

## 4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

### 4.2.1 Setting

**a. Overview of Agriculture in Santa Cruz County.** Santa Cruz County's gross agricultural production in 2011 totaled \$565.7 million (Santa Cruz County Crop Report, 2011). The top ten revenue crops that were produced in the County in 2011 included strawberries, raspberries, indoor cut flowers, field grown flowers, miscellaneous vegetables, blackberries, other plants (including farm stock and Christmas trees), landscape plants, apples, and brussel sprouts (Santa Cruz County Crop Report, 2011). The most common crop types (by acreage) in Santa Cruz County include strawberries, raspberries, apples, and lettuce. According to the California Department of Conservation (DOC), 38,845 acres of land in Santa Cruz County were classified as "agricultural land" in 2010. Of this land, 13,817 acres were classified as "Prime Farmland" and 2,449 acres were classified as "Farmland of Statewide Importance."

Santa Cruz County has a large concentration of organic farms. There are more than 90 organic growers in Santa Cruz County with over 3,500 acres in organic crops. These crops represent approximately 18 percent of total agricultural land and have an estimated value of over \$27,000,000 (Santa Cruz County Crop Report, 2011).

**b. Agriculture along the MBSST Network.** The MBSST Network corridor abuts agricultural uses primarily in the northern and Watsonville reaches. In the northern reach, agriculture is concentrated along segments 3 through 5; in the Watsonville reach, agriculture is concentrated near segments 16 and 17. In total, approximately 22 miles<sup>1</sup> of the MBSST Network would be located near active agricultural areas, with a wide variety of crops are grown along the corridor.

Important Farmlands. The DOC identifies and designates important farmlands throughout the State as part of its Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). The FMMP rating system classifies farmland according to the following criteria:

- **Prime Farmland.** *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. These are Class I and Class II soils.*
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance.** *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.*
- **Unique Farmland.** *Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climactic zones in California.*
- **Urban and Built-Up Land.** *Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. This land is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction,*

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<sup>1</sup> Including segments 3, 4, 5, 16, and 17.



*institutional, public administration, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.*

- **Other Land.** 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 40 acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.

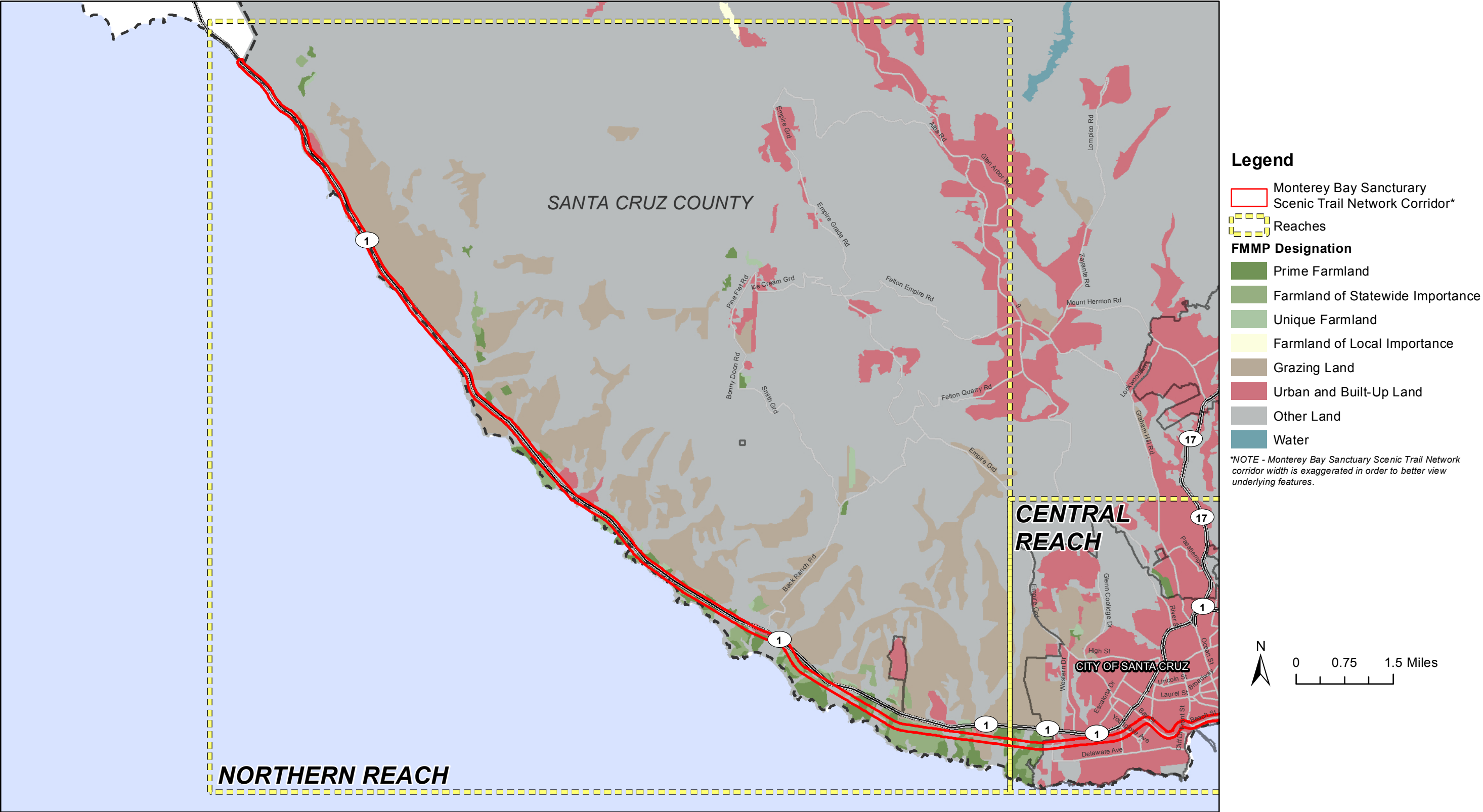
Figures 4.2-1a through 4.2-1c depict FMMP classifications within the northern, central, and Watsonville reaches, respectively. In total, approximately 40.1 acres of Prime Farmland, 23.2 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 9.1 acres of Unique Farmland occur within the MBSST Network right-of-way. The majority of Prime Farmland is located in the Watsonville reach (27.1 acres); the remaining 13.0 acres are located in the northern reach. All 23.2 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance are located in the northern reach. The majority of Unique Farmland is located in the northern reach (7.3 acres); the remaining 1.8 acres are located in the Watsonville reach. The central reach entirely comprises Urban and Build-Up Land.

