

## 2.2 PROJECT SUMMARY

The Applicant proposes a range of facilities and activities associated with the conversion of timberland and grasslands to vineyards, vineyard management, and timber management for the Preservation Ranch Project. The components of the Project are listed below and discussed in the following sections:

- Rezoning
- Timberland Conversion
- Timber Harvest Plan
- Vineyard Development (which includes conversion of timberland and grassland to vineyards, construction of farm labor residences, installation of irrigation water supply reservoirs and groundwater wells for residential water supply, and vineyard operations)
- Voluntary Parcel Merger
- Road Improvements and Maintenance
- Aggregate Borrow Sites
- Project-related Actions
  - Timber Management (which includes commercial timberlands and riparian management areas and large tree retention areas)
  - Windy Gap Wildlife Preserve
  - Soda Springs Reserve Dedication
  - Support for On-going Stream Restoration Programs (conducted by the Gualala River Watershed Council)

Other ancillary Project components include project construction and implementation activities as well as the longer term project proposal that are described herein.

## 2.3 PROJECT COMPONENTS

### 2.3.1 Rezoning

The existing 19,300 + acre<sup>1</sup> Project Site contains 15,645 acres zoned TP and 3,655 acres zoned RRD (Figure 2-2). The Applicant has submitted an application to the County for the rezoning of the timber conversion areas from TP to RRD and a rezone of portions of RRD land to TP. The rezoning approval is a prerequisite for issuance of the CUP necessary for the timber conversion process for establishing the vineyards. Some of the parcels within the Project Site have a Biotic Resource (BR) Combining District overlay; the BR overlay zoning would not be changed by the rezoning proposed by the Project.

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<sup>1</sup> Acreage derived from aggregate area for existing 106 parcels included in the County Assessor's records. Although the assessor records for existing parcels total approximately 19,300 acres, Geographical Information System data suggest a total acreage of 19,652 acres, the area assumed for the evaluation of physical changes to the environment presented in this Initial Study.

In general, the purpose of the TP zoning is to protect land capable of producing timber and forest products consistent with the Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976 (1976 Act) and the Timberland Productivity Act of 1982. The 1976 Act requires counties to provide for the assessment of parcels used for the growing and harvesting of timber as Timberland Preserve Zones (TPZ). A TPZ restricts the use of land to the growing and harvesting of timber and compatible uses approved by the County in return for tax assessment benefits. The County subsequently designated many parcels as TPZs in the late 1970s.

The 1982 California Timberland Productivity Act (TPA) was adopted to protect properties conducting timber operations from being prohibited or restricted due to conflict or apparent conflict with surrounding land uses. To accomplish this goal, the TPA directed counties to designate timberlands in their General Plans to zoning categories that were devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses to the TP zone.

Timberland is generally defined as “Land which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of any commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products.” For Sonoma County the commercial timber species include the redwood, Douglas fir, and several other conifer species. Timberlands tend to be concentrated in northwestern Sonoma County, where conifer and conifer/hardwood forests dominate. Sonoma County recognizes CAL FIRE as the lead agency for determining the classification of timber lands. Section 51104(h) of the TPA defines compatible use as “Any use which does not significantly detract from the use of the Property for, or inhibit, growing and harvesting of timber and compatible uses....”

