

Technical Report: Farmlands

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines Prime Farmland as having the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and are available for these uses. Unique Farmland is land other than Prime Farmland that is used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops. Farmland of Statewide and Local Importance is defined as land which is being used for or has the potential for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops, but has not been identified as being Prime or Unique by USDA.

FARMLANDS EXISTING CONDITIONS

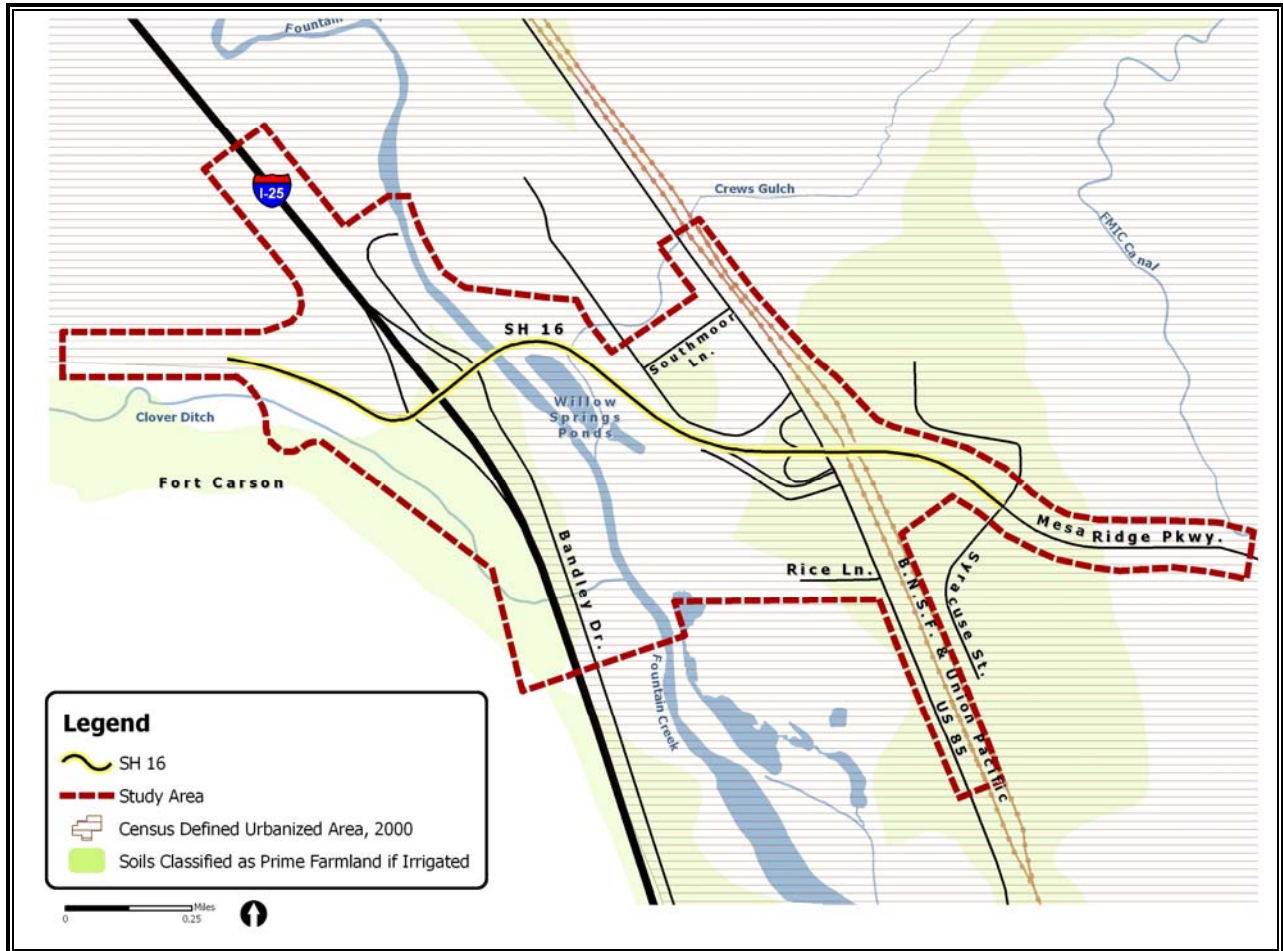
Information defining Prime and Unique Farmlands or Farmland of Statewide and Local Importance for El Paso County was obtained from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Prime soils that are currently located within a 2000 census "Urbanized Area" are not included in the calculation of existing prime soils. According to the U.S. Census, an "Urbanized Area" (UA) consists of densely settled territory that contains 50,000 or more people. Urbanized areas are generally developed with impermeable (paved) surfaces that are not available for agricultural production.

There are approximately 57 acres of soils in the study area classified by the NRCS as Prime Farmland if Irrigated. There are no other Prime or Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide or Local Importance within the study area. No active farming operations are present within the study area. Soils in the study area classified as Prime Farmland if Irrigated are shown by location in **Figure 1**.

FARMLANDS IMPACTS

According to the USDA Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form, direct farmland impacts result from the removal and replacement of cultivated lands with impermeable surfaces. Indirect farmland impacts are defined as acres not being directly converted, but that would no longer be capable of being farmed due to restricted access. Indirect impacts may also be defined as acres planned to receive services from an infrastructure project (e.g., highways, utilities) that will cause a direct conversion.

Figure 1
Soils in the Study Area Classified as Prime Farmland if Irrigated



No-Action Alternative

The No-Action Alternative would not result in the conversion of land use. No impacts to farmlands in the study area would occur.

Proposed Action

Approximately 16 acres of soils classified as Prime Farmland if Irrigated are present within the construction footprint of the Proposed Action. However, the land containing these soils is either zoned Planned Industrial District, or is currently in use by Fort Carson Army Base. In a January 2004 letter from the NRCS, the Colorado Springs

NRCS District Conservationist stated that the study area is unsuitable for agriculture. Surrounding developments would isolate any type of agricultural enterprise. In addition, existing transportation infrastructure and the close proximity of the wastewater treatment facility make the study area unsuitable for agriculture. In January 2006 correspondence with the NRCS confirmed that the soils in the study area are not suitable for agriculture. Because these soils are not suitable for agriculture, they are not protected under the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). Therefore, no direct or indirect impacts to any classification of Prime or Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide or Local Importance would occur under the Proposed Action.

Because no farmland covered by the FPPA would be converted by the Proposed Action, completion of a Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form (Form AD-1006) is not necessary. Correspondence with the NRCS is contained in Chapter 10 of the EA, Agency Correspondence.

FARMLANDS MITIGATION

Since the Proposed Action would have no direct or indirect impacts on Prime or Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide or Local Importance, no mitigation measures are required.

J:_Transportation\070672.400\SH 16 Environmental Assessment\manage\report\EA_CD\Supporting Docs\4_FARMLANDS.doc