



California

**Department of
Conservation**

Division of Land Resource
Protection

Williamson Act

Land Conservation Act of 1965

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Williamson Act / CEQA

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Williamson Act & CEQA Program

Team WA/CEQA!

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Land Conservation Act of 1965 “Williamson Act”

- Voluntary program/contracts
- Restricts land usage
- 10-20 year contracts
- Contract renew annually
- Contract runs with the land



Intent of the Williamson Act

- Preservation of ag land
- Conservation of open space
- Discourage conversion of ag land to urban uses

What is DOC's Role?

- Provide technical assistance and advice ([GC § 51206](#))
- Detailed review of WA processes
- Data/records retention, annual [WA enrollment data & maps](#)
- CEQA / WA review and commenting ([CEQA appendix G](#))



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What's in it for the Landowner?

- Taxed on generated income vs. potential market value
- [Revenue & Taxation Code Section 421-431](#)
- ~ 20-70% property tax reduction
- Tax savings can be reinvested



What's in it for the Community?

- Ensures locally produced food and fiber
- Creates stability for support industries
- Provides buffers (planning tool)
- Mitigation





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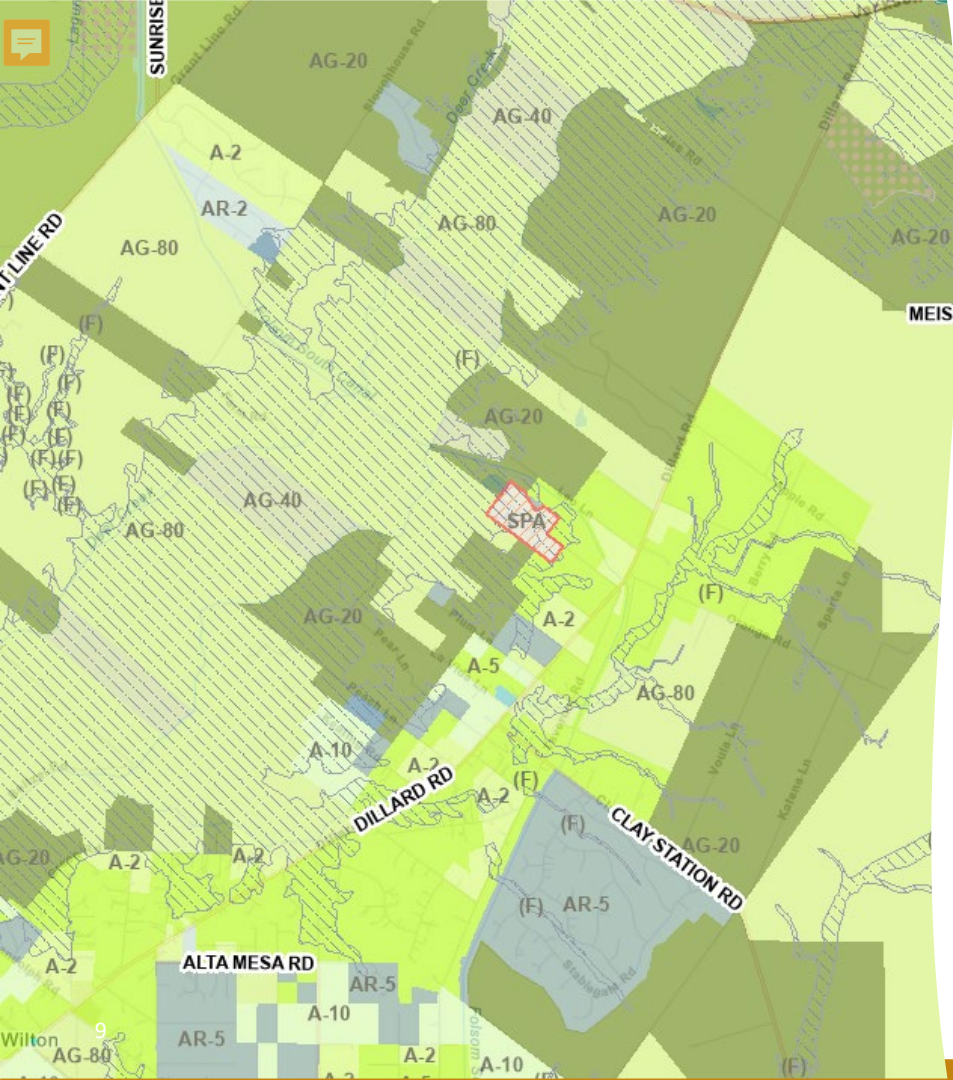
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Rules and Regulations

- Voluntary Program
- [Government Code Section 51231](#)
- Acreage minimums
- Enforcement procedures
- Allowable & Compatible land uses
- Nonrenewal & Cancellation

Agricultural Preserves

- [Government Code § 51230](#)
- Typically 100-acre minimum
- Two or more parcels may be combined to meet acreage minimums
- Often tied to local zoning
- Not all parcels within an Ag Preserve are required to go under WA contract



