B.3.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board. Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c. Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	☐	☐	☐	☒
e. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Significance criteria established by CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G.

B.3.2.1 Setting

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) in 1982 to assess the location, quantity, and quality of agricultural lands and conversion of these lands to other uses. Every even-numbered year, FMMP issues a Farmland Conversion Report. FMMP data are used in elements of some county and city general plans, in regional studies on agricultural land conversion, and in environmental documents as a way of assessing project-specific impacts on Prime Farmland.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (formerly Soils Conservation Service), classifies notable agricultural lands as follows:

- **Prime Farmland:** Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical properties for the production of crops
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Similar to Prime Farmland, but with minor shortcomings (e.g., steeper slopes, inability to hold water)

- **Unique Farmland:** Land of lesser quality soils, but recently used for the production of specific high economic value crops. Land is usually irrigated, but may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California.

The State DOC and federal NRCS-designated agricultural lands are herein referred to as Farmland. While the city of Ridgecrest began as a farming community, and Kern and San Bernardino Counties have long histories of agricultural production, the proposed substation expansion site, rerouted 115-kV subtransmission line (into and out of the substation), and fiber optic telecommunication lines (added to existing 115-kV poles with six replacement poles) would be located in an area with sparse agricultural use (City of Ridgecrest, 2008a; Kern County, 2009; San Bernardino County, 2009; DOC, 2010a; DOC, 2010b). The proposed substation expansion site would be located on a parcel designated Commercial and Office and zoned General Commercial (CG). The nearest parcels of Farmland and land zoned for agriculture to the proposed substation expansion site would be approximately 2.5 miles east and 3.2 miles west of the proposed site (DOC, 2010a; DOC, 2010b). The nearest parcels of land zoned for forestry would be located more than 17 miles west of the proposed substation expansion site and more than 19 miles southwest of the proposed site (Kern County, 2011). The proposed 115-kV subtransmission reroute and fiber optic telecommunication lines would not traverse any Farmland, nor would any stringing or laydown areas be located on Farmland (DOC, 2010a; DOC, 2010b). The nearest land under Williamson Act contract would be over 17 miles southwest of the proposed substation expansion site (DOC, 2004; DOC, 2006).

B.3.2.2 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

a. Would the project convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as Shown on the Maps Prepared Pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to Non-agricultural use?

NO IMPACT. The proposed substation expansion site, the 115-kV subtransmission reroute, and the fiber optic telecommunication lines would not be located on any lands categorized as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland). No construction activities, including stringing or laydown activities would occur on Farmland. No Farmland would be affected by construction or operation of the Proposed Project. No impact would occur.

b. Would the project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?

NO IMPACT. As described above, the nearest Williamson Act contract would be located over 17 miles from the proposed substation expansion site and a similar distance from the proposed 115-kV subtransmission reroute and fiber optic telecommunication lines. Additionally, as described above, the proposed substation expansion site would be located approximately 2.5 miles northwest of the nearest parcel of land zoned for agricultural use. The new fiber optic telecommunication lines would be installed along an existing 115-kV subtransmission line which run adjacent to or would traverse agricultural zoned land; however, since the work would occur on existing wood poles or replacement poles, no conflicts with existing agricultural uses are anticipated. No impact would occur.

c. Would the project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?

NO IMPACT. As described above, the nearest parcel of land zoned for forestry would be located over 17 miles west of the proposed substation expansion site. Similarly, for the existing 115-kV subtransmission

line route on which the fiber optic telecommunications lines would be installed, the nearest parcel of land zoned for forestry would be located over 12 miles west of the western end of the subtransmission line. Consequently, construction and operation of the Proposed Project would not affect any zoned forest land, timberland, or timberland zoned for timber production. No impact would occur.

d. Would the project result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

NO IMPACT. The proposed substation expansion site would be located on a sparsely vegetated parcel lacking any forest. As such, construction and operation of the proposed substation expansion would not convert any forest land to non-forest use. While the existing 115-kV subtransmission line alignment and associated fiber optic telecommunication line may run adjacent to forested areas, the work would occur on existing wood poles or replacement poles and no loss or conversion of forest land is anticipated. No impact would occur.

e. Would the project involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

NO IMPACT. The Proposed Project would not convert any agricultural land to non-agricultural uses nor would it convert any forest land to non-forest use, and it is not anticipated that the Proposed Project would involve other changes that would result in conversions to non-agricultural or non-forest uses. As noted in Section B.3.12, Population and Housing, the Proposed Project would not be growth-inducing and would, therefore, not be expected to substantially induce or exacerbate conversion of agricultural or forest land. Consequently, no conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses and no conversion of forest to non-forest uses would occur.