### c. Regulatory Framework.

#### State of California.

*Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program.* The DOC's FMMP monitors the conversion of the State's farmland to and from agricultural use. County-level data is collected and a series of maps are prepared that identify eight classifications and uses based on a minimum mapping unit size of 10 acres. The program also produces a biennial report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use. The program maintains an inventory of state agricultural land and updates the Important Farmland Series Maps every two years. The FMMP is an informational service only and does not constitute state regulation of local land use decisions. Agricultural land is rated according to several variables, including soil quality and irrigation status with Prime Farmland being considered the most optimal for farming practices. Other FMMP designations include Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, and Water. For further detail see Section 4.2.1(b) (Agriculture along the MBSST Network).

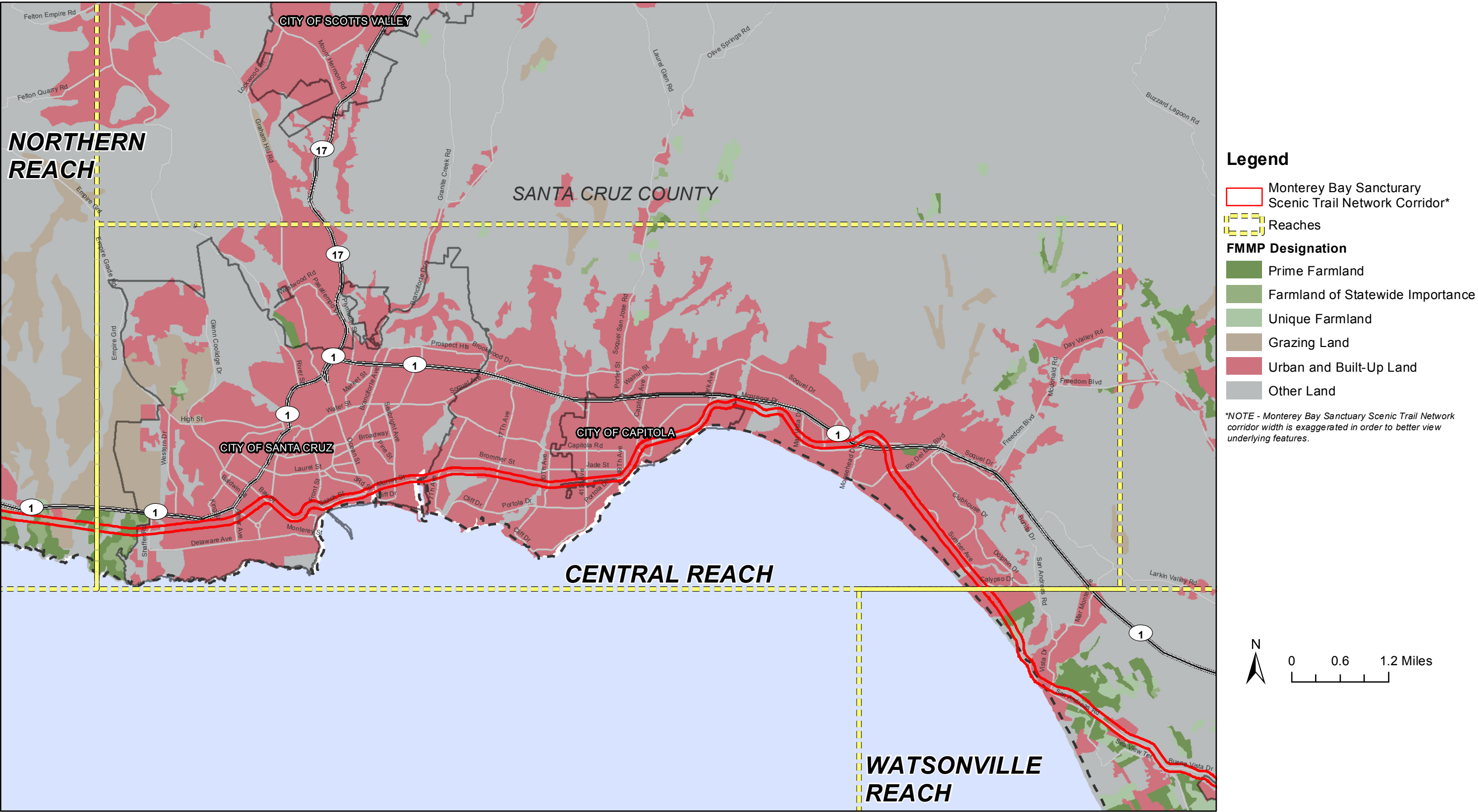
*California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act).* The California Land Conservation Act of 1965—commonly referred to as the Williamson Act—enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments that are much lower than normal because they are based upon farming and open space uses as opposed to full market value. Local governments receive an annual subvention of forgone property tax revenues from the State via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971. Participation in this program is voluntary, requiring 100 contiguous acres of agricultural land under one or more ownerships to file an application for agricultural preserve status. After an agricultural preserve has been established, the land within the preserve is automatically restricted to agricultural and agriculturally compatible uses and the landowners may enter into a Williamson Act land use contract. The land may also be subject to agricultural rezoning.



