



Planners Committee

Item #3

February 26, 2010

Williamson Act Subventions Analysis

Issue: The Governor's current 2010-2011 budget proposal suspends Williamson Act subventions. SACOG staff has prepared a letter to the Governor encouraging restoration of the subventions.

Recommendation: None, this item is for information only.

Discussion: In the final 2009-2010 budget, Governor Schwarzenegger effectively suspended California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act subvention funding by leaving only \$1,000 in the budget for the program. His current 2010-2011 budget again eliminates the subventions. As a result of losing subventions for the Williamson Act, challenged county budgets throughout California are being further stressed due to their contractual obligations. Some counties are contemplating elimination of the program or assessing local fees to cover program costs. The SACOG region receives nearly \$2 million in subventions (Attachment A).

The Williamson Act has been successful in protecting 16.5 million acres of farmland throughout the state (about 740,000 acres or 1/3 of the farmland in the SACOG region) by offering property tax relief in return for rolling contracts to keep land in agriculture for 10 or 20 years. The program helps maintain farm viability and is one of just a few state programs that specifically targets farmland conservation. A recent California Farm Bureau Federation poll found that one in three farmers could not continue farming or ranching without the program. Many fear these lands could be converted to development in the absence of subventions.

SACOG analysis (Attachment B) shows a possible significant affect on Blueprint implementation and carbon emissions if Williamson Act lands are converted to development. As much as 22 percent of the population that would have otherwise located in Blueprint growth areas could end up in low density rural development. In one day, these households would produce carbon emissions that are roughly equal to one year's worth of carbon emissions from agriculture.

SACOG sent a letter to the Governor in July 2007 to express support of the Williamson Act subventions. In June 2009, the SACOG board also voted to send a letter in support of SB 715 to address enforcement concerns with the Williamson Act. In November 2009, the Land Use and Housing and Government Relations and Public Affairs committees heard testimony from the California Farm Bureau Federation and Yolo County regarding the impacts of losing subventions. In response, staff offered to write another letter (Attachment C) in support of the subventions with an emphasis on how the Williamson Act supports the state's AB 32 and SB 375 objectives.

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March 1, 2010

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Greenhouse Gas Benefits of Williamson Act Subventions

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, I strongly encourage you to restore subventions for the California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act in your May Budget Revise—to not fund them threatens AB 32 and SB 375 implementation. For \$30 million annually, 16.5 million acres of farmland statewide (740,000 acres in our six-county region) are protected from urban sprawl. As you know, transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in our state, and extending our urban footprint onto agricultural lands will cause increases in vehicle miles traveled. In many respects, funding the Williamson Act is really a proxy for funding AB 32 and SB 375 implementation.

SACOG has analyzed how urban growth and related vehicle movement and carbon emissions would change if Williamson Act lands were converted to urban uses. The results show significant negative impacts on our region's Blueprint plan to slow urban sprawl and reduce emissions. As much as 22 percent of the population that would have otherwise locate in Blueprint growth areas could end up in low-density rural development. One day's worth of carbon emissions from vehicle miles alone from new households would roughly equal one year's worth of carbon emissions from agricultural vehicles.

We looked at the *daily* impacts of development at 1 and 5 housing units per acre. According to our analysis of just the six-county region alone:

- if 20,000 acres of Williamson Act land were developed at 1 unit per acre, daily vehicle emissions for those households would increase by 508 tons of carbon, and at 5 units per acre, vehicle emissions would increase by 2,543 tons; and
- if 60,000 acres of Williamson Act land were developed—less than 10 percent of the lands currently protected in the SACOG region—*daily* carbon emissions from resulting households would range from 1,526 to 7,631 tons.

How does this compare to current emissions from agricultural uses? These lands are currently in agriculture—about half of which is pasture—where vehicle and equipment use occurs in terms of hours per year rather than miles per day. Using University of California Cooperative Extension data, we estimate that agricultural vehicles emit 455 tons of carbon *per year* on 20,000 acres, and 1,365 tons *per year* on 60,000 acres. Even if vehicle activity on pasture acreage was at the average level for agriculture, the emissions would range from 2,300 to 6,901 tons *per year*—still around the *daily* average for urban uses. While we did not include farm-to-market truck activity, we still content that carbon emissions from agriculture vehicles are considerably lower.

In addition to the greenhouse gas benefits, subventions protect agricultural lands, support agriculturally based economies, and provide environmental services such as flood control, carbon sequestration, and habitat conservation. Without subventions and a healthy agriculture industry, many counties may look to develop these lands to address budget shortfalls that affect emergency, health, and other services.

