

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT*

Trends and Projections

Population. With nearly 400,000 residents, Santa Barbara County is ranked the 18th most populous county among a total of 58 counties in the state. Between 1980 and 2000, Santa Barbara County's population, and employment increased an estimated 33.6%, and 25.4% respectively. Lompoc, Santa Maria and Santa Ynez Valleys experienced the greatest population growth rates, ranging from 30.2 to 63.4%. In contrast, population growth rates for the South Coast grew modestly during the same period at 17%. Population and employment estimates for Santa Barbara County and cities are provided in Table 9: Census: Population and Employment 1980-2000.

In 2000, nearly 20% of the county's total population resided in the Goleta area. Newly incorporated in 2001, Goleta was formerly one of the largest unincorporated communities in the state and among the fastest growing areas in the county. Over 54% of the new residential units approved in 1999 were in Goleta and Orcutt, another growing unincorporated area in the county. Due to the growth of these areas over the last 30 years, the county was ranked as the 10th highest population of unincorporated areas among California counties.¹

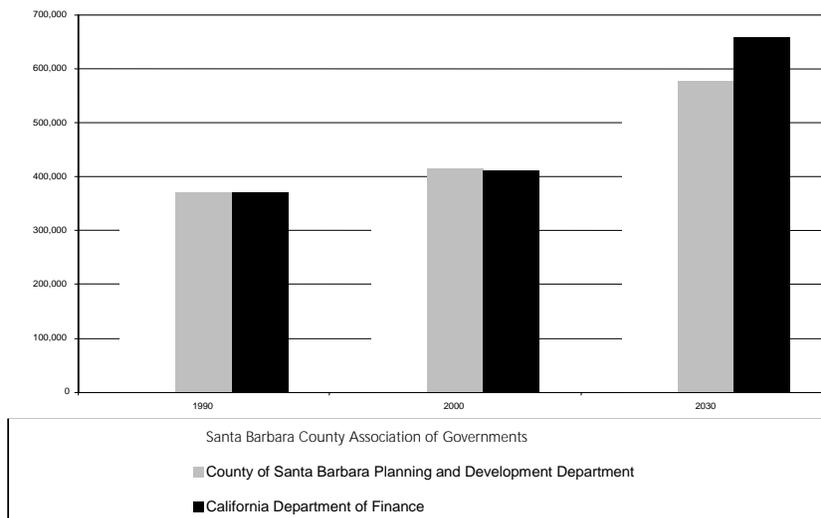
Methods for determining population projections to the year 2030 vary among local and state agencies (See Figure 1). The California Department of Finance projections for the county are based on U.S. Census Data with calculations for increases based on historic and assumed birth and death rates. The County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department (SBP&D) projected

Table 9: Census: Population and Employment 1980-2000

	Population			Employment		
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
County Totals	303,237	369,608	399,347	137,469	163,247	178,400

Source: 1980, 1990 US Census, Santa Barbara County Association of Governments

Figure 1: Santa Barbara County Population Growth Estimates



* The information presented in this section reflects primarily county and subregional data because more detailed data was not available for the study area.

growth based on averaging the last ten years' annual growth rates for the county and applied this average to estimate population growth over the next thirty years. The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) uses a methodology similar to the state but factors in the effects of existing county land use policies on the growth rate. All three projections indicate that Santa Barbara County will experience significant growth pressures by the year 2030.

The California Department of Finance forecasts the most aggressive population projections with a growth rate of 60% for the county overall for the next thirty years. Santa Barbara County Department of Planning and Development projects a growth rate of about 40%. The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments projections are the most conservative, with a countywide population growth rate of 30% by 2030. Both SBP&D and SBCAG estimate a greater growth rate in the North County with a slower rate along the South Coast. SBP&D estimates that 50 percent of the county will reside in North County by 2005, increasing to 54% by 2030. SBCAG estimates a growth rate of 40% in the North County with a slower growth rate of 20% along the South Coast.²⁻⁴

SBP&D, the California Department of Finance, and SBCAG studies are all plausible future scenarios for the county. However, the growth pressures facing the study area are primarily on the eastern end near the Goleta Urban Rural Boundary Line. Currently, the county has projected that if all the residential projects currently approved for Goleta Valley are built, then it will reach 90% of its planned residential buildout. After buildout, the Goleta Valley may need up to 8,500 additional homes to accommodate growth, requiring 3,000 more acres of residential land at typical densities. Given the current pressures, we will assume for this environmental assessment that by 2030 there will be increased pressure to develop in the eastern end of the study area.⁵

Housing. The demand for housing in Santa Barbara County has pushed the cost of housing beyond affordability.* In 2001, the countywide median home price of \$329,262 was considerably higher than the state average of \$265,915. The South Coast is one of the least affordable areas in the United States, with the median price of a home at \$655,000. This figure is beyond the reach of service sector employees and many higher income professionals. Median home prices in the South Coast rose 14.5% per year over the past ten years. Median home prices rose 18.8% per year in the North County.⁶

In 2001, demand pushed home prices up significantly from the previous year in the more affordable northern areas of the county. Examples include Lompoc (increasing from \$134,500 to \$170,000), Santa Maria (increasing from \$144,000 to \$169,250), and Santa Ynez (increasing from \$343,50 to \$350,000.⁷

As the above figures indicate, demand for residential real estate in Santa Barbara is high. South Coast property for large estate development, in particular, is at a premium. In the eastern portion of the study area near the western Urban Rural Boundary Line, land values have ranged from \$52,272 per acre at Winchester Ranch to \$658,000 per acre at Santa Barbara Cove (eagle canyon coast). Approximately 11,000 acres of land within the study area have been on the market in recent years (See Table A4 in the "Tables" section).



Winchester Commons, NPS photo

* Under state and federal statutes affordability is defined as housing which costs no more than 30% of gross household income. Housing costs include rent or mortgage payments, utilities, taxes, insurance, homeowner's association fees, and related costs.

Employment. The 2000 US Census reported 178,400 employed residents in Santa Barbara County. The unemployment rate remained stable at 3.5% in 2001. Significant job losses in the agriculture sector last year strongly impacted the low job growth rate of .17%, down from 3.4% for the previous year. Job creation is expected to average around 1.2% a year for the next ten years.⁸

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments anticipates the creation of 79,000 additional jobs over the next 30 years. This accounts for a 44% increase in the number of jobs from 2000 to 2030.