Base map source: RRM Design Group, 2012. Additional data provided by the California Department of Conservation, 2010 and the County of Santa Cruz 2012.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Map:  
Northern Reach

Figure 4.2-1a  
RTC

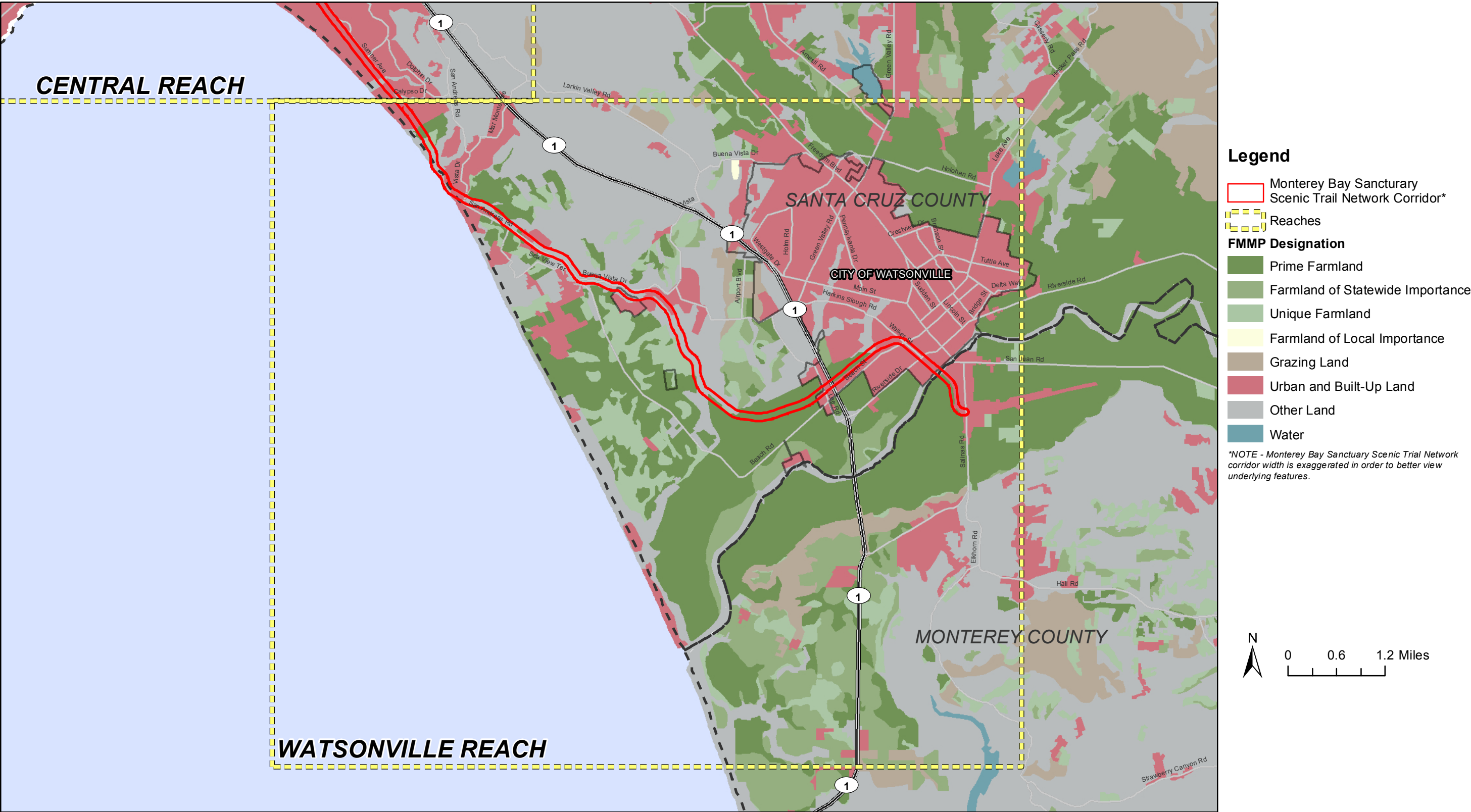


Base map source: RRM Design Group, 2012. Additional data provided by the California Department of Conservation, 2010 and the County of Santa Cruz 2012.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Map:  
Central Reach

Figure 4.2-1b  
RTC





Base map source: RRM Design Group, 2012. Additional data provided by the California Department of Conservation, 2010 and the County of Santa Cruz.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Map:  
Watsonville Reach

Figure 4.2-1c  
RTC

After a contract has expired, the landowners may remove the subject property from an agricultural preserve. Prior to the expiration of a contract, a landowner also has the option to petition for the cancellation of the contract. Contract cancellation will require the landowner to pay a substantial fee as outlined in the California Government Code §§ 51280-51287.

As shown in Figure 4.2-2, most of the agricultural land adjacent to the northern and Watsonville reaches is currently under Williamson Act contract.

Santa Cruz County.

*Santa Cruz County General Plan.* The Conservation and Open Space Element of the Santa Cruz County General Plan includes objectives and policies to protect agricultural resources. The objectives and policies applicable to this project are discussed below.

