

GOVERNMENT CODE - GOV

TITLE 5. LOCAL AGENCIES [50001 - 57550]

(Title 5 added by Stats. 1949, Ch. 81.)

DIVISION 1. CITIES AND COUNTIES [50001 - 52203]

(Division 1 added by Stats. 1949, Ch. 81.)

PART 1. POWERS AND DUTIES COMMON TO CITIES AND COUNTIES [50001 - 51298.5]

(Part 1 added by Stats. 1949, Ch. 81.)

CHAPTER 7. Agricultural Land [51200 - 51297.4]

(Chapter 7 added by Stats. 1965, Ch. 1443.)

ARTICLE 1. General Provisions [51200 - 51207]

(Article 1 added by Stats. 1965, Ch. 1443.)

51200.

This chapter shall be known as the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 or as the Williamson Act.

(Amended by Stats. 1967, Ch. 1371.)

51201.

As used in this chapter, unless otherwise apparent from the context, the following terms have the following meanings:

- (a) "Agricultural commodity" means any and all plant and animal products produced in this state for commercial purposes, including, but not limited to, plant products used for producing biofuels.
- (b) "Agricultural use" means use of land, including but not limited to greenhouses, for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity for commercial purposes.
- (c) "Prime agricultural land" means any of the following:
 - (1) All land that qualifies for rating as class I or class II in the Natural Resource Conservation Service land use capability classifications.
 - (2) Land which qualifies for rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating.

(3) Land which supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and which has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture.

(4) Land planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes, or crops which have a nonbearing period of less than five years and which will normally return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than two hundred dollars (\$200) per acre.

(5) Land which has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant products an annual gross value of not less than two hundred dollars (\$200) per acre for three of the previous five years.

(d) "Agricultural preserve" means an area devoted to either agricultural use, as defined in subdivision (b), recreational use as defined in subdivision (n), or open-space use as defined in subdivision (o), or any combination of those uses and which is established in accordance with the provisions of this chapter.

(e) "Compatible use" is any use determined by the county or city administering the preserve pursuant to Section 51231, 51238, or 51238.1 or by this act to be compatible with the agricultural, recreational, or open-space use of land within the preserve and subject to contract. "Compatible use" includes agricultural use, recreational use or open-space use unless the board or council finds after notice and hearing that the use is not compatible with the agricultural, recreational or open-space use to which the land is restricted by contract pursuant to this chapter.

(f) "Board" means the board of supervisors of a county which establishes or proposes to establish an agricultural preserve or which enters or proposes to enter into a contract on land within an agricultural preserve pursuant to this chapter.

(g) "Council" means the city council of a city which establishes or proposes to establish an agricultural preserve or which enters or proposes to enter into a contract on land within an agricultural preserve pursuant to this chapter.

(h) Except where it is otherwise apparent from the context, "county" or "city" means the county or city having jurisdiction over the land.

(i) A "scenic highway corridor" is an area adjacent to, and within view of, the right-of-way of:

(1) An existing or proposed state scenic highway in the state scenic highway system established by the Legislature pursuant to Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code and which has been officially designated by the Department of Transportation as an official state scenic highway; or

(2) A county scenic highway established pursuant to Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code, if each of the following conditions have been met:

(A) The scenic highway is included in an adopted general plan of the county or city; and

(B) The scenic highway corridor is included in an adopted specific plan of the county or city; and

(C) Specific proposals for implementing the plan, including regulation of land use, have been approved by the Advisory Committee on a Master Plan for Scenic Highways, and the county or city highway has been officially designated by the Department of Transportation as an official county scenic highway.

(j) A “wildlife habitat area” is a land or water area designated by a board or council, after consulting with and considering the recommendation of the Department of Fish and Game, as an area of importance for the protection or enhancement of the wildlife resources of the state.

(k) A “saltpond” is an area which, for at least three consecutive years immediately prior to being placed within an agricultural preserve pursuant to this chapter, has been used for the solar evaporation of seawater in the course of salt production for commercial purposes.

(l) A “managed wetland area” is an area, which may be an area diked off from the ocean or any bay, river or stream to which water is occasionally admitted, and which, for at least three consecutive years immediately prior to being placed within an agricultural preserve pursuant to this chapter, was used and maintained as a waterfowl hunting preserve or game refuge or for agricultural purposes.

(m) A “submerged area” is any land determined by the board or council to be submerged or subject to tidal action and found by the board or council to be of great value to the state as open space.