Employment sectors that contributed the largest growth rate in 2001 were local government (1,300 jobs), finance, insurance, and real estate (400 jobs) and state government (300). Other sectors such as business services, transportation and communications experienced no job growth, but remained stable. In the past year, the largest losses in employment were seen in agriculture (1,400 jobs), and wholesale trade (300 jobs).⁹⁻¹⁰

Over the past thirty years, large employment producing industries have located in the South Coast resulting in a larger numbers of employees relative to the number of new homes. As a result, South Coast workers have looked to North County

communities, such as Santa Maria, Orcutt, Lompoc and Buellton, to meet their housing needs. Conversely, North County has more housing than jobs. This has resulted in a jobs/housing imbalance in which 20,000 workers are currently commuting daily to the South Coast. Caltrans is considering proposals to widen Highways 101, 154 and 166 and has approved a proposal to widen Highway 246 between Lompoc and Buellton. These proposals will likely take years to plan and construct and will cost millions of dollars in public improvements and remove hundreds of acres of agriculture land.¹¹

Santa Barbara County has developed into a service-based economy in the last twenty years. The service sector is the fastest growing sector and contains the majority of jobs in the county. Government, healthcare, agriculture, retail trade, and high tech sectors lead as the largest employment categories in the area. By 2030, service sector job growth will account for 30% of all regional jobs. The majority of growth will occur in the South Coast, especially within the tourism industry, which is also the largest employment sector in the South Coast. Table 10 provides countywide job distribution data for the next 30 years.

Income. In 1999, real household median income in the county was \$46,677, as compared to \$41,994 nationally and \$47,493 for the state. The

Table 10: Countywide Job Distribution Data 2000-2030

Employment Sector	2000	2015	2030
Agriculture	8.70%	8.30%	8.20%
Mining	0.50%	0.50%	0.40%
Construction	4.50%	7.20%	9.00%
Manufacturing	10.20%	10.60%	10.80%
Transportation	2.90%	2.60%	2.50%
Wholesale Trade	3.20%	3.30%	3.50%
Retail Trade	19.00%	17.70%	16.70%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	4.20%	3.70%	3.40%
Services	28.20%	29.10%	29.80%
Government	18.80%	17.20%	15.60%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Santa Barbara County Association of Governments Regional Growth Forecast 2000-2030

1999 median household income for the South Coast (\$49,918) was only slightly higher than household median income for the North County (\$45,474). Income levels have been unable to keep pace with the rising cost of housing in Santa Barbara County.

Tourism. A picturesque coastline, numerous parks and beaches, wineries and a mild climate make the county a popular vacation destination. While business travel declined 11% from 1996 to 3 million visitors in 2000, leisure travel increased 17% to 6.7 million visitors during that same period.¹² Over 8 million were visitors to the South Coast. Travel, dining and recreational services provide a significant number of jobs, suggesting a strong dependence on tourism for a large number of private sector jobs. In 2000, tourism generated \$1.2 billion in total spending, approximately 20,000 jobs and \$83 million in tax revenues. Much of the growing tourism is associated with the expanding wine industry in the North County.¹³ Table 11 includes a summary of travel impacts for Santa Barbara County.

The county experienced a 17% growth in hotel/motel room sales in 2001 compared to 9.7% for the previous year. For the past eight years, sales have increased an average of 8.4% per year. A recent study by the University of California at Santa Barbara predicts that this positive trend will continue, but cautions it may be at a decelerated rate of growth as compared to prior years.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

Agriculture. Agriculture is the largest production industry in the study area, and the third largest

employer for the county (See Land Use map in the "Maps" section). Over half of the county's open lands are privately-owned agricultural land. Although the agricultural workforce declined last year by 9.4%, agriculture is a major contributor to the regional economy. In 2001, the agriculture sector provided 15,000 jobs. Sales of agricultural products declined 6.1% with \$634 million in revenue. The decrease was largely offset by an 18.9% increase in the harvest of wine grapes. Wine grapes are primarily produced in the Santa Ynez Valley, outside of the study area. Broccoli followed as the second largest crop with \$78 million in revenues.¹⁶

Agricultural operations on the Gaviota Coast support the production of avocado, citrus, cherimoya orchards and cattle grazing. Farming opportunities exist from Goleta to Point Conception. Bixby and the Hollister Ranch Subdivision, with over 42,000 acres, represent the majority of agriculture land along the North Gaviota Coast, where cattle grazing is the primary form of agriculture. A detailed discussion of land use and agriculture trends has been provided in the following section, "Land Use."

Oil Production. Oil and gas development is the principal industrial activity in the study area. Offshore oil and gas production in Santa Barbara County accounts for 57.8 % of the state's total offshore production and 89.9% of its natural gas production. Total employment in the oil and gas extraction sector increased to 800 in 2001, an increase of 100 from the previous year.¹⁷

Table 11: Summary of Travel Impacts for Santa Barbara County, 1992 and 2000

	DESTINATION SPENDING (\$M)	TOTAL TRAVEL SPENDING (\$M)	EMPLOYMENT JOBS	EARNINGS (\$M)	TAX RECEIPTS (\$000)
1992	747.1	754	15,100	242.1	53,003
2000	1155.2	1169.2	19,300	371.5	83,203
Annual Change 1992-2000	5.6%	5.6%	3.1%	5.5%	5.8%

Note: Destination spending does not include air transportation or travel arrangement. Employment includes all full- and part-time payroll employees and working proprietors. Property taxes are not included.

Source: Dean Runyan Associates, 2002

There are seven oil and gas processing facilities in the study area, one of which, the Texaco facility at Gaviota, is not in operation. The other six facilities process and/or store oil and gas from offshore fields, which accounts for almost all of the gas and oil production. The Gaviota Oil and Gas processing facility and Exxon Las Flores Canyon oil processing facility have been designated as consolidated sites for processing all new oil and gas production from offshore reservoirs. Several oil facilities within the study area are planned for abandonment or decommissioning. These projects include the Unocal Cojo Marine Terminal on Bixby Ranch, the Texaco-Hollister Ranch pipeline abandonment, and the Gaviota Oil and Gas Facility excess equipment removal project.

