

## **3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

This section describes the general environmental setting in the vicinity of the project site. Specific description of the setting in each of environmental issue areas being studied in this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) can be found in the relevant chapters of Section 4.0, *Environmental Impact Analysis*.

### **3.1 REGIONAL SETTING**

The site is currently located in unincorporated San Luis Obispo County. However, the project applicant has elected to work with the City and has proposed an annexation of the site, such that the San Luis Ranch Project would be located within the City boundaries. San Luis Obispo County is bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the west, Monterey County to the north, Kern County to the east, and Santa Barbara County to the south. As a region, San Luis Obispo County is moderately urbanized, but remains as a generally low density, rural and agricultural area of California that has grown as a major tourist destination. The region includes seven incorporated cities: Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Grover Beach, Morro Bay, Paso Robles, Pismo Beach, and San Luis Obispo. The seven incorporated urban areas include approximately 55 percent of the County's total population (2010 Census). All of the urban areas within San Luis Obispo County are linked to either State Route 1 (SR 1) or U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101), which are the primary transportation corridors serving the region.

The City of San Luis Obispo is located between the San Lucia Mountains and the coastal mountains that frame the Los Osos Valley, including the Irish Hills and volcanic Morros. The City of San Luis Obispo is the business and government hub of San Luis Obispo County, and is the largest incorporated city between Santa Maria and Salinas. Cuesta Ridge lies to the north and east of the City, the Edna Valley is to the southeast and the ridges of the Davenport and Irish Hills are to the southwest. Agricultural valleys and open space surround most of the City, including vineyards and field crops, scrub oak, and grassland communities.

The City's topography and its proximity to the Pacific Ocean serve not only as major contributors to the scenic nature of the area, but also define the local climate. San Luis Obispo enjoys a Mediterranean climate, with mild winters, warm summers, and moderate rainfall. Weather systems are dominated by the Pacific High, a pressure zone centered off the coast of California that diverts storm tracks northward during the summer. The warmest month is generally September with an average maximum of about 77 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) and the coolest month is generally January with an average minimum of about 41 °F, though highs in the 90s and lows in the 30s are not uncommon. Precipitation primarily falls between November and April, with an average annual rainfall of about 22 inches.

The prevailing winds are typically from the northwest, although there are important daily and seasonal variations in both direction and velocity. Locally, there is a tendency for the diurnal land/sea breeze cycle to cause prevailing winds to change direction and move offshore from early evening to morning and then return to the general onshore flow. Wind speed and direction in the winter is primarily a function of the location and strength of frontal systems that periodically move across the region. San Luis Obispo is located in a seismically active region subject to sporadic seismic events of varying intensity.



## **3.2 SITE SPECIFIC SETTING**

The San Luis Ranch property is located within unincorporated San Luis Obispo County but is surrounded by the corporate boundary of San Luis Obispo. The proposed project would be located within the San Luis Ranch Specific Plan area, a highly visible area west of U.S. 101 within the City's Urban Reserve Line (URL). The property is currently used for agricultural purposes, primarily as cultivated row crops. Background views of Cerro San Luis are available across the property from northbound traffic on the freeway. Prefumo Creek forms the area's western boundary, contributing to both the property's high flood hazard potential, and to its wealth of biological resources.

The topography of the property is generally flat with the exception of Prefumo Creek and the Cerro San Luis Channel in the northern portion of the site. Agricultural production is the current primary land use of the property. Dry and partially irrigated field crops on the site include garbanzo beans, dry beans and other field crops. More recent production includes irrigated crops such as cabbage and lettuce. The San Luis Ranch Complex, formerly known as the Dalidio Ranch Complex, which includes a farm house and outbuildings, is located on the northwest portion of the property near Madonna Road. The balance of the land along the Prefumo Creek drainage is screened by the presence of a mature grove of blue gum Eucalyptus trees that occur along the creek corridor.

The relatively flat topography onsite and the low profile of the row crops provide for expansive views across the property. For northbound travelers on U.S. 101, foreground views to the west are of agricultural row crops, with middle-ground views of the San Luis Obispo Promenade (a nearby shopping mall), and background views of Cerro San Luis and Bishop Peak. Southbound travelers looking west view agricultural row crops in the foreground, vegetation associated with Prefumo Creek and the edges of the commercial uses clustered at the Los Osos Valley Road/U.S. 101 interchange in the middle-ground and the Irish Hills in the background.

The San Luis Ranch property is located on the southwestern side of Dalidio Road, between Madonna Road and U.S. 101. The property is located within a transition area between the commercial development to the north and the residential development to the west. Adjacent land uses include residential, public, open space (including the SLO City Farm), park, office, general retail, and a major highway.

## **3.3 CUMULATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

A project's cumulative impacts are the possible environmental effects that may be cumulatively considerable when considered with other reasonably foreseeable projects [Section 15065 (a)(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines]. Cumulatively considerable impacts occur when the incremental effects of a particular project or program are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of other past, current, or probable future projects or programs that are not incorporated into baseline or existing conditions.