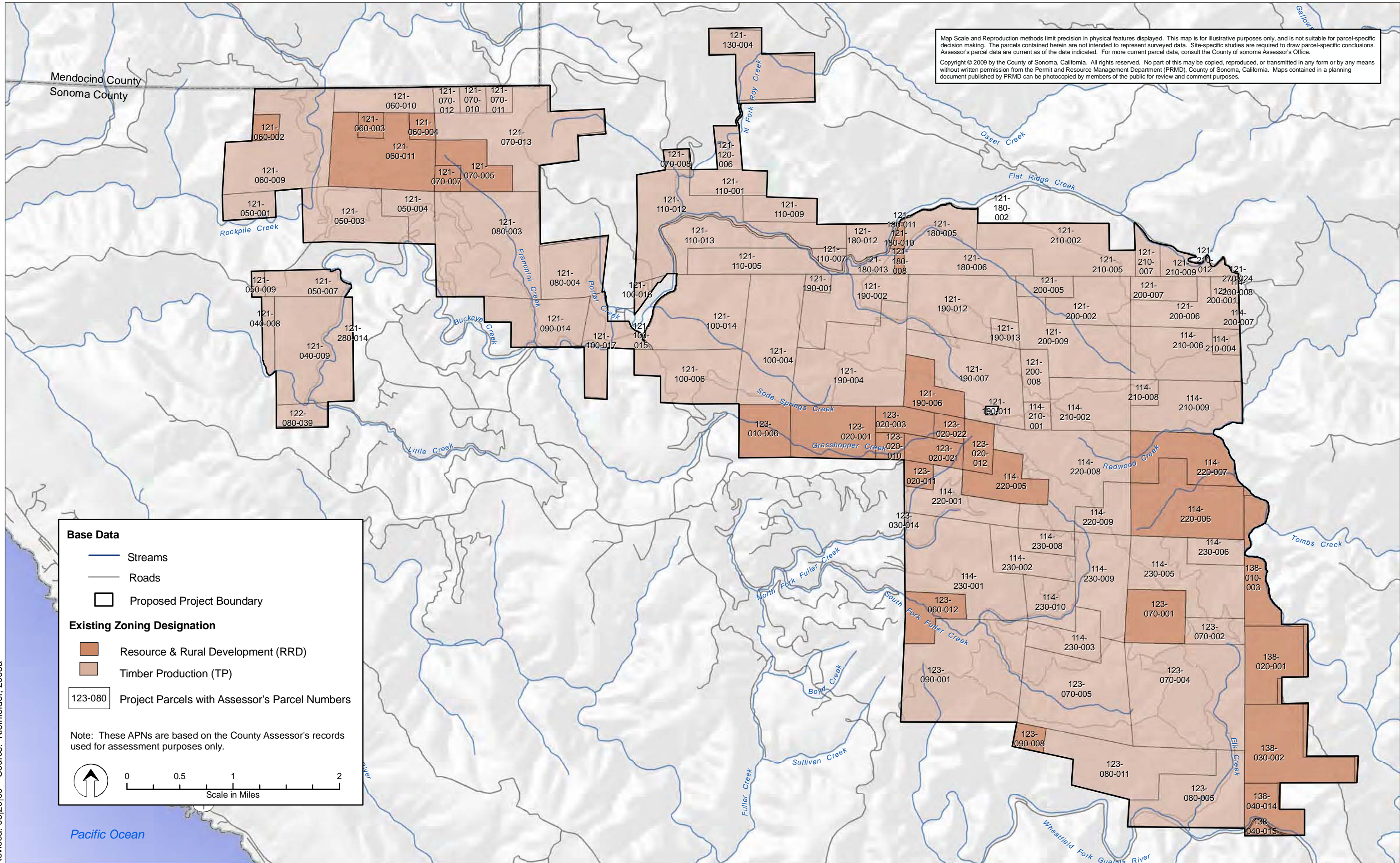
Of the 1,861 acres of proposed vineyard lands, 1,681 acres are currently zoned in the TP district and 180 acres are zoned in the RRD district (refer to Figure 2-2). However, the conversion of timberland to vineyards is not an allowable use in the TP District since it would inhibit and detract from the growing of timber on the Site. Therefore, concurrent with their use permit request for timber conversion, the Applicant has applied to rezone the subject 1,681 acres from the TP District, which does not allow conversion to the RRD district, but allows conversion on a case by case basis through a discretionary use permit. Special findings must be made before TP parcels can be rezoned. Though a small portion of the proposed vineyards on TP parcels are on lands that are not considered timberland and allow vineyard development as a permitted compatible use without any need of rezoning, the Applicant is requesting that all the proposed vineyards in the current TP district be rezoned to the RRD district. This would assure that all vineyard areas are similarly zoned. The Applicant has also proposed rezoning 2,939 acres of timberland at the Site (that would not be converted to vineyard) currently zoned RRD to the TP district (Figure 2-3). The Project does not request any changes to the current zoning densities.