In 1999, then Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt extended 36 state and federal leases for offshore oil production off the Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo coasts. The State of California and others filed suit, arguing that these lease extensions required a determination from the California Coastal Commission that they were consistent with state coastal protection laws. In December 2002, a federal appeals court voided the lease extensions pending review by the Coastal Commission and analysis of the environmental impacts of the lease extensions.



Venoco Oil and Gas Processing Facility, NPS photo

Transportation. The Gaviota Coast study area includes part of the City of Goleta. It is accessible by U.S. Highway 101, which runs east west along the coast from Goleta to Gaviota State Park, then turns inland. U.S. Highway 101 connects the Gaviota Coast to the City of Santa Barbara and other major population centers such as Los Angeles, 100 miles to the south, and San Jose 245 miles to the north. North County residents access Highway 101 via Highways 1 and 246.

SBCAG identified Santa Maria Valley, Lompoc Valley and Ventura County as areas with the highest number of South Coast commuters. With population growth and a jobs/housing imbalance between North County and the South Coast, traffic on Highway 101 between Santa Barbara and Goleta is reaching capacity during both the morning and afternoon peak hours in both directions.¹⁸ Annual traffic growth between 1990 and 2000 on Highway 101 south of Route 1 was approximately 1.9%.

According to the Santa Barbara County Department of Planning and Development, major improvements within the last few years to area intersections and roads have helped to temporarily alleviate traffic congestion. However, these improvements cannot keep pace with the rapid growth in population and housing.¹⁹

Caltrans control stations along Highway 101, close to and within the study area, have recorded increases in average daily traffic counts (ADT) between 1993 and 2001. ADT increases occurred along Highway 101 at Los Carneros Road (28 percent), Glen Annie/Storke Roads (27 percent), and El Capitan Beach State Park (25 percent) during PM peak hours. Northbound Highway 1 traffic showed similar patterns during the same period. ADT increased along Highway 101 at Jalama Road (16 percent) and Vandenberg Air Force Base, Main Gate (20 percent) during PM peak hours.²⁰ A level of service (LOS) analysis was conducted by Caltrans for sections along Highways 101 and 1 (data for Highway 246 was not available). Level of service is a widely used system of describing traffic and driving characteristics at

different intensities of traffic flow and congestion.*

The LOS analysis results indicate that most of the major corridors are currently operating between LOS B and E on southbound Highway 101 and between LOS C and F for northbound traffic. Northbound Highway 101 at the Highway 154 junction is operating at full capacity at LOS F. Southbound traffic is operating at LOS E, or very heavy and unstable traffic conditions. Traffic on Highway 1 is operating between LOS A to LOS D for the three segments analyzed by Caltrans. Figures show that the segment three miles east of the Highway 1/101 junction to south of the Highway 246/1 junction is experiencing the heaviest traffic and delays at LOS D.²¹

SBCAG develops future year projections of traffic volumes. The forecasts are used to provide an indication of the general magnitude of traffic that would be using major routes in and near the study area in the future. SBCAG traffic model forecasts that by 2020, average daily traffic counts will increase 19.6 % at Highway 101 north of Winchester Canyon and 21.7 % at Highway 101 north of Los Carneros.²²



Highway 101, NPS photo

* LOS A: Light traffic. Average travel speed of about 90% of free flow speed. Stopped delay at signalized intersections is minimal. LOS B: Moderate traffic. Average travel speeds drop due to intersection delay and inter-vehicle conflicts, but remain at 70% of free flow speed. Delay is not unreasonable. LOS C: Substantial traffic. Stable operations. Longer queues at signals result in average travel speeds of about 50% of free flow speeds. Motorists experience appreciable tensions. LOS D: Heavy traffic. Approaching unstable flow. Average travel speeds down to 40% of free flow speed. Delays at intersections may become extensive. LOS E: Very heavy traffic. Unstable flow. LOS F: Saturated flow conditions, forced flow, low operating speeds.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Alternative 1

Population and Housing. Regional changes in population and housing within the next 30 years forecast a 30% to 60% population increase and could result in a housing shortage of over 178,000 units countywide. The strength and effectiveness of current growth management could be severely tested as the county could be pressured to secure large amounts of additional land for housing. Urban land set aside for other use could be rezoned for residential use. The Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department has stated that the most likely areas for development are open space and agricultural lands adjacent to urban areas, in lots less than 100 acres in size and not in the agricultural preserve. Such pressures could result in adverse impacts on the eastern end of the study area and could involve adjusting the western Urban Rural Boundary Line to accommodate additional housing units.²³ Rising land values and restrictions on development in order to keep land in agricultural use would continue to negatively impact the supply of affordable housing in the near-term.

Employment. Major changes to employment and output have been forecast for the County. Over 79,000 new jobs are projected in the county, with the service sector as the largest employer. The tourism sector in Santa Barbara County would continue to grow, following historical patterns. The number of jobs created would be small within the study area relative to the number of jobs in the region.

Agricultural employment in the study area could be affected to the extent that agricultural uses expand or contract in response to market forces and regulatory pressures. While current zoning and regulations have slowed the conversion of

farmland to other uses in the study area, rising land values and the potential conversion of farms and ranches to rural residential estates in the eastern end of the study area may result in the displacement of some farms and ranches in the long term. Displacement of farms for other land uses could negatively impact employment. Those particularly impacted could be minority and low-income populations that have traditionally held a large number of low-paying agricultural jobs.

Services and Facilities. Most municipal services, utilities and other facilities in the unincorporated areas along the Gaviota coast and nearby cities would experience long-term impacts under Alternative 1 due to projected growth in population and possible residential development. Infrastructure improvements for water, sewer, roads, and parking would be required to accommodate growth, placing additional burdens on government budgets and pressure for additional tax revenues.

A study by the Northern Illinois University and American Farmland Trust on the fiscal costs and public safety risks of low-density residential development on farmland found that for many living in dispersed houses or subdivisions, the emergency response times for police, ambulance and fire fighters exceeded national standards. If additional farmland is converted to rural residential development under existing agricultural zoning, there could be adverse impacts to the response time of services such as police and fire protection.²⁴

Transportation. Regional population increases, a continuation of the jobs/housing imbalance, and residential, commercial, and industrial development at various locations in the region are likely to generate additional traffic flows on study area roadways and highways. Specific recreation development could have localized adverse circulation impacts that could be mitigated through site design and access improvements. Increased numbers of visitors to the Gaviota Coast could also adversely impact traffic flows. However, additional traffic from increased visitation would

be minimal as most increases in traffic congestion would be from the jobs/housing imbalance projected between the north and south county areas. The extent of congestion will depend on how state and local transportation managers respond to needs for expansions and upgrades to transportation systems. Pressure from these long-term impacts associated with the jobs/housing imbalance could result in widening Highways 1, 246 & 101. The portion of these traffic increases attributable to activities in the study area is expected to be minimal.