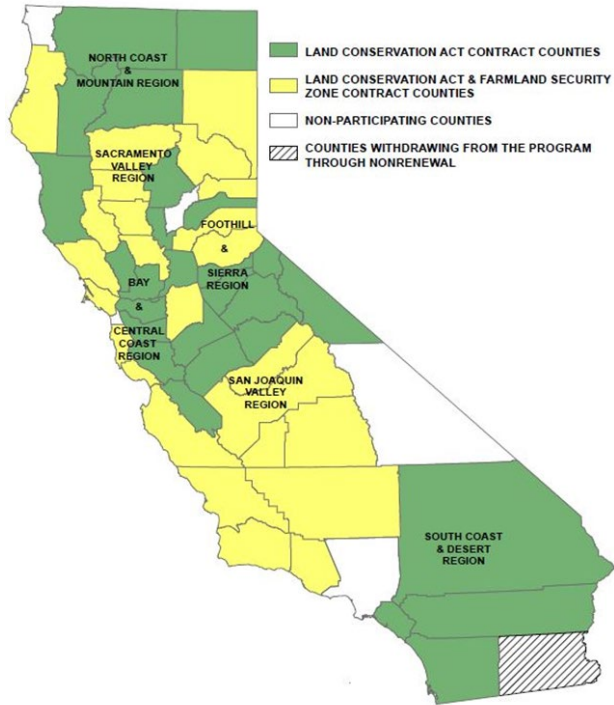


Farmland Security Zone Contracts

- FSZ or “Super” Williamson Act
- 18–20-year term
- Must be located on FMMP, Prime, Statewide, Unique, or Locally Important farmland ([Government Code § 51296.8](#))
- Increased property tax reduction 65% of normal WA contract on same land ([Revenue & Taxation Code § 423.4](#))
- Increased cancellation penalty 25% ([Government Code § 51297](#))



Williamson Act Today



- 51/58 counties participate
- 2004 enrollment ~16.6 million acres
- 2021 enrollment ~10 million acres
- Imperial County: only county to exit the program
- Moratorium on new contracts
- 2023 enrollment ~15.6 million acres

Trends and Challenges Compatible Use

- Use must be compatible
- [Government Code Section 51238.1](#)
- Solar
- Agritourism





Compatible Use: Solar?



Compatible Use: Solar?

- No compatibility findings
= Cancellation
- Size, scale, scope



Compatible Use: Agritourism?

- Agritourism definition
- Roadside fruit stand
- Tasting Rooms
- Wedding venues, Event Centers
- Bed and Breakfast
- Where to draw the line





Compatible Use: Agritourism?

- Farm Tours
- Farm Stays
- Farm / Event Center
- Where to draw the line
- Size, scale, scope



Contract removal:

- [Removing Contracts Webpage](#)
- Nonrenewal, most common
- Cancellation, 12 ½ - 25% fee
- Easement Exchange
- Solar Use Easement
- Public Acquisition
- Annexation





Conclusion



- Program continues to be offered
- Williamson Act continues to preserve agricultural and open space land



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History and Purpose of CEQA

- Prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment
- Encourage public participation
- Foster informed public decision making
- Ensure transparency in governmental decision-making process



DLRP's Role

- Review and comment per [Public Resources Code Section 614\(a\)&\(b\)](#)
- Review environmental documents related to the Department's areas of responsibility and expertise
- CEQA (Appendix G II. Agricultural Resources)
- FMMP mapping data
- WA enrollment data
- LESA model





Division thresholds for comment

- Williamson Act contracted land
- State/Department funded easements
- Prime Farmland > 10 acres
- Statewide or Unique Farmland > 40 acres



Possible Review Documents



CEQA related:

- Early Consultation
- Public Scoping Hearing
- Initial Study
- Notice of Exemption
- Notice of Preparation
- Negative Declaration
- Mitigated Negative Declaration
- DEIR/EIR/SEIR/FEIR

Williamson Act related:

- Ag Preserve Boundary Adjustment
- Solar Use Permit
- Cancellation
- Public Acquisition
- Annexation
- Easement Exchange
- Contract Non-renewal
- Enrollment reporting

County and City related:

- Lot Line Adjustments
- Subdivision Applications
- Tentative Subdivision Maps
- Rezone/Prezone Applications
- Coastal Zone Permit Applications
- General Plan Updates/Amendments
- Ordinance Amendments
- Site Plan Application
- Minor Use Permit
- Conditional Use Permit
- Special Use Permit
- Excavation Application
- Commission Hearings
- LAFCo Hearings

Year	Projects reviewed	Comment letters written
2022	975	36
2023	1275	38
2024	1500	41



Typical DOC Comments

- Compliance with WA Government Code
- Compliance with City/County GP
- Compliance with easement guidelines
- Mitigation for impact to farmland
- 1:1 Agricultural easements
- In-lieu of fees



THANK YOU

Questions?

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