/leases that would allow for continued use of the no-development buffer zone for agricultural purposes.
- Conversion of farmland to nonfarmland uses could be mitigated by preserving an equal amount of agricultural land within the respective counties in those areas that have not been approved or proposed for urban uses (i.e., primarily in the Central Segment). This would be consistent with Placer County's current policy of requiring one-to-one (1:1) replacement for agricultural land impacted by proposed projects where feasible. The no-development buffer zone as proposed would meet much of this mitigation goal. This mitigation strategy should be coordinated with the Placer and Sutter County Agricultural Commissioners, particularly in areas where agricultural lands will have been converted to other uses prior to Placer Parkway Tier 2 environmental review, to ensure that a fair share mitigation strategy is promoted. This mitigation strategy would reduce impacts to farmlands.
- Agricultural easements administered by land trusts (examples include Placer Land Trust, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, American Farmland Trust) or other nonprofit entities on agricultural parcels should be considered as a means to mitigate for the

permanent loss of agricultural land within the Sutter and Placer County region. The Agricultural Land Stewardship Program established by the California Farmland Conservancy, administered by the DLRP under the DOC, which is a grant program that aids in purchasing and/or partially funding agricultural easements, could also be applicable, as could agricultural easements administered by Placer County.

- The Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP) (described in Section 4.14.1.3) may be finalized and approved prior to corridor acquisition for the Parkway. The PCCP is being developed to guide and streamline permitting for large-scale development in Western Placer County over the next 50 years while establishing a network and conservation areas to protect and conserve sensitive species and natural communities. If and when approved, the PCCP is expected to set aside large tracts of contiguous land for conservation purposes. These properties would help to maintain the diversity of flora and fauna in the county, and in most (but not all) cases could help preserve farmland, as well, where proposed preserve areas would serve agricultural purposes as well as maintain a diversified plant and animal community. At this time, Sutter County does not have similar established criteria, or a program to review, execute, and administer agricultural easements. The Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan may provide a structure that would be suitable for such mitigation.

#### **4.4.4.2 Disruption to Agricultural Activities**

##### **Tier 1 – Avoidance/Minimization Strategies**

- During the development of alternatives, in order to reduce environmental impacts, avoidance alternatives were also considered (see Section 2.5.4). These avoidance alternatives did not meet the project Purpose and Need and were therefore eliminated from further consideration.
- During the alternatives screening process, efforts were made to avoid farmland impacts, as described under Farmland Conversion, above, which would also help to minimize disruption to agricultural activities. In addition, identification of working farm units, as well as agriculturally designated parcels, was undertaken to better understand the effect of the Parkway on farms. At the suggestion of local farmers, this included an examination of existing and planned power lines in the vicinity of Parkway corridor alternatives to identify if the combination of the two on smaller or bisected parcels would render them unusable for continued farming.
- During development of the Tier 1 conceptual design of the Parkway, efforts were made to avoid disruption of agricultural activities. These efforts included:
  - The restriction of access between Pleasant Grove Road and Fiddymont Road to avoid inducing urban growth in areas not designated for development in existing general plans and to maintain the rural character of western Placer County and south Sutter County.
  - The location of the Parkway within a no-development buffer zone (see Section 2.5) that would preserve open space and agricultural uses adjacent to the Parkway and limit future development in the buffer zone.

## **Tier 2 – Consultation/Coordination**

- PCTPA will continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions in Tier 2 to reduce the likelihood of disruption of farmland activities. Coordination will include development of specific project design details for the Parkway and other projects to minimize impacts, as described above and in Mitigation Considerations, below.

## **Tier 2 – Mitigation Commitments**

- To maintain existing and future local roadway connectivity (for emergency access, farming operations and community access), which will help to avoid/minimize disruption to agricultural activities, over-crossings will be constructed, as appropriate, to convey traffic over the Parkway. These over-crossings will not connect to the Parkway.

## **Tier 2 – Mitigation Considerations**

- Based on consultation with local jurisdictions, Tier 2 mitigation strategies will include the development of design improvements to reduce disruption to agricultural activities, such as:
  - Provision of alternative access to remnant parcels.
  - Determination of the number, location and design of specific project features such as over-crossings.
  - Appropriate adjustments to the location of the actual roadway within the Parkway corridor alignment.
  - Partnering with local jurisdictions to institute land use controls (if local jurisdictions deem these necessary or desirable), such as general plan amendments, zoning/overlay zoning changes, covenants/deed restrictions, agricultural/conservation easements, and urban growth boundaries.
- Farmland impacts could be reduced via land purchase/leases that would allow for continued use of the no-development buffer zone for agricultural purposes. This could include short-term leasing agreements to farm portions of the future right-of-way in order to aid in offsetting the early conversion of agricultural land for transportation purposes and to encourage the continuation of agricultural production as long as feasible during the initial phases of the construction of the Parkway (see Section 2.2.1 regarding possible phasing).

### **4.4.4.3 Williamson Act Conflicts**

- Even though in some instances Williamson Act properties affected by the Parkway may stay enrolled in the Williamson Act program, there are no feasible avoidance, minimization, mitigation, or design strategies that could be implemented to diminish potential impacts on Williamson Act enrolled lands.

#### **4.4.4.4 Consistency with Plans and Policies**

##### **Tier 1 – Avoidance/Minimization Strategies**

- During the alternatives screening process, efforts were made to avoid farmland impacts and disruption of agricultural activities, which would be the primary cause of inconsistency with plans and policies in the study area. Examples of such efforts included modification and/or elimination of PSR conceptual corridor alignments (see Section 2.5) and Tier 1 conceptual design modifications to maintain access to and viability of agricultural land. In order to reduce environmental impacts, avoidance alternatives were also considered (see Section 2.5.4). See also the discussion above. These alternatives did not meet the project Purpose and Need and were therefore eliminated from further consideration.

##### **Tier 2 – Mitigation Considerations**

- The Parkway may be inconsistent with Sutter County policies 6.A-1, 6.A-6 and 6.A-7, Placer County policies 7.A.1, 7.A.2, 7.A.3, 7.A.7, 1.H.3, and 1.H.4, as well as Sunset Industrial Plan Area policies 1.E.1, 1.E.2, 1.E.3, and 1.E.4. If the creation of parcels larger than the respective General Plan designated/Zoning Ordinance minimum size is not feasible, then the following mitigation strategies could be considered:
  - General Plan Amendments or Zoning Ordinance Amendments for the affected properties could be enacted to ensure consistency with ordinance requirements.
  - Sutter and Placer counties could enact a potential zoning overlay district for parcels reduced in size by Placer Parkway that would recognize the special nonconforming nature of these properties.
  - Parkway proponents could purchase remainder parcels in their entirety so that there would not be a zoning consistency issue.

#### **4.4.5 TIER 1 AND TIER 2 STUDIES**

- Analyses begun in Tier 1 which will be undertaken in greater detail in Tier 2
  - The evaluation of farmland impacts will examine individual farms affected by the Parkway to determine how impacts can be reduced by such means as provision of frontage roads and/or overcrossings to maintain access, merging or trading of remnant parcels to facilitate continued viability of individual farm units, or purchasing nonviable remnant parcels and rezoning them for alternative uses.