Mitigation efforts could include the promotion and development of transit operations and ridesharing programs, the development of high wage jobs in North County or the implementation of an affordable housing program with a focus on South County. Establishment of an affordable housing program in the South County area would continue to be challenging given the area's high land values.

Conclusion

Population, housing and employment countywide are expected to increase substantially in the long-term, with significant differences in growth patterns between the North and South County areas. In the Goleta area, housing would be unable to accommodate this growth due to land use restrictions and a lack of vacant land zoned for residential development. Residential buildout could be reached on the South Coast in 8 years and in North County in 15 years. The development pressure could cause in adverse impacts on the eastern end of the study area and could involve adjusting the western Urban Rural Boundary Line to accommodate additional housing units in the long-term. Lack of affordable housing due to high land values on the South Coast could adversely impact disadvantaged populations historically employed in low-wage industries such as agriculture and tourism.

If agricultural land is converted to rural residential development under existing agricultural zoning, then burdens on emergency services could result in minor adverse impacts to public health and safety.

Traffic volumes would increase on the roadways and highways due to population and housing growth outside the study area. Highways 101, 1, and 246 would experience the greatest amounts of traffic congestion and other related problems. Specific recreation development could have localized adverse traffic impacts that could be mitigated through site design and access improvements. Roadways within the study area would experience increased volumes over time, but would continue to operate effectively and without unacceptable levels of traffic congestion. The portion of these traffic increases attributable to activities in the study area is expected to be minimal. Mitigation could include the promotion and development of transit and commuter programs that would help reduce the number of vehicles using the commuter corridors through the study area.

Alternative 2

Population and Housing. Programs and tools proposed under Alternative 2 could retain more open space, with indirect adverse impacts on housing. Tighter restrictions on development in order to keep land in agricultural use could continue to negatively impact the supply of affordable housing in the near-term. This is especially true in the Goleta area that borders the Urban Rural Boundary Line and where demand for housing would eventually exceed supply. Low-income and minority populations could be impacted by this shortfall, as increases in demand drive up the cost for homes and rental units. Disadvantaged populations historically employed in low-wage industries such as agriculture and tourism would continue to be impacted by housing costs.

Local Economy. If the local community were to establish an open space district, state land conservancy, or purchase of development rights program, additional open space amenities would be protected through easements and land acquisition. Additional detailed analysis on associated socioeconomic impacts would be required with the establishment of such a

program. However, the economic benefits of open space have been documented in numerous studies. In the long-term, protected rivers, trails, and greenway corridors have the potential to create jobs, enhance property values, expand local businesses, attract new or relocating businesses, increase local tax revenues, decrease local government expenditures, and promote a local community.²⁵ Without a specific proposal for establishing such an entity, a detailed analysis cannot be undertaken at this time.

If additional recreational opportunities were made available through entities such as an open space district or state land conservancy, this could result in an increase in the number of visitors to the study area. An increase in visitors could bring additional sales taxes and revenues from tourist-related activities and services.

Changes in local ordinances could affect the types of land use allowed in the study area. This could impact the tax base and other revenue streams in either a beneficial or adverse direction, depending on the land use controls adopted. Stricter controls on uses such as residential development could suppress future growth in the tax base that might otherwise be realized as land was converted from agriculture to more intensive uses.

Employment. The local economy could benefit if local labor and materials are used to improve existing, or construct new, facilities, campgrounds and trails. New facilities would contribute minimal employment opportunities within the study area relative to the number of service related jobs in the region. Minor levels of in-migration could occur for job opportunities in the tourism and construction industries.

Agricultural protection measures such as easement programs could help to ensure the continuation of farming- and ranching-related employment.

Services and Facilities. Alternative 2 could include the construction and operation of additional visitor facilities. The type and amount of visitor or recreational facilities developed would

depend on the goals of the local community when establishing an open space district or state land conservancy. With implementation of the mitigation measures and development requirements, adverse impacts on services and facilities would be negligible.

Specific impacts of Alternative 2 on county services and fiscal conditions cannot be determined, but would likely be minor. Utility infrastructure would not be adversely impacted. On-site infrastructure (such as water, sewer, roads and parking) identified within the study area could be enhanced as part of the construction activities associated with the development of visitor facilities and improved road access. However, an increase in visitors to the study area as a result of Alternative 2 could require infrastructure improvements. This could create additional expenses for the county that may or may not be offset by increased tourism expenditures.

Transportation. Commuter traffic patterns would not change under this alternative beyond those identified under Alternative 1. Traffic volumes and the level of service provided by the roads in the study area would be similar to those identified under Alternative 1.

An increase in the number of visitors could increase traffic congestion and noise along Highway 101 and local roadways. However, the increase in visitation under this alternative is expected to be minimal, relative to the commuter and other traffic from outside the study area. Under Alternative 2, no regionally significant traffic impacts would occur beyond those impacts identified under Alternative 1.

Conclusion

Programs and tools proposed under Alternative 2 could retain more open space, with indirect adverse impacts on housing. Under Alternative 2, tighter restrictions on development could negatively impact the supply of housing. Low-income and minority populations could be impacted by this shortfall, as increases in housing demand drive up the cost for homes and rental units. Additionally, agricultural protection measures

such as easement programs could help to ensure the continuation of farming- and ranching-related employment.

The creation of new programs, enhancement of existing programs, and local development of trails could attract new visitors to the area, creating modest increases in jobs. Minor levels of in-migration could occur for job opportunities in the tourism and construction industries.

Transportation impacts and changes in traffic volume under Alternative 2 would be insignificant in the regional context. Similar to Alternative 1, traffic volumes could increase on the roads within and near the study area due to growth in the surrounding communities. Alternative 2 would add a negligible increment to traffic volumes and congestion, with no change in projected levels of service.