(n) “Recreational use” is the use of land in its agricultural or natural state by the public, with or without charge, for any of the following: walking, hiking, picnicking, camping, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, or other outdoor games or sports for which facilities are provided for public participation. Any fee charged for the recreational use of land as defined in this

subdivision shall be in a reasonable amount and shall not have the effect of unduly limiting its use by the public. Any ancillary structures necessary for a recreational use shall comply with the provisions of Section 51238.1.

(o) "Open-space use" is the use or maintenance of land in a manner that preserves its natural characteristics, beauty, or openness for the benefit and enjoyment of the public, to provide habitat for wildlife, or for the solar evaporation of seawater in the course of salt production for commercial purposes, if the land is within:

(1) A scenic highway corridor, as defined in subdivision (i).

(2) A wildlife habitat area, as defined in subdivision (j).

(3) A saltpond, as defined in subdivision (k).

(4) A managed wetland area, as defined in subdivision (l).

(5) A submerged area, as defined in subdivision (m).

(6) An area enrolled in the United States Department of Agriculture Conservation Reserve Program or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

(p) "Development" means, as used in Section 51223, the construction of buildings or the use of the restricted property if the buildings or use are unrelated to the agricultural use, the open-space use, or uses compatible with either agricultural or open-space uses of the property, or substantially impair the agricultural, open-space, or a combination of the agricultural and open-space uses of the property. Agricultural use, open-space use, uses compatible with either agricultural or open-space uses, or the acquisition of land or an interest in land are not development.

(Amended by Stats. 2008, Ch. 503, Sec. 1. Effective January 1, 2009.)

51203.

(a) The assessor shall determine the current fair market value of the land as if it were free of the contractual restriction pursuant to Section 51283. The Department of Conservation or the landowner, also referred to in this section as "parties," may provide information to assist the assessor to determine the value. Any information provided to the assessor shall be served on the other party, unless the information was provided at the request of the assessor, and would be confidential under law if required of an assessee.

(b) Within 45 days of receiving the assessor's notice pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 51283 or Section 51283.4, if the Department of Conservation or the landowner believes that the current fair market valuation certified pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 51283 or Section 51283.4 is not accurate, the department or the landowner may request formal review from the county assessor in the county considering the petition to cancel the contract. The department or the landowner shall submit to the assessor and the other party the reasons for believing the valuation is not accurate and the additional information the requesting party believes may substantiate a recalculation of the property valuation. The assessor may recover his or her reasonable costs of the formal review from the party requesting the review, and may provide an estimate of those costs to the requesting party. The recovery of these costs from the department may be deducted by the city or county from cancellation fees received pursuant to this chapter prior to transmittal to the Controller for deposit in the Soil Conservation Fund. The assessor may require a deposit from the landowner to cover the contingency that payment of a cancellation fee will not necessarily result from the completion of a formal review. This subdivision shall not be construed as a limitation on the authority provided in Section 51287 for cities or counties to recover their costs in the cancellation process, except that the assessor's costs of conducting a formal review shall not be borne by the nonrequesting party.

(1) If no request is made within 45 days of receiving notice by certified mail of the valuation, the assessor's valuation shall be used to calculate the fee.

(2) Upon receiving a request for formal review, the assessor shall formally review his or her valuation if, based on the determination of the assessor, the information may have a material effect on valuation of the property. The assessor shall notify the parties that the formal review is being undertaken and that information to aid the assessor's review shall be submitted within 30 days of the date of the notice to the parties. Any information submitted to the assessor shall be served on the other party who shall have 30 days to respond to that information to the assessor. If the response to the assessor contains new information, the party receiving that response shall have 20 days to respond to the assessor as to the new information. All submittals and responses to the assessor shall be served on the other party by personal service or an affidavit of mailing. The assessor shall avoid ex parte contacts during the formal review and shall report any such contacts to the department and the landowner at the same time the

review is complete. The assessor shall complete the review no later than 120 days of receiving the request.

(3) At the conclusion of the formal review, the assessor shall either revise the cancellation valuation or determine that the original cancellation valuation is accurate. The assessor shall send the revised valuation or notice of the determination that the valuation is accurate to the department, the landowner, and the board or council considering the petition to cancel the contract. The assessor shall include a brief narrative of what consideration was given to the items of information and responses directly relating to the cancellation value submitted by the parties. The assessor shall give no consideration to a party's information or response that was not served on the other party. If the assessor denies a formal review, a brief narrative shall be provided to the parties indicating the basis for the denial, if requested.