As part of the Project, the Applicant has also proposed dedicating a 2,702-acre<sup>2</sup> easement to the County or other appropriate entity for the purposes of establishing the Windy Gap Preserve. The Applicant has requested that the 2,702 acres, currently zoned TP, be rezoned to the RRD district, which the Applicant considers more conducive to the operation and management of the wildlife preserve.

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<sup>2</sup> Geographical Information System data available for the Project Site indicate that the area of the proposed Windy Gap Preserve is approximately 2,702 acres.

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**Base Data**

- Streams
- Roads
- Proposed Project Boundary

**Existing Zoning Designation**

- Resource & Rural Development (RRD)
- Timber Production (TP)
- 123-080 Project Parcels with Assessor's Parcel Numbers

Note: These APNs are based on the County Assessor's records used for assessment purposes only.

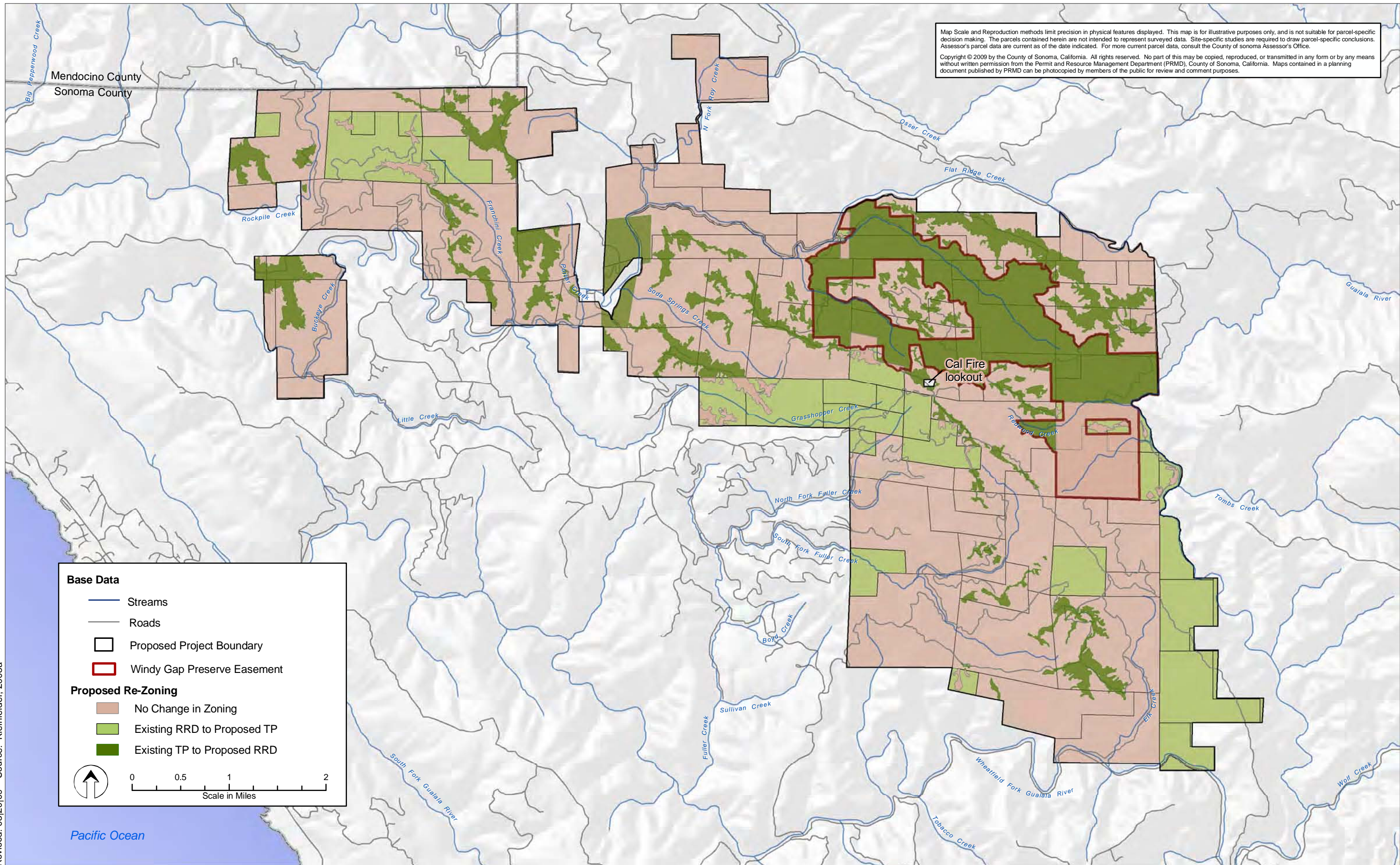
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Scale in Miles