Land Use

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Trends

Land use regulation plays an important role in the protection of resources within the study area. As coastal areas are experiencing the greatest increase in population in California, coastal resources are increasingly facing potential impacts of development. The following section will discuss trends in land development, focusing on the protection of agricultural land, the study area's major land use. Land use impacts affecting other resource topics will be discussed in subsequent sections. It is assumed that public land within the study area will not be developed and that agricultural land owned by public agencies will continue to be used for agriculture in the foreseeable future.

The study area is the largest remaining rural area on the southern California Coast. The few major developments within the study area include the County landfill, oil-processing facilities located from Goleta to Point Conception, rural residential development, and resort facilities. The Goleta Valley, in the far eastern portion of the study area, is the fastest growing area on the South Coast of Santa Barbara County.²⁶ Major coastal development projects over the last ten years include Bacara Resort (78 acres), an approved development plan for 162 residential units at Ellwood Mesa (38 acres), and several rural residential estates such as those found on lots at Hollister Ranch. Development proposals include housing near Sandpiper Golf Course in Goleta (14 acres) and Naples (485 acres). A proposal for a new golf course adjacent to Sandpiper Golf Course was recently denied by the California Coastal Commission. Future growth pressures may result in a change in zoning to accommodate more housing outside of the Urban Rural Boundary Line. However, this would depend on whether the newly incorporated City of Goleta implements policies to slow growth or increase density within the Urban Rural Boundary Line.

Farmland. The loss of high quality farmland to development is an issue that has received national attention. Most threats to farmland occur on the fringe of metropolitan areas where the value of land for development far exceeds its agricultural value.²⁷ In California, 100,000 acres of farmland are lost to urbanization annually.²⁸ Analysis of statewide trends indicates that the region around Santa Barbara is also experiencing losses of farmland. The Central California Coastal Valleys just north of the study area are among the top twenty areas experiencing the greatest losses of farmland in the United States. However, agricultural lands in the study area have not experienced significant farmland conversion over the past two decades.



Bixby Ranch, NPS photo

With the rising value of land in the eastern portion of the study area, it is likely that any farmland sold on the market would be used for residential uses. In 2001, the average value of agricultural land in production in California was valued at \$1,050 an acre for grazing and \$5,500 an acre for fruit production. By comparison, agricultural land that sold for development exceeded \$40,000 an acre statewide.²⁹ Of the 87,930 acres of private land within the study area, approximately 11,000 acres of agricultural land have been on the market in recent years (See Table A4, in the "Tables" section). Approximately one-third of this total acreage was priced higher than \$5,500 an acre, the state average for fruit production. Asking prices for the 11,000 acres totals approximately \$296 million with an average of \$27,000 per acre. In the Goleta and Naples area the average asking price

was approximately \$167,000 per acre, versus \$11,000 an acre for areas farther west. Asking prices in Goleta and Naples were exceptionally high ranging from \$52,272 an acre at Winchester Ranch to approximately \$600,000/acre at coastal areas adjacent to the Bacara Resort.³⁰⁻³³ One third of the land for sale was recently protected from future development through conservation easements or land acquisition. Despite this, the great disparity between agricultural land values and market land values will continue to act as an incentive for landowners to sell since farmland can be sold for development at prices significantly higher than returns from agriculture. Rising land values could make it increasingly more difficult for conservation groups to purchase land for conservation.

In Santa Barbara County, loss of agriculture is consistent with statewide trends that show the largest losses of farmland in areas adjacent to urban development. However, the loss in the county is occurring at a slower rate. Between 1988 and 2000, Santa Barbara County lost a total of 5,709 acres of farmland.³⁴ Agricultural land represents 40% of the total amount of land developed over the last twenty years. Nearly all of this conversion took place in the North County. In addition to losses from development, widening proposals for highways, if implemented, would also result in the loss of hundreds of acres of agricultural land.³⁵

Analysis of impacts on prime and unique farmland is required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Prime farmland is defined as irrigated land with the best possible combination of physical and chemical features able to support agricultural crops. Unique farmland is defined as having lesser

quality soils that are used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. Countywide data on prime and unique farmland in shows an increase in prime and unique farmland in recent years. This can be attributed to the recent increase of vineyards in the Santa Ynez Valley, located north of the study area boundary. Wine grapes are one of the state's leading agricultural crops and have recently become Santa Barbara County's number one producing crop, accounting for \$118 million in sales in 2001. The increase in vineyards has thus led to a total increase of prime and unique farmland in Santa Barbara County. However, this trend cannot be applied to the study area since the climate and topography in the study area is not suitable for wine grapes.³⁶⁻³⁷

Most of the farmland in the study area is classified as grazing land. In 2000, approximately 100,000 acres of land, both public and private, were suited for grazing livestock. This number has remained relatively constant despite the fact that grazing land declined by over 13,000 acres countywide between 1988 and 2000.³⁸ The countywide trend can be attributed to low financial returns on grazing: approximately \$5-10 in revenue per acre for leased rangeland in Santa Barbara County.³⁹ Loss of grazing land to non-agricultural use impacts cultural and scenic resource values in the study area.

The eastern end of the study area includes a majority of the study area's prime and unique farmland. Although the total amount of farmland in the study area has remained constant over the past ten years, acres of farmland considered prime and unique has decreased somewhat since 1988 (see Table 12: Farmland Trends for the Gaviota Coast Study Area).

Table 12: Farmland Trends for the Gaviota Coast Study Area

Acres of Farmland	Year					
	1984	1986	1990	1994	1998	2000
Total Prime and Unique*	7541	7861	7920	7951	6743	6844
Grazing	102591	102368	102166	102131	102821	102662
Total Farmland	110132	110229	110086	110082	109564	109506
Source: California Department of Land Conservation, 2001.						
*Includes farmland of local and statewide importance.						