Objective 5.13      *Commercial Agriculture. To maintain for exclusive agricultural use those lands identified on the County Agricultural Resources Map as best suited to the commercial production of food, fiber and ornamental crops and livestock and to prevent conversion of commercial agricultural land to non-agricultural use. To recognize that agriculture is a priority land use and to resolve policy conflicts in favor of preserving and promoting agriculture on designated commercial agricultural lands.*

Policy 5.13.20      *Conversion of Commercial Agricultural Lands. Consider development of commercial agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses only under the following circumstances:*

- (a) It is determined that the land is not viable for agriculture and that it is not likely to become viable in the near future (See Policy 5.13.21);*
- (b) Findings are made that new information has been presented to demonstrate that the conditions on the land in question do not meet the criteria for commercial agricultural land; and*
- (c) The conversion of such land will not impair the viability of, or create potential conflicts with, other commercial agricultural lands in the area.*

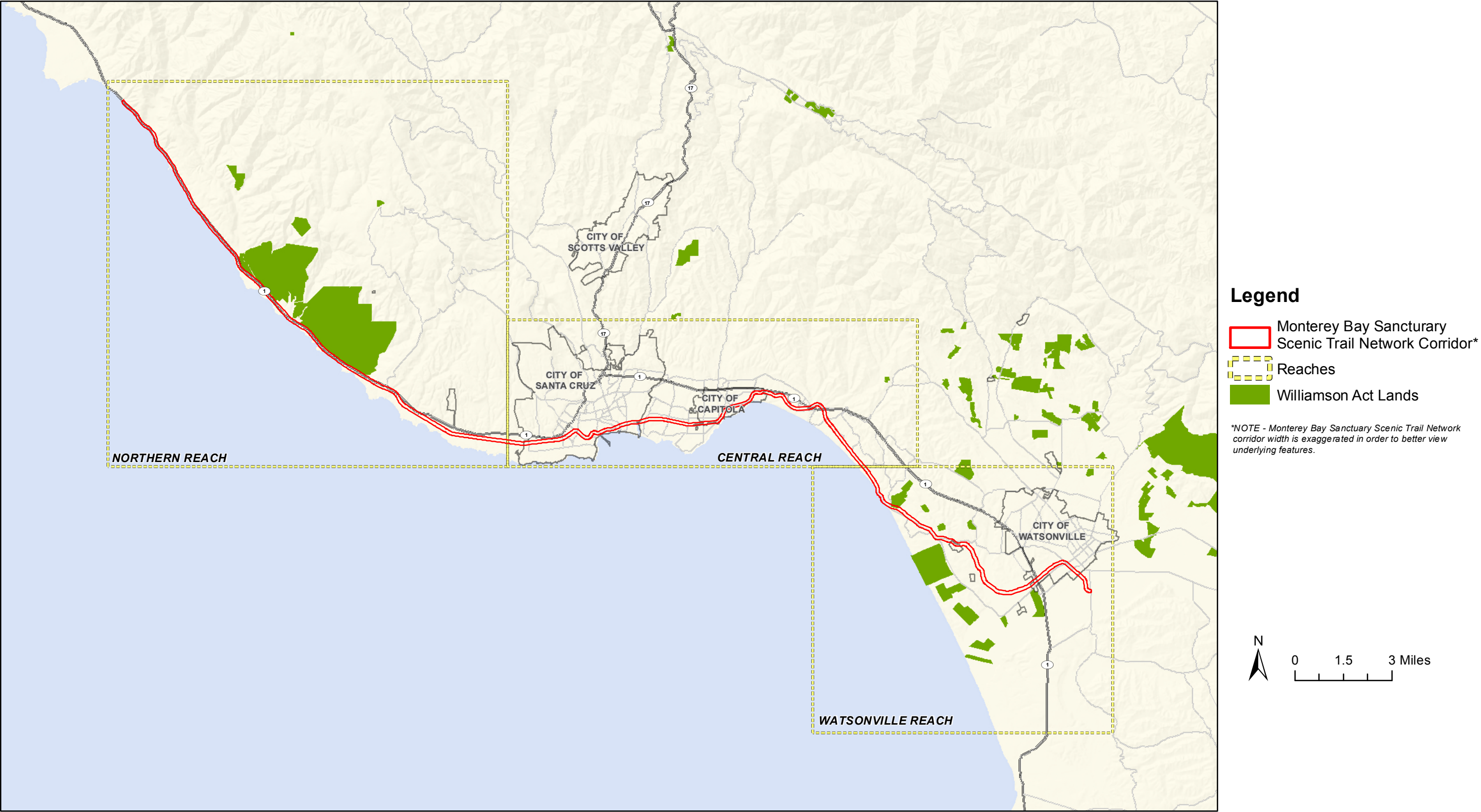
Policy 5.13.21      *Determining Agricultural Viability. Require a viability study conducted in response to an application which proposes to convert agricultural land to non-agricultural land to include, but not be limited to, an economic feasibility evaluation which contains at least:*

- (a) An analysis of the grow revenue from the agricultural products grown in the area for the five years immediately preceding the date of filing the application.*
- (b) An analysis of the operational expenses, excluding the cost of land, associated with the production of agricultural products grown in the area for the five years immediately preceding the date of filing the application.*
- (c) An identification of the geographic area used in the analyses. The area shall be of sufficient size to provide an accurate evaluation of the economic feasibility of agricultural uses for the land stated in the application.*

*Recommendations regarding viability shall be made by the Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission based on evaluation of the viability study and the following criteria: parcel size, sizes of adjacent parcels, degree of non-agricultural development in the area, inclusion of the parcel in utility assessment districts, soil capabilities and topography, water availability and quality, and proximity to other agricultural use.*