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**Base Data**

- Streams
- Roads
- Proposed Project Boundary
- Windy Gap Preserve Easement

**Proposed Re-Zoning**

- No Change in Zoning
- Existing RRD to Proposed TP
- Existing TP to Proposed RRD

0 0.5 1 2  
Scale in Miles

Revised: 03/20/09 Source: Kleinfelder, 2008a



The Applicant has also proposed dedicating 221 acres of the Project Site to the County for inclusion in the Soda Springs Redwood Reserve as part of the Project. The dedicated lands surround the existing 40-acre Reserve. The Applicant has requested that the 221 acres currently zoned TP be rezoned to the RRD zoning district.

If all rezoning were granted then:

- 1,861 acres would be rezoned from TP to RRD for vineyard development,
- 2,702 acres would be rezoned from TP to RRD for a Windy Gap wildlife preserve,
- 221 acres would be rezoned from TP to RRD for park dedication (Soda Springs Reserve), and
- 2,939 acres would be rezoned from RRD to the TP for timber management.

Refer to Table 2-1 for the existing and proposed rezoning acreages in each zoning district.

Table 2-1. Existing and Proposed Rezoning Acreages on the Project Site

Zoning Category	Existing Zoning Acreage onsite	Proposed Rezoning Acreage onsite
TP	15,645.1	14,590.6
RRD	3,655.2	4,708.7 (includes 2,627 acre preserve and 220.7 acres for the County Park Dedication area)
Total Assessor's Acreage	19,300.3	19,299.3

### 2.3.2 Timberland Conversion

The Project proposes to convert 1,671 acres of “timberland” to vineyards plus an additional 190 acres classified as “non-timberland” (i.e., grassland) for a total of 1,861 acres of vineyard areas within the Project Site (Figure 2-4). The vineyard areas would include the planted vineyards (approximately 1,500 acres), perimeter access lanes, equipment staging areas, and farm worker residential areas. The Applicant proposes to remove all existing vegetation at the identified vineyard areas and not restock to prepare the land for an alternate use. The existing inventory of the types of vegetative cover, described below, is variable throughout the Site. In timberland areas, the amount of conifers (i.e., stocking) is also variable. Table 2-2 summarizes the acreage of vegetation types and conifer stocking within areas proposed for conversion to vineyards.

Table 2-2. Vegetation Types within Vineyard Footprint

Type	Conifer Stocking	Acres
<b>Conifers Not Present</b>		
Grassland	None	183
Oak woodland	None	7
<i>Subtotal</i>		<b>190</b>
<b>Conifers Present (understocked)</b>		
True oak/conifer	Understocked	12
Brushland/conifer	Understocked	45
Mixed hardwood/conifer, <20" dbh overstory	Understocked	294
Mixed hardwood/conifer, >20" dbh overstory	Understocked	6
<i>Subtotal</i>		<b>357</b>
<b>Conifers Present (stocked)</b>		
Douglas fir or sugar pine, <20" dbh overstory	Stocked	604
Redwood, <20" dbh overstory	Stocked	692
Douglas fir, >20" dbh overstory	Stocked	3
Redwood, >20" dbh overstory	Stocked	15
<i>Subtotal</i>		<b>1,314</b>
<b>Conversion Total</b>		<b>1,671</b>
<b>Project Total</b>		<b>1,861</b>