Tax Incentives. Much of the farmland in Santa Barbara County is protected voluntarily under the Williamson Act. Since its establishment in 1965, total farmland enrolled in Santa Barbara County's agricultural preserve under the Williamson Act has steadily increased. However, between 1991 and 2001, prime farmland protected under the Williamson Act has declined 25% representing a loss of 18,000 acres countywide. In 2001, roughly 52,000 acres of prime farmland and 497,000 acres of nonprime farmland were enrolled under Williamson Act contracts in Santa Barbara County.⁴⁰

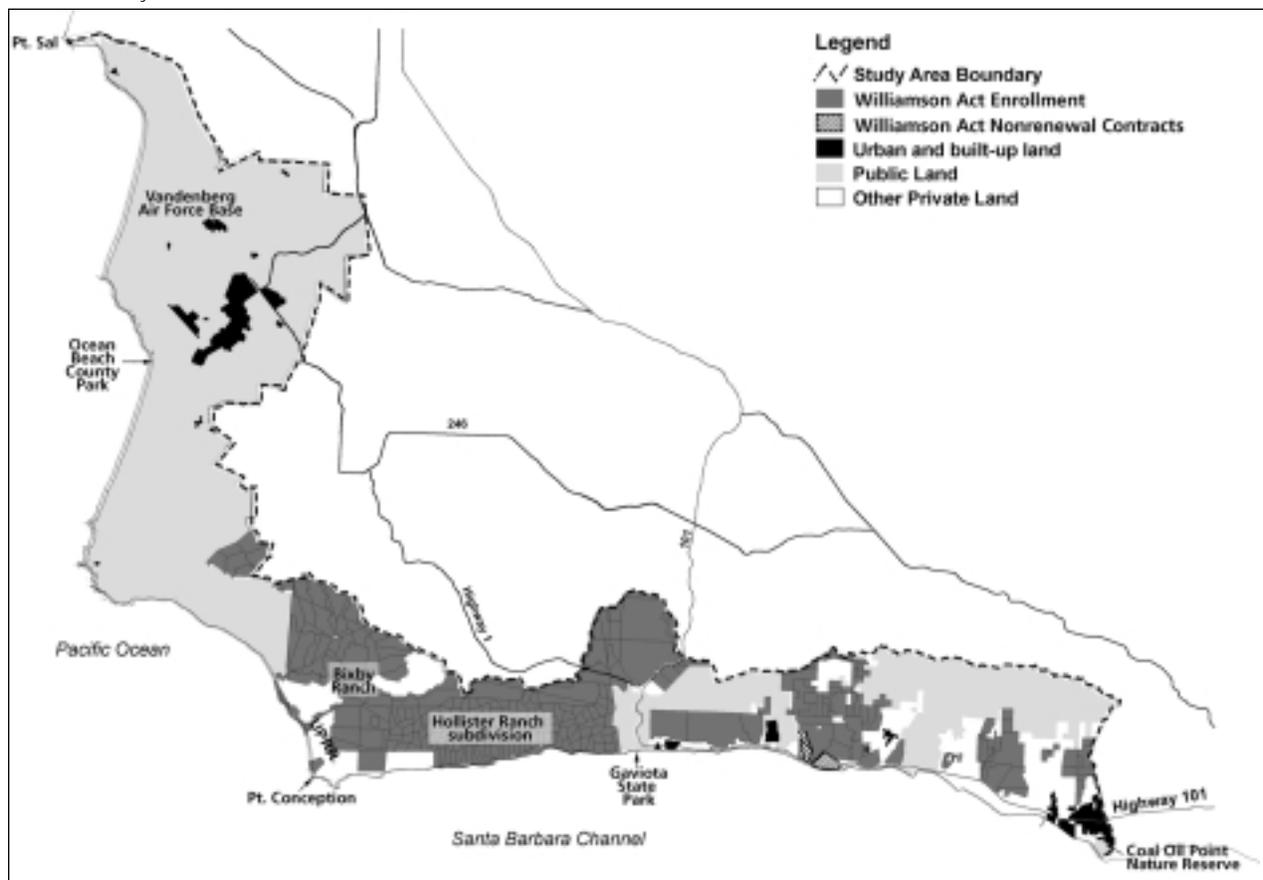
Within the study area, 87,930 acres of land are privately owned, with approximately 63,000 of these acres under Williamson Act contracts. Owners of 534 acres of land in the agricultural preserve have recently opted not to renew their contracts (nonrenewal). Countywide, approximately 133 acres of prime and unique farmland have been preserved

under the Farmland Security Zone Program (also known as the Super Williamson Act).⁴¹

While the Williamson Act has been successful in conserving farmland throughout most of California, it is less successful in areas where growth pressures have caused rapid urban development. Most of the state's nonrenewal contracts are located in rapidly urbanizing areas of southern California such as Riverside, Ventura, and San Diego counties.⁴² When the value of land for development outweighs the benefit derived from the Williamson Act, landowners have less incentive to stay in the program. The Williamson Act now faces new challenges as much of the land enrolled thirty years ago is now closer to growing urban areas.⁴³ The Williamson Act is most effective in preventing farmland conversion when combined with zoning constraints and other agricultural land preservation tools.

Figure 2: Williamson Act Enrollment, 2002

Source: County of Santa Barbara, 2003



Within the study area, landowners adjacent to urban development in Goleta have the least amount of land enrolled under the Williamson Act. The majority of agricultural land with Williamson Act contracts is located west of Gaviota State Park (approximately 70%); miles from the Urban Rural Boundary Line (see Figure 2: Williamson Act enrollment, 2002). In addition, lands protected under the Williamson Act may also become vulnerable if the State acts on a recent proposal to discontinue funding to reimburse local governments for property taxes lost from Williamson Act contracts.

Zoning. While local agricultural zoning provides a framework for protection for agricultural lands, it is also vulnerable to changes through the local planning process. In the study area, including western Goleta, there have been approximately 40 zoning changes over the past two decades. Changes include upzoning, downzoning, and the application of special overlay districts including Environmentally Sensitive Habitat overlays established under the Coastal Plan.⁴⁴ In the Goleta area, only 537 acres of residentially-zoned land is vacant. According to the County of Santa Barbara, the estimated demand for land to accommodate housing in Goleta over the next 30 years may exceed all of the urban land available by over 3,000 acres.⁴⁵ This rate of growth may increase pressure to develop in areas beyond the Urban Rural Boundary Line in the long-term.

The majority of the agricultural land in the study area is zoned for agriculture. However, non-agricultural uses of the land under existing agricultural zoning have occurred in past years. The County regulations for agriculturally zoned land allow the construction of recreational facilities and golf courses under a conditional use permit. Agricultural land has also been subdivided into large lot, rural residential estates.⁴⁶ Hollister Ranch, one of the largest ranches on the Gaviota Coast, was subdivided into 135 hundred-acre parcels in 1970 and sold for large-lot ranch estates. This resulted in the construction of an extensive network of roads along hillsides and placed additional demands on the limited local water

supply. Agricultural use of the land has become secondary to residential uses on many of the lots.⁴⁷ The Agricultural Element of the Santa Barbara Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1991 currently discourages subdivision of agricultural land into parcels that would not be viable for agricultural production. The County has adopted the Lot Line Compliance and Lot Line Compliance Adjustment Program to prevent lot line adjustments that would undermine agriculture. Several lawsuits have recently been filed by landowners over these lot line restrictions.