- Policy 5.13.22      *Conversion to Non-Agricultural Uses Near Urban Areas. Prohibit the conversion of agricultural lands (changing the land use designation from Agriculture to non-agricultural use) around the periphery of urban areas except where it can be demonstrated that the viability of existing agricultural use is already severely limited by conflicts with the urban uses, where the conversion of land would complete a logical and viable neighborhood and contribute to the establishment of a stable limit to urban development and where the conversion of such land would not impair the viability of other agricultural lands in the area. Within the Sphere of Influence of the City of Watsonville, no conversion of agricultural land is allowed which would adversely affect the city's General Plan affordable housing goals, unless determined to be of an overriding public benefit. (See policy 2.1.5)*
- Policy 5.13.23      *Agricultural Buffers Required. Require a 200 foot buffer area between commercial agricultural and non-agricultural land uses to prevent or minimize potential land use conflicts, between either existing or future commercial agricultural and non-agricultural land uses.*
- Policy 5.13.27      *Siting to Minimize Conflicts. Structures shall be sited to minimize possible conflicts with agriculture in the area. Where structures are located on agricultural land, the structures shall be sited in such a manner to remove as little land as possible from production.*
- Objective 5.14      *Non-Commercial Agricultural Land. To encourage and provide for limited agricultural uses, such as small-scale agriculture and community gardens, on the limited amount of agricultural land remaining in the County which is not designated as commercially viable, in order to maintain a diversity of farm operations and to maintain productive open space and rural character.*

*Santa Cruz County Municipal Code. Chapter 16.50 (Agricultural Land Preservation and Protection) of the Santa Cruz County Municipal Code (commonly referred to as the Right-to-Farm Ordinance) is intended to support and encourage continued agricultural operations in the County and to forewarn prospective purchasers and residents of property adjacent to agricultural operations of the necessary sounds, odors, dust and hazardous chemicals that may accompany agricultural operations. Accordingly, no agricultural activity, operation, or facility or appurtenances thereof shall be or become a nuisance, public or private, if it has been conducted and maintained for commercial purposes, and in a manner consistent with proper and accepted customs and standards as established and followed by similar agricultural operations, and in a manner consistent with all applicable Federal, State and local laws, regulations, permits and approvals, and the conditions thereof, after it has been in operation for more than three years if it was not a nuisance when it began.*



Base map source: RRM Design Group, 2012. Additional data provided by the County of Santa Cruz 2007 and 2012.

Williamson Act Lands  
Figure 4.2-2  
RTC



Section 16.50.059 additionally defines agricultural buffer setbacks, as described below:

*(B) All development for habitable uses within 200 feet of the property line of any parcel containing Type 1, Type 2, or Type 3 commercial agricultural land shall:*

- (1) Provide and maintain a 200-foot buffer setback between Type 1, Type 2 or Type 3 commercial agricultural land and nonagricultural uses involving habitable spaces, including dwellings, habitable accessory structures and additions thereto; and commercial, industrial, recreational, or institutional structures, and their outdoor areas designed for public parking and intensive human use, except that if an existing legal dwelling already encroaches within the 200-foot buffer setback, proposed additions thereto, habitable accessory structures or private recreational facilities, none exceeding 1,000 square feet in size, shall be exempt from this subsection so long as they encroach no further than the existing dwelling into the buffer setback and an appropriate vegetative and/or other physical barrier for all existing and proposed development, as determined necessary, either exists or is provided and maintained. For the purposes of this section, outdoor areas designed for intensive human use shall be defined as surfaced ground areas or uncovered structures designed for a level of human use similar to that of a habitable structure. Examples are dining patios adjacent to restaurant buildings and private swimming pools. The 200-foot agricultural buffer setback shall incorporate vegetative or other physical barriers as determined necessary to minimize potential land use conflicts.*
- (2) Provide and maintain a buffer setback distance of at least 200 feet where the subdivision of land results in residential development at net densities of one or more dwelling units per acre adjacent to Type 1, Type 2, Type 3 commercial agricultural land, with vegetative screening or other physical barriers as appropriate.*
- (3) Comply with SCCC 16.50.090(C) and/or 14.01.407.5 pertaining to recording deed notices of adjacent agricultural use. Such deed notice shall contain a statement acknowledging the required permanent provision and maintenance of the agricultural buffer setbacks and any required barriers (e.g., fencing or vegetative screening).*

#### City of Santa Cruz.

*City of Santa Cruz General Plan 2030.* Although there are no agricultural lands within the Santa Cruz City limits, the Land Use chapter of the City of Santa Cruz General Plan 2030 includes several policies and actions to prevent loss of prime farmland, preserve agricultural land at the City's edge, and support County efforts to protect agricultural lands along the coast north of Santa Cruz. Action HZ4.1.6 seeks to emphasize the City's role as an organic agricultural center and work with appropriate agencies to develop demonstration projects on non-chemical pest control. These policies and actions are listed below.

Policy LU1.2      *Ensure that growth and development does not lead to the overdraft of any water source, the creation of unacceptable levels of air pollution, or the loss of prime agricultural land.*

Action LU1.2.1      *Environmental review for specific projects shall be accompanied by sufficient technical data and reviewed by appropriate departments.*

Policy LU2.3      *Preserve open space and agricultural land uses at the edge of the city.*



Policy LU3.5      *Encourage a mix of uses, including public facilities, along Lower Pacific Avenue, linking Downtown with the Wharf.*

Action HZ4.1.6      *Emphasize the city's role as an organic agricultural center and work with appropriate agencies to develop demonstration projects on non-chemical pest control and soil management practices.*

*Santa Cruz City Code.* All habitable uses in the City of Santa Cruz are required to comply with Section 16.50.095 of the Santa Cruz County Code, which requires agricultural buffers of 200 feet for non-agricultural uses adjacent to specified agricultural lands within the County.

City of Capitola.

*City of Capitola General Plan.* The Capitola General Plan is currently being updated, and a Public Review Draft General Plan is anticipated for June 2013. The current General Plan was adopted in 1989. As there are no agricultural lands within the City of Capitola, the 1989 General Plan does not contain any policies related to agricultural resources.

*Capitola Municipal Code.* The Capitola Municipal Code does not contain policies related to agricultural resources, although agriculture is an allowed use in the Single-Family Residence (R-1) and Industrial Park (IP) zoning districts.

City of Watsonville.