As defined in Section 15355 of the CEQA Guidelines, a cumulative impact consists of an impact which is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other projects causing related impacts. According to Section 15130 of the CEQA Guidelines, the



discussion of cumulative impacts must reflect the severity of the impacts and their likelihood of occurrence, but the discussion need not provide as great detail as is provided for the effects attributable to the project alone. The discussion should be guided by standards of practicality and reasonableness, and should focus on the cumulative impact to which the identified other projects contribute rather than the attributes of other projects that do not contribute to the cumulative impact. Impacts that do not result in part from the project evaluated in the EIR need not be discussed.

The impact sections of this EIR discuss the potential cumulative environmental impacts resulting from the proposed project in association with other planned, pending, and reasonably foreseeable projects in the vicinity of the project area. The cumulative impacts discussion considers the contribution to environmental effects of the proposed Specific Plan, General Plan Amendment/Pre-Zoning, Development Plan/Tentative Tract Map, Development Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding, and architectural review for the 131-acre project site, including annexation of the site into the City of San Luis Obispo.

The CEQA Guidelines allow for the use of two different methods to determine the scope of projects for the cumulative impact analysis:

- **List method.** A list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts, including, if necessary, those projects outside the control of the agency (Section 15130).
- **General Plan projection method.** A summary of projections contained in an adopted General Plan or related planning document, or in a prior environmental document which has been adopted or certified, which described or evaluated regional or area-wide conditions contributing to the cumulative impact (CEQA Guidelines §15130). In accordance with CEQA Guidelines 15130, the scope of projects for cumulative impact analysis can include a summary of projections contained in an adopted General Plan or related planning document, or in a prior environmental document which has been adopted or certified, which described or evaluated regional or area-wide conditions contributing to the cumulative impact.

In order to assess cumulative impacts, this EIR uses the General Plan projection method that considers projects and programs included in the City's General Plan Land Use and Circulation Elements. The General Plan projection method used in this EIR is based on City-wide cumulative projections that establish conditions that would exist due to the build-out of the City's General Plan, which is approximately twenty years out (Year 2035). This approach to cumulative impacts is consistent with the approach used in the Multimodal Transportation Impact Study (TIS) prepared for the project by Omni-Means (dated November 2016). The TIS is included as Appendix L to this EIR. Citywide buildout conditions include:

- Special focus areas identified in the General Plan Land Use Element that contain specific guidelines for the future adoption of a specific plan, including: Airport Area and Margarita Area Specific Plans, Orcutt Area Specific Plan, and San Luis Ranch.
- Buildout of areas within the existing City boundaries and planning sphere of influence.
- Land use changes anticipated to occur under the 2014 Land Use and Circulation Element Update.



- Circulation improvements anticipated in the cumulative conditions described in the TIS.

Cumulative impacts related to projects anticipated in the 2014 Land Use and Circulation Element Update are analyzed in the LUCE Update EIR, and this EIR incorporates and builds upon this information to utilize a tiered approach to assessment of these cumulative impacts. Potential future development capacity in the City reflects reasonable assumptions regarding factors such as land use designation requirements, development standards, existing development conditions, and the adopted and proposed performance standards for existing and proposed specific plan areas. Table 3-1, adapted from the LUCE Update EIR, shows the buildout potential future development in the Land Use Element Planning Subarea as envisioned by the Land Use Element (including the San Luis Ranch Specific Plan area). As shown in Table 3-1, buildout based on the Land Use Element could result in approximately 4,904 additional dwelling units, and an estimated 5,081,708 square feet of non-residential uses.



**Table 3-1. Total Future Development Capacity within the Planning Subarea under the General Plan Land Use Element**

	Acres	Typical Density <sup>1</sup>		Capacity								
				Units <sup>2</sup>			Non-Residential Square Footage <sup>3</sup>					
		Residential (Units/Acre)	Non-Residential (FAR)	Single-Family	Multi-Family	Total	Office	Commercial	Industrial	Hotel	Park (Acres)	Total (includes hotels)
<b>Potential Development Areas<sup>4</sup></b>												
Foothill at Santa Rosa Area				0	80	80	0	-1,814	0	0	-	-1,814
Caltrans Site				0	53	53	-3,792	-14,265	0	200	3.5	101,943
General Hospital Site				9	32	41	48,788	0	0	0	-	48,788
Broad Street Area				0	589	589	0	229,068	0	0	-	229,068
Sunset Drive-In Site				0	0	0	260,706	222,962	0	0	-	483,668
Dalidio/Madonna Area				320	180	500	150,000	200,000	0	200	8.3	470,000
Pacific Beach Site				0	38	38	-94,851	57,499	0	0	-	-37,352
Calle Joaquin Auto Sales Area				0	0	0	0	128,066	0	120	-	200,066
Madonna Site on LOVR				0	115	115	16,770	236,000	0	139	-	336,170
LOVR Creekside Area				0	159	159	0	0	0	0	2.7	0
Broad Street at Tank Farm Road Site				0	41	41	73,180	62,726	0	0	-	135,906
Avila Ranch				405	295	700	0	25,000	0	0	-	25,000
<i>Subtotal</i>				<i>734</i>	<i>1,582</i>	<i>2,316</i>	<i>450,801</i>	<i>1,145,242</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>659</i>	<i>14.5</i>	<i>1,991,443</i>
<b>Previously Approved Specific Plans<sup>5</sup></b>												
Margarita Area Specific Plan				741	127	868	959,017	10,000	0	0	25.9	969,
Airport Area Specific Plan <sup>6</sup>				0	0	0	427,191	616,983	747,642	0	-	1,791,815
Orcutt Area Specific Plan				540	439	979	0	11,000	0	0	12.0	11,000
<i>Subtotal</i>				<i>1,281</i>	<i>566</i>	<i>1,847</i>	<i>1,386,208</i>	<i>637,983</i>	<i>747,642</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>37.9</i>	<i>2,771,832</i>
<b>Planned and Approved Projects<sup>7</sup></b>												
Chinatown Project				0	32	32	0	46,000	0	78	-	46,000
Pacific Courtyards				0	12	12	10,000	0	0	0	-	10,000