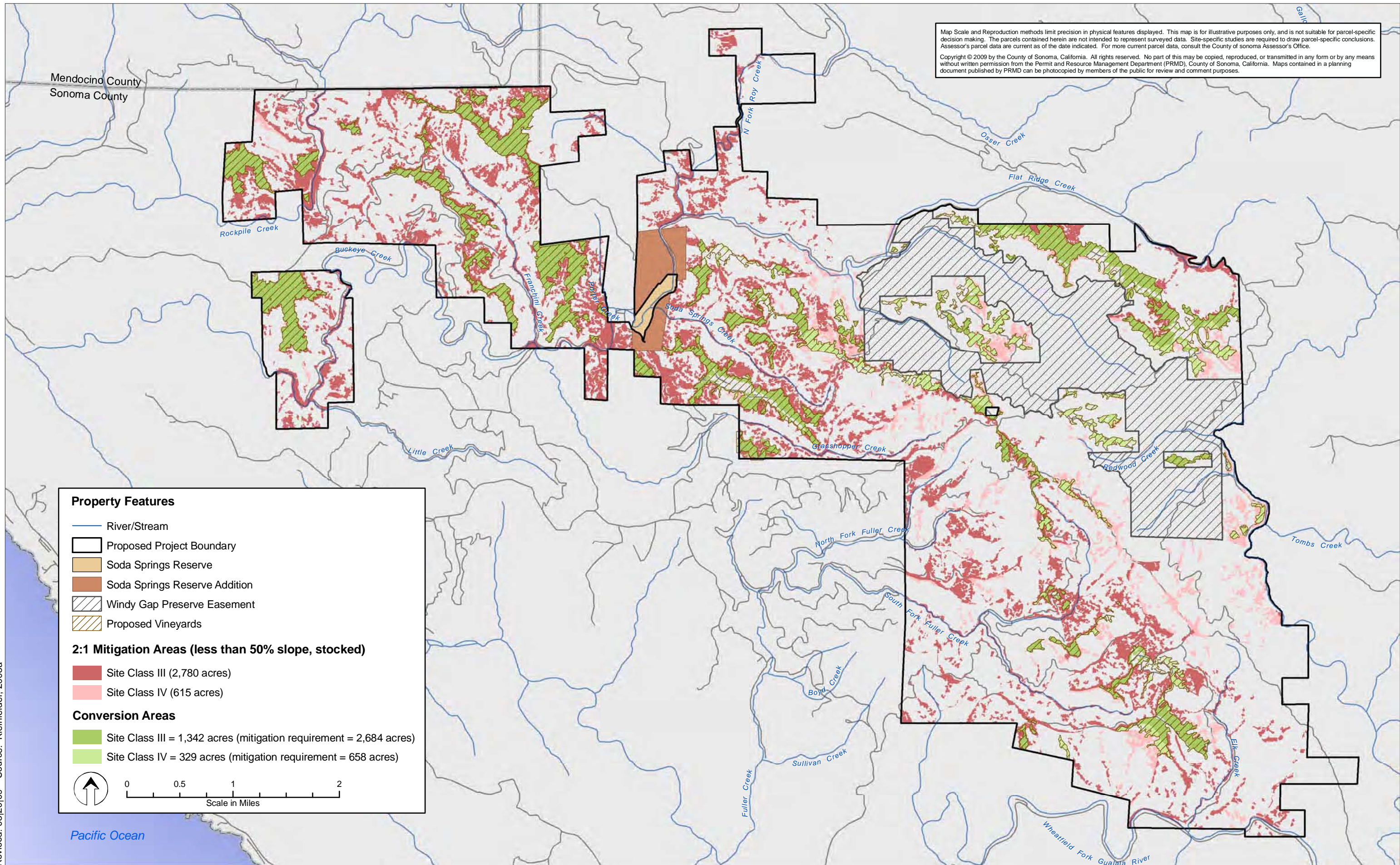
Note: dbh = diameter breast height

It is the Applicant's intent to comply with the County's timber conversion ordinance (Ordinance 5651). This ordinance requires that for every acre of timberland converted to another use (i.e., vineyard development), 2 acres of stocked timberlands of comparable or better timber Site Class as defined by the California Forest Practice Rules (CFPR) (with slopes of 50 percent or less) be protected. For instance, this Project would convert approximately 1,671 acres of timberland to vineyards; therefore, according to County Ordinances 5651 and 5695 approximately 3,342 (a 2:1 ratio or 2 x 1,671) acres would have to be permanently protected through an easement.

Most of the conversion areas (approximately 816 acres) are sited on bench lands and ridge tops that have average slopes of less than 20 percent. The maximum slope considered for vineyard development was 38 percent. Approximately 558 acres of conversion areas have slopes ranging from 30 to 38 (Winzler & Kelly 2008). Most of the timberland conversion area is currently occupied with young, immature stands of trees with relatively high tanoak competition. Table 2-3 below describes the total amount of timber estimated to be harvested. Note that presently there is a greater representation of tanoak and other hardwoods than conifers in terms of numbers of trees and basal area per acre. As summarized in Table 2-3, existing timber volumes on the conversion areas are comprised of an average of 2,602 thousand-board feet of redwood (47 percent), 2,550 thousand-board feet of Douglas fir (46 percent), and 403 thousand-board feet of other conifers (7 percent).

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**Property Features**

- River/Stream
- Proposed Project Boundary
- Soda Springs Reserve
- Soda Springs Reserve Addition
- Windy Gap Preserve Easement
- Proposed Vineyards

**2:1 Mitigation Areas (less than 50% slope, stocked)**

- Site Class III (2,780 acres)
- Site Class IV (615 acres)

