3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This section provides a brief description of the current environmental conditions in the proposed project area, including the environs of the Carpinteria Valley in the County of Santa Barbara.

3.1 REGIONAL SETTING

The study area consists of the Carpinteria Valley, a narrow coastal terrace located between the Santa Ynez Mountains and the Santa Barbara Channel. The Carpinteria Valley lies at the southeastern edge of Santa Barbara County. It is located approximately 12 miles southeast of the City of Santa Barbara, and 16 miles northwest of the City of San Buenaventura. The study area is generally bounded by Ventura County to the east and Toro Canyon Road to the west. The City of Carpinteria forms the urban core within the south-central portion of the Valley and US Highway 101 provides the primary regional transportation corridor.

The Valley is relatively flat along the coastline, rising to hills to the north, and is crossed by seven creeks draining the foothills south to the ocean. Two of these, Franklin and Santa Monica Creeks, feed into El Estero (Carpinteria Marsh), a large marshland southwest of the City of Carpinteria corporate boundary. Soils in the Carpinteria Valley are frequently prime in nature in the flat areas of the Valley floor, grading to the non-prime classification in the foothills. Approximately 30 percent (2,100 acres) of the soils in the Valley are classified as prime (Class I or II). The remaining non-prime soils are predominately Class III or IV, but still support active agricultural production; only a small percentage of the Valley has no potential agricultural value (e.g., steep mountainous parcels along the edge).

The area's two climate zones, Maritime and Coastal, are characterized by very mild temperature ranges and nearly frost-free growing conditions. Average daily seasonal temperatures range between 55 degrees in the winter and 65 degrees in the summer; with approximately 320 frost-free days per year. These mild temperatures, combined with prime soils, relatively wind free setting, and excellent solar exposure (i.e., north-south orientation) combine to produce exceptionally high quality, high yield crops that can be harvested almost year round, thereby providing a unique market advantage compared to other agricultural areas in the County, as well as in the State.

The Carpinteria Valley's visual resources include sweeping mountain views, extensive tracts of diverse open field agriculture, views of the Carpinteria Marsh (one of the County's most significant coastal wetland areas) and the most direct "whitewater" ocean views anywhere in the South Coast urbanized area. Elevations within the valley's viewshed rise from sea level to 4,690 feet (Divide Peak). Most views are from the foothill areas along public roads and trails, as well as from several residential enclaves north of Highway 192. Residential neighborhoods include Shepard Mesa located in the northeastern corner of the study area, Serena Park and Toro Canyon in the western end of the study area, and two smaller subdivisions, La Mirada and Ocean Oaks, north of Foothill Road between Nidever Road and Cravens Lane. There are also several significant public view corridors of the ocean, Channel Islands, foothills, and Carpinteria Marsh from various portions of Highway 101 and Highway 192. Much of the Valley remains in open field and orchard crops which, combined with the unique coastal foothill / valley setting, leads to the high scenic quality of the Valley representative of the rural agricultural nature of the area.

3.2 PROJECT SITE SETTING

Existing Agriculture~~Development~~. Within the 7,196-acre study area, there are ~~approximately 5,600~~5,636 acres of agriculturally zoned land. Approximately 3,900 acres are in active agricultural production (greenhouse, open field and orchard). Of this, 342 acres (14.9 million sf) are covered by greenhouse development, with the remaining 3,540 acres in open field and orchard production. Natural vegetation on steep slopes and riparian areas comprise the remaining 1,700 acres of agriculturally zoned lands. Under the existing AG-I zoning, these currently uncultivated lands have the potential to be converted to open field or orchard production. ~~conversion to agriculture is highly unlikely.~~

Historically, greenhouse development in the study area has been constructed on slopes of 5% or less. Of the approximately 2,500 acres of AG-I designated land in the study area meeting this criteria, more than 99% is currently in some form of agricultural production (including greenhouse development, open field, orchards, and fallow land with evidence of historic agricultural use). Most land that is suitable for greenhouse development has already been converted to agriculture. The remaining 3,100 acres of agriculturally zoned land occurs on slopes in excess of 5%, which is unsuitable for greenhouse development. These lands occur in the proposed AG-I-OF zone district. Under the existing AG-I zoning, greenhouse development that does not exceed a cumulative threshold of 20,000 sf per parcel and the conversion of natural lands to open field and orchard agriculture are permitted uses on any of these lands. These zone district provisions will not change under the proposed AG-I-CARP and AG-I-OF zone districts. These provisions are a part of the environmental baseline (i.e., the conditions in the vicinity of the project as they exist at the time of commencement of environmental analysis) and will continue whether or not the project is approved. ~~Within the 7,196 acres study area, there are approximately 5,600 acres of agriculturally zoned land.~~