*City of Watsonville General Plan.* An updated City of Watsonville General Plan was adopted by the City Council in January 2013, but was subsequently challenged in court and is on hold until resolution on the legal issues can be reached. Therefore, at this time, the 2005 General Plan remains in effect. The existing 2005 General Plan, adopted in 1994, notes that the agricultural heritage of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley is an important aspect of Watsonville's character. None of the lands within the City limits are designated for agricultural use, although agriculturally designated and utilized lands virtually surround the City. The goals, policies, and implementation measures applicable to this project are discussed below.

Goal 3.3      *Agricultural Land Use. Foster the continuation of agriculture in the Pajaro Valley.*

Policy 3.F      *Agricultural Land Conservation. The City shall plan for the preservation and enhancement of important agricultural soils by encouraging the County and LAFCO to prohibit continued urbanization of lands beyond the Urban Limit Line and by encouraging the retention of land beyond the Urban Limit Line for long term agricultural purposes.*

Impl. 3.F31      *Urban Limit Line. In order to preserve agricultural uses outside the urbanized area, the City shall not support annexation or increased urbanization by the City outside the Urban Limit Line as identified in the Watsonville 2005 Land Use Diagram.*

- Impl. 3.F.2      *Retention of Agriculture. The City shall encourage retention of agricultural uses on those lands beyond the Urban Limit Line by restricting the extension of urban services to those areas.*
- Impl. 3.F.3      *Williamson Act. The City shall encourage landowners outside the Urban Limit Line to maintain agricultural production through the use of Williamson Act contracts.*
- Goal 9.7        *Agricultural Soils. Limit the urbanization of productive agricultural soils to only those parcels contiguous with existing urban use, best suited for urban development, and within the urban limit line.*
- Impl. 9.E.6      *Agricultural Land Conservation. The City shall encourage retention of agricultural land beyond its urban limit line.*

*Watsonville Municipal Code.* The Watsonville Zoning Ordinance includes two zoning districts for agricultural purposes: Exclusive Agriculture (EM-A-1), which is intended to protect and foster agriculture, to permit all normal uses related to agriculture, and to prohibit those that would be in conflict, and Interim Agriculture (EM-A-2), which is intended to preserve land in interim agricultural use and protect against premature urban development, which is presently unneeded, and for which it may be uneconomic to provide urban services.

Chapter 14-33 of the Watsonville Municipal Code, commonly known as the Right-to-Farm Ordinance, was adopted to preserve and protect agricultural operations and agricultural land in the vicinity of Watsonville by: (a) limiting the effects of land use conflicts created by the proximity of urban development to agricultural operations located in and immediately adjacent to the city; and (b) providing notice to purchasers, property owners and tenants of non-agricultural uses adjacent to agricultural land and operations and the City's support for the preservation of agricultural land operations.

In addition to these regulations, the City cooperates with Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties in programs to create agricultural and open space buffers between urban development and agricultural uses. As of October 26, 2004, the City revised its policy relating to buffer zones between adjacent urban residential developments and agricultural land uses to be consistent with the Santa Cruz County Agriculture Buffer Policy including the exception provisions (Resolution No. 274-04). This policy establishes a 200-foot buffer between Santa Cruz County agriculture land uses and residential land uses. This buffer is located entirely within the urban area, and would not utilize any portion of the Santa Cruz County designated agriculture lands.

Monterey County. Segment 20 of the proposed MBSST Network project, which is 0.74 miles long, would be located in Monterey County. The purpose of this segment is to provide a regional connection to the Monterey County section of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. Implementation of this section would require cooperation and coordination with the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) and the County of Monterey. Monterey County General Plan goals and policies, as well as Monterey County Municipal Code regulations, would apply to this segment.

## 4.2.2 Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

### a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds.

Evaluation Criteria. The following thresholds are based on Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. Impacts would be significant if the proposed MBSST Network would result in any of the following:

- 1) *Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;*
- 2) *Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; and/or*
- 3) *Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use.*

It should be noted that the proposed MBSST Network project would not conflict with designated forestry or timberland resources, as construction and operation of trail features facilitated by the proposed Master Plan would primarily occur within the railroad and roadway rights-of-way and would therefore avoid any adjacent forestry or timberland resources. As a result, the checklist items related to this condition were excluded from the above list. Additional discussion can be found in the Initial Study (Appendix A of this document).

Potential health and safety impacts resulting from pesticide drift and other pesticide applications are discussed in Section 4.8, *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*.

### b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

**Impact AG-1**    **Development of the proposed MBSST Network would ~~may~~ impact land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance. Impacts would be Class II, significant but mitigable.**

*Northern Reach.* As shown in Figure 4.2-1a, the northern reach of the MBSST Network contains Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance. As stated in Section 4.2.1(b) above, approximately 13.0 acres designated as Prime Farmland, 23.2 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 7.3 acres of Unique Farmland fall within the MBSST Network right-of-way. It should be noted, however, that these figures represent the maximum right-of-way widths for each individual segment. In the northern reach, the right-of-way varies from 25 to 100 feet. The actual disturbance area would be narrower and is assumed to be an average of 25 feet. In addition, although the proposed MBSST Network would impact Prime Farmland, many of these areas are composed of disturbed dirt paths within or adjacent to the existing rail corridor right-of-way, and are not directly used for agricultural production, i.e. growing crops. Further, improvements within segments 1 through 3 consist primarily of on-road improvements, which would not disturb unpaved areas.

Although the estimates provided above represent a worst case scenario, construction of the northern reach of the MBSST Network would impact Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide



Importance, and Unique Farmland. Therefore, in accordance with the thresholds identified in Section 4.2.2(a), impacts are considered potentially significant.