**Conversion Areas**

- Site Class III = 1,342 acres (mitigation requirement = 2,684 acres)
- Site Class IV = 329 acres (mitigation requirement = 658 acres)

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Scale in Miles

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Table 2-3. Existing Timberland Structure of the Conversion Area

Species	Total Board Feet	Board Feet per Acre	Total Trees	Trees per Acre	Basal Area* (square feet) per Acre
Redwood	3,822,575	2,602	59,169	40	37
Douglas-fir	3,746,319	2,550	53,847	37	30
Other Conifers	591,751	403	4,384	3	4
<b>Total Conifers</b>	<b>8,160,645</b>	<b>5,555</b>	<b>117,400</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>71</b>
Tanoak	3,550,624	2,417	134,072	91	57
Other Hardwoods	1,681,925	1,145	50,779	35	25
<b>Total Hardwoods</b>	<b>5,232,549</b>	<b>3,562</b>	<b>184,851</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Total (All Species)</b>	<b>13,393,194</b>	<b>9,117</b>	<b>302,251</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>153</b>

\* Basal area is the cross section area of the stem or trunk of a plant or tree, generally measured at breast height (i.e., 4.5 feet above ground surface).

As mentioned above, the timber conversion areas are generally characterized by stands of small, densely spaced trees. Soils are average to poor for growing trees (Timber Site class 3 and 4 as defined by California FPR Section 1060). Within the area proposed for vineyard development, 190 acres were determined to be non-timberland (refer to Table 2-4). These areas are either grasslands or oak woodlands, with most being grassland. Further, approximately 21 percent or 357 acres of the conversion area is currently understocked for conifers by FPR standards, and has high tanoak stocking levels. Approximately 79 percent of the conversion area is considered stocked by FPR standards but is dominated primarily by young dense small diameter stands of redwood, Douglas fir and tanoak with most of the overstory less than 20 inches diameter breast height (dbh).