The Carpinteria Valley currently contains approximately 14.4 million square feet (sf) of ~~"greenhouse development." This development includes all permanent structures such as~~ greenhouses, hothouses, plant protection structures, and shade and hoop structures. Figures 3-1 and 3-2 are aerial photographs that illustrate these existing uses in the Valley (and those parcels proposed for AG-I-CARP zoning). Approximately 450,000 sf of ~~related development~~accessory structures (e.g., packing ~~sheds~~facilities, warehouses, boiler rooms, etc.) also exist, bringing total greenhouse~~-related~~ development to approximately 14.9 million sf on about 750 acres.

The majority of this greenhouse development is concentrated south of Highway 192, between Nidever Road and Linden Avenue, where approximately 9.1 million square feet of greenhouse development is present and approximately 275 acres of open field agricultural uses in the same area. This constitutes approximately 61 percent of all greenhouse development in the Valley. ~~In comparison to the approximately 750 acres of parcels containing greenhouses, there are approximately 3,500 acres of open field cultivation (including orchards) currently in production in the study area.~~

Existing greenhouses in the Valley range from aging structures constructed in the 1960s to new computer-automated facilities. Many older greenhouses were constructed either prior to the establishment of zoning and/or zoning development standards which address percent lot

coverage, setbacks, landscape screening and drainage control and are currently considered non-conforming structures.

Current Open Field/Orchard Production. The project study area has mild year-around temperatures, unique micro-climates, extensive areas with prime agricultural soils, available and adequate labor, and excellent solar exposure resulting from its south-facing orientation. These factors combine to allow growers to produce high quality, high yield crops year-round. In addition the Valley is located within easy access to large markets and international transportation hubs. Within the project study area, there are approximately 3,500 acres in open field crop production.

Open field agriculture production in the project study area is dominated by avocado orchards. However, the Valley's unique climate also results in the area being one of the State leaders in high-yield specialty crops including citrus, cherimoyas, passion fruit, kiwis, bananas and other sub-tropical fruits. Numerous small open field operations are located within the Shepard Mesa area in the eastern end of the Valley and are engaged in the viable production of these specialty crops. Numerous open field growers also use the Valley's unique resources to produce high quality cut flowers and nursery products in the lower reaches of the foothills and throughout the valley flat land. This diversity of crops contributes to the overall agricultural productivity of the area by providing growers with the flexibility to respond to market and environmental changes.

Current Greenhouse Crop Production. There are ~~approximately 40~~ 42 greenhouse growers in the Valley, with farms ranging from small operations (e.g. mostly open fields with one small greenhouse or plant protection structure) to large (entire production in greenhouses). Crop production includes cut flowers and ornamental nursery products including chrysanthemums, gerbera daises, asters, lilies, orchids and roses, and other products such as potted plants, vegetables, seeds, bulbs, and vegetable seedlings. Greenhouses contribute substantially to the county's overall agricultural production. While occupying less than 0.1 percent of the County's total harvested acreage, Carpinteria Valley greenhouses produce approximately 12 percent of the total agricultural value, or approximately $76 million annually (1997 County Agricultural Product Report *in* SBCo, 1999). Greenhouse operations also account for approximately 72 percent of all agricultural employment in the Carpinteria Valley (approximately 913 employees; 1997 Carpinteria Economic Profile *in* SBCo, 1999).

3.3 CUMULATIVE PROJECT SETTING

The *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15130 requires a discussion of cumulative impacts when they are significant. Since the proposed project consists of the total greenhouse buildout within the study area that would be permitted under the changed zoning, the environmental impact analysis for the project itself is necessarily cumulative in nature. In addition, approved and pending projects located in the County and City of Carpinteria, as well as buildout of the Toro Canyon Planning Area (under the zoning that is proposed by the County), were considered in the cumulative analysis. Listings of the future development projects provided by the County and City of Carpinteria estimates are located in Appendix J.

Figure 3-1 Aerial Photo 11x17

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Figure 3-2 Eastern panel Aerial Photo