(c) For purposes of this section, the valuation date of any revised valuation pursuant to formal review or following judicial challenge shall remain the date of the assessor's initial valuation, or his or her initial recomputation pursuant to Section 51283.4. For purposes of cancellation fee calculation in a tentative cancellation as provided in Section 51283, or in a recomputation for final cancellation as provided in Section 51283.4, a cancellation value shall be considered current for one year after its determination and certification by the assessor.

(d) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, the department and the landowner may agree on a cancellation valuation of the land. The agreed valuation shall serve as the cancellation valuation pursuant to Section 51283 or Section 51283.4. The agreement shall be transmitted to the board or council considering the petition to cancel the contract.

(e) This section represents the exclusive administrative procedure for appealing a cancellation valuation calculated pursuant to this section. The Department of Conservation shall represent the interests of the state in the administrative and judicial remedies for challenging the determination of a cancellation valuation or cancellation fee.

(Amended by Stats. 2009, Ch. 358, Sec. 1. Effective January 1, 2010.)

51205.

Notwithstanding any provisions of this chapter to the contrary, land devoted to recreational use or land within a scenic highway corridor, a wildlife habitat area, a saltpond, a managed

wetland area, or a submerged area may be included within an agricultural preserve pursuant to this chapter. When such land is included within an agricultural preserve, the city or county within which it is situated may contract with the owner for the purpose of restricting the land to recreational or open space use and uses compatible therewith in the same manner as provided in this chapter for land devoted to agricultural use. For purposes of this section, where the term “agricultural land” is used in this chapter, it shall be deemed to include land devoted to recreational use and land within a scenic highway corridor, a wildlife habitat area, a saltpond, a managed wetland area, or a submerged area, and where the term “agricultural use” is used in this chapter, it shall be deemed to include recreational and open space use.

(Amended by Stats. 1970, Ch. 1281.)

51205.1.

Notwithstanding any provisions of this chapter to the contrary, land within a scenic highway corridor, as defined in subdivision (i) of Section 51201, shall, upon the request of the owner, be included in an agricultural preserve pursuant to this chapter. When such land is included within an agricultural preserve, the city or county within which it is situated shall contract with the owner for the purpose of restricting the land to agricultural use as defined in subdivision (b), recreational use as defined in subdivision (n), open-space use as defined in subdivision (o), compatible use as defined in subdivision (e), or any combination of such uses.

(Added by Stats. 1978, Ch. 1120.)

51206.

The Department of Conservation may meet with and assist local, regional, state, and federal agencies, organizations, landowners, or any other person or entity in the interpretation of this chapter. The department may research, publish, and disseminate information regarding the policies, purposes, procedures, administration, and implementation of this chapter. This section shall be liberally construed to permit the department to advise any interested person or entity regarding this chapter.

(Added by Stats. 1986, Ch. 607, Sec. 1.)

51207.

- (a) On or before May 1 of every other year, the Department of Conservation shall report to the Legislature regarding the implementation of this chapter by cities and counties.
- (b) The report shall contain, but not be limited to, the number of acres of land under contract in each category and the number of acres of land which were removed from contract through cancellation, eminent domain, annexation, or nonrenewal.
- (c) The report shall also contain the following specific information relating to not less than one-third of all cities and counties participating in the Williamson Act program:
- (1) The number of contract cancellation requests for which notices of hearings were mailed to the Director of Conservation pursuant to Section 51284 which were approved by boards or councils during the prior two years or for which approval is still pending by boards or councils.
- (2) The amount of cancellation fees payable to the county treasurer as deferred taxes and which are required to be transmitted to the Controller pursuant to subdivision (d) of Section 51283 which have not been collected or which remain unpaid.
- (3) The total number of acres covered by certificates of cancellation of contracts during the previous two years.
- (4) The number of nonrenewal and withdrawal of renewal notices received pursuant to Section 51245 and the number of expiration notices received pursuant to Section 51246 during the previous two years.
- (5) The number of acres covered by nonrenewal notices that were not withdrawn and expiration notices during the previous two years.
- (d) The department may recommend changes to this chapter which would further promote its purposes.
- (e) The Legislature may, upon request of the department, appropriate funds from the deferred taxes deposited in the General Fund pursuant to subdivision (d) of Section 51283 in an amount sufficient to prepare the report required by this section.

(Amended by Stats. 2001, Ch. 745, Sec. 104. Effective October 12, 2001.)