**Table 3-1. Total Future Development Capacity within the Planning Subarea under the General Plan Land Use Element**

	Acres	Typical Density <sup>1</sup>		Capacity								
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		Residential (Units/Acre)	Non-Residential (FAR)	Single-Family	Multi-Family	Total	Office	Commercial	Industrial	Hotel	Park (Acres)	Total (includes hotels)
Mission Estates				10	0	10	0	0	0	0	-	0
Four Creeks (Creekston and Laurel Street)				0	166	166	0	0	0	0	-	0
Garden Street Terrace				0	8	8	0	25,000	0	72	-	25,000
131 South Street Apartments				0	43	43	0	0	0	0	-	0
Marsh Street Commons				0	11	11	0	3,000	0	0	-	3,000
ICON Project (1340 Taft)				0	7	7	0	4,000	0	0	-	4,000
<i>Subtotal</i>				<i>10</i>	<i>279</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>10,000</i>	<i>78,000</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>88,000</i>
<b>Other Vacant Land (by General Plan Designation)<sup>8</sup></b>												
Suburban Residential <sup>3</sup>	4.0	1		4		4				-	-	-
Low Density Residential	53.4	6		320		320				-	-	-
Medium Density Residential	7.1	10		71		71				-	-	-
Medium-High Density Residential	0.4	16		-	6	6				-	-	-
High Density Residential	2.7	19		-	51	51				-	-	-
Neighborhood Commercial	0.2		0.30	-				2,614		-	-	2,614
Community Commercial	3.2		0.30	-				41,818		-	-	41,818
Tourist Commercial	1.0		0.35	-				15,246		-	-	15,246
Office <sup>3</sup>	1.3		0.35	-			19,820			-	-	19,820
Services and Manufacturing	13.3		0.25	-					144,837	-	-	144,837
Public	0.4		0.35	-			6,098			-	-	6,098

**Table 3-1. Total Future Development Capacity within the Planning Subarea under the General Plan Land Use Element**

	Acres	Typical Density <sup>1</sup>		Capacity								
				Units <sup>2</sup>			Non-Residential Square Footage <sup>3</sup>					
		Residential (Units/Acre)	Non-Residential (FAR)	Single-Family	Multi-Family	Total	Office	Commercial	Industrial	Hotel	Park (Acres)	Total (includes hotels)
<i>Subtotal</i>	87			395	57	452	25,918	59,678	144,837	-	-	230,433
<b>Total Capacity</b>				<b>2,420</b>	<b>2,484</b>	<b>4,904</b>	<b>1,872,927</b>	<b>1,920,903</b>	<b>892,479</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>52.4</b>	<b>5,081,708</b>

Source: City of San Luis Obispo LUCE Update EIR 2014

1. Typical density and FAR is based on a net acre assumption accounting for necessary infrastructure and facilities. To get the typical density, the maximum density was recalculated based on a development percent assumption on what is average for new development
2. Unit capacity for other vacant land is calculated by multiplying acres and the typical density.
3. Non-residential square footage for specific plan area and planned projects is based on assumptions in specific plans and Community Development Project Status Report (December 31, 2012). Non-residential square footage for vacant land is calculated by multiplying acres and the typical FAR.
4. Units and non-residential square footage are calculated based on proposed general plan designations and input from the City. Some of these sites have existing development that will likely be adapted to facilitate new development. As a result, some sites have a negative number for net new non-residential square footage, even though new development is anticipated.
5. Non-Residential square footage includes land designated neighborhood commercial, services commercial, business park, and manufacturing.
6. Non-residential square footage in the Airport Area Specific Plan (AASP) includes 605,293 square feet from underutilized land that is likely to redevelop. Remaining capacity in the AASP based on analysis conducted by the City of San Luis Obispo Planning and GIS staff.
7. Does not include projects that fall within the boundaries of the Specific Plan Areas. Only those projects that provided specific unit/square footage numbers were included.
8. Does not include parcels that fall within the boundaries of the Specific Plan Areas or Planned and Approved Projects. Acreages are taken from the vacant land category in the existing land use inventory.

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