



September 24, 2019

**VIA EMAIL: CHUCK.KINNEY@CO.KINGS.CA.US**

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Kings County  
1400 W. Lacey Boulevard, Building #6  
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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

**SEP 24 2019**

**STATE CLEARINGHOUSE**

Dear Mr. Kinney:

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR  
THE JACKSON RANCH SPECIFIC PLAN, SCH# 2019080497**

The Department of Conservation's (Department) Division of Land Resource Protection (Division) has reviewed the Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Jackson Ranch Specific Plan. The Division monitors farmland conversion on a statewide basis and administers the Williamson Act and other agricultural land conservation programs. We offer the following comments and recommendations with respect to the proposed project's potential impacts on agricultural land and resources.

Project Description

The proposed project consists of the development and implementation of a specific plan for approximately 425 acres along Interstate 5 at the existing Utica Avenue off-ramp in unincorporated Kings County. A total of just under 2.5 million square feet of commercial space is planned for approximately 142 acres of the area covered by the Specific Plan. Approximately 207 acres is to be designated for agricultural use, and an additional 56 acres is to be designated as agricultural use with an overlay for a potential future airstrip. Approximately 15 acres are designated for public streets, and 5 acres has been set aside for public utility uses, including a wastewater treatment plant.

The project area is located in an unincorporated area of Kings County, consisting of 425 acres adjacent to and west of Interstate 5 at the Utica Avenue off-ramp. The area covered by the Specific Plan is approximately 70 miles northwest of the City of Bakersfield and 70 miles southwest of the City of Fresno.

Onsite land uses primarily consist of active and fallow agricultural land or rangeland. Approximately 50 percent of the project site is Prime Farmland as defined by the Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, California Important Farmland Finder, 2019, <https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/CIFF/>

## Department Comments

The conversion of agricultural land represents a permanent reduction and significant impact to California's agricultural land resources. Under CEQA, a lead agency should not approve a project if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available that would lessen the significant effects of the project.<sup>2</sup> All mitigation measures that are potentially feasible should be included in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). A measure brought to the attention of the lead agency should not be left out unless it is infeasible based on its elements.

Agricultural conservation easements on land of at least equal quality and size can mitigate the project impacts in accordance with CEQA Guideline § 15370. The Department highlights agricultural conservation easements because of their acceptance and use by lead agencies as an appropriate mitigation measure under CEQA. Agricultural conservation easements are an available mitigation tool and should always be considered; however, any other feasible mitigation measures should also be considered.

## Conclusion

The Department recommends the following discussion under the Agricultural Resources section of the DEIR:

- Type, amount, and location of farmland conversion resulting directly and indirectly from implementation of the proposed project.
- Impacts on any current and future agricultural operations in the vicinity; e.g., land-use conflicts, increases in land values and taxes, loss of agricultural support infrastructure such as processing facilities, etc.
- Incremental impacts leading to cumulative impacts on agricultural land.
- Proposed mitigation measures for all potentially impacted agricultural lands.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Jackson Ranch Specific Plan. Please provide this Department with notices of any future hearing dates as well as any staff reports pertaining to this project. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Farl Grundy, Environmental Planner at (916) 324-7347 or via email at [Farl.Grundy@conservation.ca.gov](mailto:Farl.Grundy@conservation.ca.gov).

Sincerely,



Monique Wilber  
Conservation Program Support Supervisor

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<sup>2</sup> Public Resources Code section 21002.