Table 2-4. Vineyard/Timberland Conversion Acreage

	Total Acres	% of Total Property	Site Class III	Site Class IV	Non-Timber	UnderStocked	Stocked
Timberland to be Converted	1,671	8	1,311	369	N/A	357 (21%)	1,314 (79%)
Non-Timberland	190	1	N/A	N/A	190	N/A	N/A
<b>Total New Vineyards</b>	<b>1,861</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1,267</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>1,314</b>

All timber harvesting associated with the conversion areas would be conducted pursuant to a CAL FIRE TCP and associated THP described in the next section.

### 2.3.3 Timber Harvest Plan

The Applicant is applying to the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection for a Timberland Conversion Permit to convert 1,671 acres of timberland from forest practice stocking requirements to a non-timber growing use (i.e., agricultural production of higher quality varietal grapes and construction of reservoirs, farm worker housing and agricultural buildings). The conversion areas on the Property are located on parcels zoned RRD and TP, and the Applicant has submitted an application to Sonoma County for a rezone of TP to RRD and RRD to TP.

A THP would be drafted by the Applicant for submittal with the draft CEQA document developed for the Project and the Timberland Conversion Permit application. The designated

Licensed Timber Operator (LTO) would be responsible for conducting all conversion area timber harvesting and preparation activities on the Site. All conifers and hardwoods would be harvested and stumps and slash removed from the proposed vineyard sites/conversion areas by the designated LTO. Trees within the flagged conversion area boundaries would be cut by hand or with a feller buncher. Ground-based systems (i.e., tractors and rubber tire skidders) would be used to move the cut logs to landing locations. Temporary erosion control measures (e.g., installation of straw bales and silt fences and mulching or seeding of exposed soils near streams) would be implemented, consistent with the California FPRs intended to protect water quality until permanent erosion control structures are installed (refer to Section 2.4.2).

All timber harvesting operations would conform to the conditions stipulated in the THP for proposed timber operations required by Article 7, Chapter 8, Part 2, Division 4 of the Public Resources Code (PRC). Sudden Oak Death (SOD) host plants, plant parts, unprocessed wood, and wood products may only be moved off-site under current guidelines that meet CAL FIRE regulations. SOD is a disease that is killing oaks and other plant species in the western United States, including at the Project Site. The pathogen responsible for the disease is a fungus-like organism called *Phytophthora ramorum*. Compliance information for SOD would also be provided in the THP.

### 2.3.4 Vineyard Development

The Project includes the development of individual vineyard areas totaling approximately 1,861 acres. The Project proposes to develop 17 vineyards listed in Table 2-5 and illustrated in Figure 2-5. A general overview of the components involved with vineyard development (i.e., site preparation, soil preparation/grading, and vineyard planting) and operations is provided in this section. The specific components of each of the vineyards proposed for development (e.g., water storage/reservoirs, watercourses, and water collection systems) are presented in Table 2-5.

The Applicant has assessed the potential vineyard sites' suitability identified by the previous owner, North Coast Resource Management (NCRM). The assessment of suitability for vineyard development was based on specific criteria that were evaluated by field surveys and project mapping. The criteria included existing road access, slope (maximum 38 percent), soil conditions, geometric shape (minimum width of 200 feet), drainage conditions, and proximity to sensitive resources. In addition, new areas suitable for vineyard development that were discovered in the field were added to the list. The vineyard sites categorized as viable were forwarded to the Applicant's design team for further evaluation, mapping, and flagging in the field. Most of the potential vineyard sites were identified along the ridgetops where the topography is generally gently to moderately sloping (less than 15 percent). Typically, the grade breaks sharply at the margins of the ridgetops. The average slope of most of the vineyard sites varies between 5 percent and 15 percent, qualifying the majority of the vineyard areas as "Level II authorized planting" under the Sonoma County Grading, Drainage, Vineyard and Orchard Site Development Ordinance. Under this ordinance, growers planting new vineyards or replanting existing vineyards are required to use recognized conservation practices, best management practices (BMPs), and provide for riparian setbacks to protect the environment and watersheds of the County.