*Central Reach.* The central reach begins at the northern boundary of the City of Santa Cruz and extends southeast to just south of Aptos. This reach of the MBSST Network corridor traverses through densely populated coastal urban areas, and does not travel through or near agricultural areas. As shown in Figure 4.2-1b, the central reach of the MBSST Network does not contain Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, impacts related to conversion of these resources would be less than significant.

*Watsonville Reach.* As shown in Figure 4.2-1c, the Watsonville reach of the MBSST Network contains Prime Farmland and Unique Farmland. As stated in Section 4.2.1(b) above, approximately 27.1 acres designated as Prime Farmland and 1.8 acres of Unique Farmland fall within the Watsonville reach right-of-way. It should be noted, however, that these figures represent the maximum right-of-way widths for each individual segment. In the Watsonville reach, the right-of-way varies from 62 feet to 148 feet. The actual disturbance area would be narrower and is assumed to be an average of 25 feet. In addition, although the proposed MBSST Network would impact Prime Farmland and Unique Farmland along this reach, many of these areas are composed of disturbed dirt paths within or adjacent to the existing rail corridor right-of-way, and are not used for agricultural production.

Although the estimates provided above represent a worst case scenario, construction of the Watsonville reach of the MBSST Network would impact Prime Farmland and Unique Farmland. Therefore, in accordance with the thresholds identified in Section 4.2.2(a), impacts are considered potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures. Because impacts would be potentially significant for the northern and Watsonville reaches, the following mitigation measures are required for those areas:

**AG-1(a) Placement of Fencing.** Placement of fencing shall be located in a manner which minimizes impacts related to accessibility to farmland and use of farming equipment (e.g., allowing turning radius area for farm equipment).

Significance After Mitigation. Although the proposed MBSST Network project would impact Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance, these areas are currently composed of disturbed dirt paths. With implementation of the above mitigation, the MBSST Network project would not convert a substantial area to non-agricultural use. Impacts would therefore be reduced to a less than significant level.

**Impact AG-2 Some segments of the proposed MBSST Network would be adjacent to areas zoned for agriculture and/or adjacent to areas with existing Williamson Act contracts. However, as trail segments would generally be confined to existing right-of-**

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<sup>2</sup> Although a small portion of land west of the Santa Cruz city limits is shown as being within the central reach on Figure 4.2-1b, this area is included in the northern reach, as the boundary is delineated in Section 2.0, Project Description, as the city limit boundary. Thus, the Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance shown in the westernmost portion of Figure 4.2-1b is located in the northern reach.

**ways, impacts related to conflicts with existing zoning or Williamson Act contracts would be Class III, *less than significant*.**

The proposed MBSST Network corridor travels adjacent to land zoned Commercial Agriculture (CA) and Agriculture (A) in the northern and Watsonville reaches. However, the trail right-of-way itself is designated either Special Use (SU) (in the northernmost portion of the northern reach, where the trail would abut Highway 1) or Public and Community Facilities (PF) (where the corridor corresponds with the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way). The MBSST Network right-of-way is not itself used for agriculture, nor zoned for agriculture. Thus, a proposed multi-use recreation trail along these rights-of-way would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use.

As shown in Figure 4.2-2, most of the agricultural land adjacent to the northern and Watsonville reaches is currently under Williamson Act contract. However, because the trail corridor itself is not under contract nor is it currently used for agricultural production, construction and operation of the proposed MBSST Network project would not conflict with Williamson Act contracts for adjacent land in agricultural production.

Based on the discussions above, impacts related to agricultural zoning and Williamson Act contracts would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

**Impact AG-3    Operation of the proposed MBSST Network may result in direct and indirect impacts on agricultural productivity from land use conflicts between trail users and agriculture. This is a Class II, *significant but mitigable* impact.**

The interface of trail users and agricultural operations could result in several types of land use conflicts, affecting both agricultural resources and trail users. Anticipated conflicts are described below.

*Impacts to Agricultural Uses.* Development adjacent to farmland can induce a range of adverse impacts on continued farm operations. Direct physical impacts would include vandalism to farm equipment or fencing, and theft of products. Trespassing by trail users could occur, particularly on isolated stretches of the MBSST Network corridor where security may be minimal. Such trespassing may be by trail users who become fatigued and find the shade of adjacent property to be an attractive place to rest. In some areas, fruit orchards or row crops may also present informal shortcuts to major roadways from the trail alignment. In addition to the potential for vandalism and theft, direct impacts from trespassers could include soil compaction and contamination, which can damage crop potential. Direct impacts may also include littering on farmland, particularly where there are insufficient numbers of trash receptacles along the trail. Unintentional littering could also occur if litter deposited by trail users in trash receptacles is carried by winds onto nearby farmland.

Indirect impacts to agriculture from the proximity of trail users can also affect the long-term viability of such operations. Increased regulations and liability insurance to protect the farmer from adjacent uses may cost time and money. As a result of increased public access, some farmers may voluntarily avoid cultivating or spraying the portions of their property closest to the trail, in effect establishing formal or informal buffer zones on their own. This has the effect of incrementally lowering the crop yield of the agricultural operation. Additionally, use of ornamental landscaping along the trail could bring pests into the agricultural areas, which could adversely affect agricultural production.

*Impacts to Trail Users.* Adjacent agricultural operations could create health-related and nuisance conflicts with trail users, including from closure of segments of the trail to accommodate agricultural activities. In particular, the use of pesticides on adjacent row crops and the suspension of dust from operation of farm equipment could present adverse health concerns.

The Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner's office is responsible for issuing pesticide spraying permits and regulating the use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals. As the regulating and enforcement entity for the County, the Agricultural Commissioner's office would not place additional restrictions upon the agricultural operators as a result of the proposed MBSST Network as long as pesticides and other agricultural chemicals are applied in compliance with the label, worker safety requirements, weather conditions, drift restrictions, and all other safety requirements as required by federal, state and local laws. Nor would the Agricultural Commissioner's office require specific agricultural or pesticide buffers from the proposed trail. Rather, pesticide spray restrictions listed on the pesticide label would be enforced. These buffers are greatest for fumigants, which have a greater potential for drifting into the trail area.