Because of an anomaly in the County's development history, higher density development will be allowed at Naples, a site that was formerly in agricultural use. Fifty-five homes are currently proposed for this 485-acre site, although higher densities are allowed site based on approved subdivision plans developed for the Town of Naples by speculators in 1888.

Conservation Easements. Easements allow permanent protection of resource land in a manner that is flexible and can be tailored to meet the needs of the landowner. Currently, 2,700 acres of land within the study area have been protected by conservation or agricultural easements. The direct cost for purchasing the conservation easements was \$5.2 million. In addition, Vandenberg AFB has acquired restrictive safety easements on approximately 16,600 acres of Bixby Ranch adjacent to the base. Approximately 1,500 acres are restricted from residential development. This "zero-development" zone does allow recreational development such as trails, camping and golf courses. The remainder of the easement is classified as "low-development" and allows up to 45 residential units. The U.S. Air Force paid \$22 million for these safety easements.

The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County estimates that there are 21,000-22,000 key acres of private land that need protection and that the cost for protecting this land through tools such as easements over time could cost up to \$75 to 100 million. Rising land values may hinder the ability to purchase easements.

The voluntary nature of easements makes them less predictable as a land conservation tool. Successful easement transactions depend on the easement holder's relationship with the landowner. Local support through land trusts or local governments is thus essential to a successful easement program. While subsequent landowners are bound to easement restrictions, they are not always interested in upholding the easement terms. This provides a burden on the local land trust or government to monitor and enforce the terms of the easements.⁴⁸ Funding availability will be the main challenge to purchasing easements given the rising land values in the eastern end of the study area.



La Paloma Ranch, NPS photo



Naples, NPS photo

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following section assesses potential impacts to agricultural land as well as the effectiveness of current and proposed programs and policies in protecting these lands.

Alternative 1

Tax Incentives. Given current trends in land values and the recent nonrenewal contracts placed on some parcels in the agricultural preserve, we can assume that growth pressures and high land values could cause additional land to be withdrawn from the preserve in the eastern portion of the study area in the long-term. Loss of protection under the Williamson Act could have a moderate and direct, adverse impact on prime and unique farmland in the long-term if it is used for non-agricultural use. Land conversion to non-agricultural uses in the eastern part of the study area may also have an indirect, adverse impact in the long-term on adjacent private land where value and potential for development would increase.

The Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act of 2000 provides an incentive for landowners to protect land through granting tax credits in exchange for conservation easements. The State Legislature suspended funding for the Natural Heritage Tax Program for fiscal year 2002-2003. It is not certain at this time whether the State Legislature will reopen the program for fiscal year 2003-2004, or if the program will be extended beyond the end of the 2005 calendar year. Tax credits were granted to purchase a conservation easement for Rancho Dos Vistas in 2002 (700 acres of which is in the study area). Because of the uncertainty regarding the future of this program, it is not possible to predict the impact it would have on future land conservation in the study area.

Zoning. Development under conditional use permits permanently impacts the agricultural landscape. Under current zoning, it is expected that projects could be approved in the future with mitigation measures to avoid impacting the area's most significant environmental resources.

The development of rural residential and conditional use projects could result in a direct, adverse impact on agricultural lands in the long-term with the construction of housing and supporting facilities such as roads. Long-term, adverse, indirect impacts could result, as land values in adjacent areas are likely to increase, leading to more incentives to develop additional land.

In recent years the oil industry has been in the process of decommissioning many of its pipelines and processing facilities on the study area coast. The most recent major oil development proposal (Tranquillon Ridge Project), located offshore of Vandenberg AFB, was denied by the Board of Supervisors. The project would have involved extended-reach drilling and production from Platform Ireneof oil and gas reserves in the State Tidelands, located in federal waters. New development from major oil processing facilities with major adverse impacts is not expected in the near term.

Coastal Plan. The Coastal Plan requires a 320-acre minimum lot size for agriculturally zoned land within the Coastal Zone and restricts building on environmentally sensitive habitat. This large lot size could reduce the amount of residential units built on agricultural land. However, this is not the optimum size lot for ranching. The University of California conducted an analysis that identified 1,800 acres as the minimum amount of land necessary for a viable ranch.⁴⁹ The 320-acre lot size could result in the use of lots on former grazing land for high end rural residential development leading to idle use of agricultural land. The Coastal Plan is also subject to future changes through public planning processes. The Coastal Plan would continue to have a beneficial impact on the preservation of agricultural land by controlling development in the near term. Although it is difficult to anticipate with any certainty, with future development pressure and rising land prices for ranch lands, the coastal plan may not be as effective in the long term.

Conservation Easements. It is not always financially viable for landowners to donate or sell easements. In rapidly urbanizing areas there is often a reluctance to donate easements when property owners believe that they might prosper more by entering into future land development.⁵⁰ Easements typically compensate for about one to two-thirds of the land's market value. Given current funding levels and increasing land values, higher land values could limit the amount of acres protected using easements. Conservation easements are therefore likely to provide a minor to moderate beneficial impact in the long-term depending on the future availability of funding.

Conclusion

County zoning, regulations, and tax incentives would continue to provide major beneficial protection of agricultural land within the study area in the near term. However, given the high value of land in the eastern portion of the study area, it is likely that in the long-term that some land would be converted to residential or other allowed uses such as golf courses. This would have a moderate adverse impact on agricultural land (prime and unique as well as grazing). Indirect impacts from future rising land values and population growth pressures may result in additional pressure to develop land in areas that are not threatened by development in the near term. Over time direct and indirect adverse impacts on agricultural land could be moderate.

Easements would continue to provide a minor to moderate beneficial impact on agricultural land given that funding sources would be limited and land values are high. It is unlikely that additional development for oil production would adversely impact future land use.

Alternative 2

Analysis of Alternative 1 indicates that even with the use of existing tools such as agricultural zoning, the Coastal Plan, tax incentives, and conservation easements, high land values could create incentives for the conversion of agricultural land to residential or other land uses in the long-term. Alternative 2 suggests use of a variety of land use tools and funding sources to provide more opportunities to permanently protect land from development. The results of such tools are dependent on the community's decision to implement them. The following analysis is based on the assumption that the community would implement suggested programs. Impacts are assessed based on successful implementation in other areas.