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Tax relief is required for many agricultural producers to stay in business. Unable to afford property taxes, many would be forced to sell their land for development. The California Farm Bureau Federation recently polled Williamson Act participants and found that one in three could not continue farming or ranching without the program. Preventing the conversion of these farmlands to urban uses is critical.

Williamson Act subventions are one of the most broad-reaching and effective programs to achieve economic and environmental sustainability in the state. Considering the multi-billion dollar return from a roughly \$30 million annual investment, we strongly encourage you to restore the Williamson Act subventions.

Sincerely,



Mike McKeever
Executive Director

MM:DS:ef

cc: Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg
Assembly Speaker Perez
Senator Sam Aanestad
Senator Dave Cox
Senator Lois Wolk
Assemblymember Joan Buchanan
Assemblymember Ted Gaines
Assemblymember Alyson Huber
Assemblymember Dave Jones
Assemblymember Roger Niello
Assemblymember Jim Nielsen
Assemblymember Mariko Yamada

Williamson Act Inventory, SACOG Region

October 20, 2009

Current Williamson Act Acreage

	<u>El Dorado</u>	<u>Placer</u>	<u>Sacramento</u>	<u>Sutter</u>	<u>Yolo</u>	<u>Total Acres</u>
Grazing	25,178	1,619	83,150	12,435	109,382	231,763
Local Importance	5,951	25,750	9,026	0	31,375	72,102
Local Potential	0	0	0	0	13,377	13,377
Prime	348	4,069	58,367	34,287	190,638	287,709
Statewide Importance	406	1,648	23,519	13,793	11,127	50,493
Unique	1,048	8,971	7,259	2,186	34,839	54,304
Other Lands	2,267	2,401	5,897	520	19,382	30,467
Total Acres	35,199	44,458	187,218	63,220	410,120	740,214

Approximate Subvention Value

	<u>El Dorado</u>	<u>Placer</u>	<u>Sacramento</u>	<u>Sutter</u>	<u>Yolo</u>	<u>Total</u>
	\$42,000	\$50,000	\$500,000	\$270,000	\$1,100,000	\$1,962,000

Williamson Act Non-Renewal

	<u>El Dorado</u>	<u>Placer</u>	<u>Sacramento</u>	<u>Sutter</u>	<u>Yolo</u>	<u>Total Acres</u>
Grazing	1,812	141	7,093	0	3,943	12,989
Local Importance	237	9,548	312	0	1,227	11,324
Local Potential	0	0	0	0	737	737
Prime	0	1,814	2,494	0	8,750	13,058
Statewide Importance	0	623	1,921	0	725	3,269
Unique	0	1,611	896	0	1,220	3,726
Other Lands	31	543	115	2	418	1,109
Total Acres	2,081	14,279	12,830	2	17,019	46,210
(% of current acreage)	6%	32%	7%	0%	4%	6%

Williamson Act Acreage - Non-Renewal

	<u>El Dorado</u>	<u>Placer</u>	<u>Sacramento</u>	<u>Sutter</u>	<u>Yolo</u>	<u>Total Acres</u>
Grazing	23,366	1,478	76,057	12,435	105,439	218,775
Local Importance	5,714	16,202	8,714	0	30,148	60,778
Local Potential	0	0	0	0	12,640	12,640
Prime	348	2,255	55,873	34,287	181,888	274,651
Statewide Importance	406	1,025	21,598	13,793	10,402	47,224
Unique	1,048	7,361	6,364	2,186	33,620	50,578
Other Lands	2,236	1,858	5,782	518	18,964	29,358
Total Acres	33,118	30,180	174,387	63,218	393,101	694,004

NOTE: Yuba County does not participate in the Williamson Act program.

SACOG Williamson Act Subventions Analysis

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Impacts Resulting from Development

March 1, 2010

	<u>20,000 Acres Developed</u>		<u>60,000 Acres Developed</u>	
	<u>1 DU/ Ac.</u>	<u>5 DU/Ac.</u>	<u>1 DU/ Ac.</u>	<u>5 DU/Ac.</u>
Household Shift to Williamson Act Lands	18,906	94,532	56,719	283,597
Population	51,047	255,237	153,144	765,711
Incremental Vehicle Emissions (Tons CO ₂ / Day)	509	2,544	1,526	7,631
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Ag Production (~ 1/2 pasture ac.)				
Vehicle Emissions (Tons CO ₂ / Year)	455		1,365	
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Ag Production (assumes no pasture)				
Vehicle Emissions (Tons CO ₂ / Year)	2,300		6,901	