Regardless of whether agricultural operators follow all restrictions on the pesticide label, the potential exists for trail users to trespass onto adjacent agricultural property after pesticides have been applied, thereby becoming exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals. The health effects of pesticide exposure are further discussed in Section 4.8, *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*.

It should be noted that while ongoing agricultural operations could impact trail users, these impacts are not unique to this project. Agricultural operations in the region often result in nuisance impacts to adjacent urban development, and such impacts are typically of a greater magnitude than expected with regard to trail users. Homeowners typically note conflicts with adjacent agricultural operations more frequently than do transitory trail users, who voluntarily enter and leave agricultural areas of their own accord, and therefore are more likely to accept short-term odor and noise nuisances. Nevertheless, given the potentially large number of trail users, impacts are considered potentially significant.

*Mitigating Design Features.* The proposed MBSST Network project contains several design features intended to limit potential conflicts between agricultural operations and trail users. This includes the installation of continuous fencing between the trail and most adjacent agricultural properties, which would discourage access to neighboring lands. In addition, notices would be posted at entrances to the trail of on-going agricultural activities, stating that the trail user agrees to use of the trail at his/her own risk. Implementing entities would require pet waste removal

and provide dog waste bag dispensers at trailheads. Rural areas may include a simple regulation sign requiring pet owners to collect their pet waste, and dogs may also be restricted in trail sections that are adjacent to agricultural lands where sensitivity relating to contamination exists. Trail users would additionally be advised that agricultural operations will be occurring and may include pesticide spraying, agricultural dust and debris, and burning activities in accordance with State and local laws and ordinances. Finally, notices would state that the trail may be subject to closure without notice to accommodate such activities.

The trail would be designed with the ability for its physical closure (of isolated segments) in the event it becomes necessary to facilitate permitted spraying. The Trail Manager would work to establish a plan for receiving notices of impending spraying activity and follow-up actions, as appropriate, and the Trail Ranger would be responsible for ensuring that temporary trail closure gates are open or closed, should they be needed.

Twenty-two existing trail access and staging areas are located in close proximity to the trail alignment, and include features such as parking for vehicles and bicycles, drinking water, trash receptacles, kiosks with traveler information, and other amenities. These areas would provide trail users with a place to rest, thereby reducing the potential for trespassing by trail users who become fatigued and find the shade of adjacent fruit orchards to be an attractive place to rest.

Finally, the proposed MBSST establishes a Trail ~~Manager~~ Ranger who would be responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the trail facility components, including trash clean up and disposal, graffiti removal, and repairs to trail components. The Trail Manager would ensure that each element described in the operations and maintenance plan is completed. The establishment of a formal trail operations and maintenance plan would help ensure adequate maintenance of the trail corridor and facilities, thereby reducing litter-related conflicts.

Despite the above design features, mitigation is required to reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measures are required to reduce the potential impacts from agricultural land use conflicts to a less than significant level:

- AG-3(a) Notice of Agricultural Activities.** The following information shall be added to the proposed notices on on-going agricultural activities:
- Trail users are advised to stay on the trail and be alert to operating machinery and equipment near the trail.
  - Trail users are required to use restroom facilities in consideration of food hygiene issues on adjacent agricultural lands.
  - Where dogs are not prohibited, trail users are required to clean up after their dogs and prevent trespass by dogs on adjacent agricultural properties in consideration of food hygiene issues on adjacent agricultural lands.
  - The legal ramifications for trespassing on adjacent properties.



- The legal ramifications for trespassing or being on the trail after it is closed.

**AG-3(b) Landscaping Coordination.** For segments adjacent to agricultural operations in the northern and Watsonville reaches, any ornamental plant material used along the trail shall be comprised of native and indigenous species. The selected plant palette shall be reviewed by the Agricultural Commissioner's office prior to approval of landscape plans. Any plant material which may host pests destructive to agriculture shall be prohibited.

**AG-3(c) Chemical Spraying Impact Reduction Options.** On a case-by-case basis, the RTC and/or the implementing entity for segments adjacent to agricultural operations shall work with the Agricultural Commissioner's office and adjacent farmers to reduce impacts to trail users from agricultural spraying, including pesticides. Non-buffer options shall be considered, including the use of alternative methods of pest and weed control and/or an agreement that farmers notify the Agricultural Commissioner's office or Trail Manager in advance of proposed agricultural spraying within 100 feet of the trail. This would allow the Agricultural Commissioner's office, in accordance with existing requirements, to inform the RTC and/or implementing or managing entity of all spraying within 100 feet of the trail so that appropriate action can be taken (e.g., posting notices or closure of that segment of the trail).

Significance After Mitigation. Proposed design features and implementation of the above mitigation measures would reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

**d. Cumulative Impacts.** The proposed MBSST Network project would impact Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance, as discussed in Impact AG-1. As a result, it would contribute to the cumulative loss of agriculture within the County arising from continuing urbanization. The project may also contribute to increasing conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses. Long-term agricultural viability within the County could be adversely affected by such conflicts. The County of Santa Cruz and City of Watsonville's Right-to-Farm Ordinances are regulatory mechanisms intended to ensure the viability of agriculture within the County, and would provide some degree of mitigation for this impact. It should be noted that the viability of agriculture involves more than merely prohibiting development in areas designated for agriculture. For agriculture to remain viable as an industry in the County, farmers must be able to farm, which necessitates the use of pesticides and equipment, with associated nuisance effects. Project design features and mitigation measures required herein would address these impacts, and it is therefore anticipated that the project's contribution to cumulative impacts would be less than significant.

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