Additional Funding Sources. Establishment of an open space district (OSD) or state land conservancy would provide an increase in the amount of funding available for the purchase of land and easements within the study area. In addition to funding, the benefits of establishing such programs include long-term planning for open space protection and the jurisdictions to work cooperatively in their efforts to conserve land. However, establishing such programs can be a political and administrative challenge.

Open Space Districts. OSD's primarily look to property or sales tax revenue as a means to raise funds for easements and open space acquisition. Other sources of funding include land grants, gifts, as well as debt financing measures. Budgets, acres of protected land, and goals for conservation differ between open space districts (See Table 13). An

Table 13: Examples of Open Space Districts - Funding and Acres Protected

Open Space District	Emphasis	Established	Annual Funding	Acres Protected
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (OSD)	Recreation and Open Space	1971	\$12 million (property tax)	44,000 acres of land and 250 miles of trails. All are open to the public.
Marin County OSD	Recreation and Open Space	1972	\$2.1 million (property tax)	14,000 acres protected. All are open to the public.
Sonoma Agricultural Preservation and OSD	Agriculture and Open Space	1991	\$13 million (sales tax)	27,000 acres protected (primarily easements). 1% open to the public.

Source: Sonoma County Coalition for the Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2000

Table 14: Examples of State Regional Land Conservancies - Funding and Acres Protected

State Conservancy	Budget (2000-2001)	Land Holdings
California Tahoe Conservancy, 1984	\$ 4.1 million (support) \$ 20.5 million (property acquisition and improvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,487 acres • 4,391 physical properties • 235 easements
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, 1979	\$ 629,000 (support) \$ 24.3 million (property acquisition and improvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11,000 acres
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, 1996	\$140,000 (support) \$ 4.9 million (property acquisition and improvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17,000 acres • 1,622 physical properties • 1,138 easements

Source: California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2001, California Tahoe Conservancy, 2003

OSD may choose to transfer acquired land or easements on to an existing agency, land trust, or organization to manage.

Assuming the same success of existing open space districts, a local OSD in Santa Barbara County could contribute from \$2 million to \$13 million dollars annually towards the purchase of easements and open space within the study area resulting in thousands of acres of protected land over the next thirty years.

State Land Conservancies. Establishing a state land conservancy is another option for increasing the amount of funding available for easements or land acquisition. Charged with acquiring land in the public trust, each land conservancy has different statutory goals. Table 14 provides for a summary of land protection by existing state land conservancies.

There are currently seven state land conservancies in operation today. Goals common to the existing seven conservancies include: 1) providing open space and recreational opportunities for population centers; 2) providing camping, hiking, and other outdoor recreational activities in remote locations; 3) ensuring the sustainability of agricultural lands; and 4) preserving wildlands for environmental and wildlife purposes. Table 14 gives a few examples of the type of budget required and acres of land protected. Establishment of a regional state conservancy in Santa Barbara County could attract funding to the study area beyond that currently available through the California Coastal Conservancy, and thereby contribute thousands of acres of protected land over the next thirty years.

Local Funding Sources. Local options for funding include establishing a purchase of development rights or revolving fund for easement acquisition. Innovative funding structures for such programs such as installment purchase agreements can be set up to allow local governments to stretch funds while landowners can acquire more than they could through a traditional cash sale. Howard County, Maryland pioneered this program

in 1987 and has added 9,200 acres of land to their agricultural easement program.⁵¹ Non-profit organizations can also establish revolving funds for easement acquisition. For the example, in the face of growing development and economic pressures, the Colorado Cattlemen's Association in 1995 formed the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT). Over 129,000 acres ranchland were protected as of December 2002.⁵²

The successful implementation of the suggested local funding sources could result in a moderate, long-term beneficial impact to agricultural land.

Changes in Local Zoning and Regulations.

Alternative 2 proposes modifications to the zoning regulations for agricultural land to increase effectiveness at retaining agricultural land. Such modifications could include limiting the types of conditional uses allowed within agricultural zoning. Some permitted recreational uses, such as golf course development, do not keep land in agricultural use or protect the character of the agricultural landscape.

Alternative 2 also proposes that the Farmland Security Zone Program could be revised to allow grazing lands to be eligible for the additional tax benefits associated with twenty year contracts. The Land Use map in the "Maps" section demonstrates that grazing is one of the dominant land uses within the study area. Changes to the zoning and the Farmland Security Program would allow additional long-term benefits for protecting rapidly disappearing grazing land in Santa Barbara County.

The recommendations for preventing zoning changes to accommodate future development in the study area include limiting upzoning through voter initiatives and updating the Coastal Plan. Voter initiatives make it more difficult for local political bodies to change agricultural zoning to accommodate development. While such initiatives could reduce the spread of developed areas, there is no quantifiable data on the effectiveness of such proposals at this time.

A comprehensive update of the Coastal Plan with

community involvement would provide an opportunity to incorporate new data on sensitive resources in need of protection. The effects of such an effort are not quantifiable at this time.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). The success of a TDR program is dependent on the local government's ability to designate appropriate sending and receiving areas and establish the right incentives to encourage buying and selling, as well as the willingness of landowners to use the program. TDR programs are also subject to market pressures. Fewer transactions occur if there is not a market demand for additional housing.⁵³ TDR programs are more difficult to establish and administer than other land conservation tools. The 50 existing programs nationwide protect from 0-40,583 acres of land. Over 60% of the total acres protected nationwide (88,575) are protected by Montgomery County, Maryland. Most TDR programs protect less than three thousand acres. Assuming Santa Barbara County establishes a successful TDR program, it is conservatively assumed that additional acres of farmland within the study area could be protected providing a long-term beneficial impact.

Conclusion

If the local community were to implement any of the suggested funding options and growth management actions recommended in Alternative 2, the study area could experience moderate beneficial impacts as more agricultural land (both prime and unique farmland and grazing land) could be protected in the long-term as compared to Alternative 1. Direct and indirect adverse impacts from development would be reduced as there would be more resources to protect land faced with development pressures.



lupine, NPS photo



railroad bridge at Jalama Beach County Park, NPS photo