2.2 Agriculture Resources

Issues (and Supporting Information Sources):		Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
2.	**AGRICULTURE 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. **Would the proposed project:**				
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)	Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use?	☐	☒	☐	☐

This section provides a description of local agricultural resources on parcels through which the Proposed Project would traverse and within the project vicinity. A general overview of applicable State and County regulations is also provided. The impact analysis evaluates the project's potential to adversely affect existing agricultural resources and mitigation is identified, where appropriate, to reduce these project impacts.

2.2.1 Setting

Existing Agriculture Resources Overview

About 65 percent of the acreage in Sonoma County is used for agriculture. In 2003, Sonoma County earned approximately $512 million in the production of agricultural goods, a decrease of about $53 million from 2002 (Sonoma County, 2004). Fruits/tree nuts/berries and nurseries/greenhouses were the top commodities in Sonoma County, producing approximately $366 million and $56.6 million, respectively, in 2002 (USDA, 2002).

The Proposed Project would traverse several parcels that are currently irrigated vineyards and pastures (see **Table 2.1-2** in Section 2.1, *Land Use and Planning*).

Important Farmland

To characterize the environmental baseline for agricultural resources, Important Farmland Maps produced by the Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) were reviewed. Important Farmland maps show categories of Prime Farmland,

Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance (if adopted by the county), Grazing Land, Urban and Built-up Land, Other Land, and Water. Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance map categories are based on qualifying soil types, as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), as well as current land use. These map categories are defined by the Department of Conservation's FMMP as follows:

- Prime Farmland: Land which has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to current farming methods.

- Farmland of Statewide Importance: Land that is similar to *Prime Farmland* but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture.

- Unique Farmland: Land of lesser quality soils used for the production of specific high economic value crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. It is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Examples of crops include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers.

- Farmland of Local Importance: Land of importance to the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county's board of supervisors and local advisory committees. Examples include dairies, dryland farming, aquaculture, and uncultivated areas with soils qualifying for *Prime Farmland* and *Farmland of Statewide Importance*.

- Grazing Land: Land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock.

- Urban and Built-up Land: Land used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administrative purpose, railroad yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment plants, water control structures, and other development purposes. Highways, railroads, and other transportation facilities are also included in this category.

- Other Land: Land which is not included in any of the other mapping categories. Common examples include low-density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing, confined livestock, poultry or aquaculture facilities, strip mines, borrow pits, and water bodies smaller than 40 acres.

- Water: Water areas with an extent of at least 40 acres.

Table 2.2-1 shows the acres of farmland in Sonoma County, as well as the amount of recent farmland conversions.

TABLE 2.2-1
FARMLAND CONVERSION FROM 2000–2002 IN SONOMA COUNTY

Land Use Category	Total Acres Inventoried		2000–2002 Acreage Changes		
	2000	2002	Acres Lost	Acres Gained	Net Change
Prime Farmland	37,035	36,377	3,227	2,569	-658
Farmland of Statewide Importance	18,921	19,747	1,966	2,792	826
Unique Farmland	30,289	31,173	4,218	5,102	884
Farmland of Local Importance	87,661	74,851	16,300	3,490	-12,810
Grazing Land	173,906	16,2148	25,711	13,953	-11,598
Agricultural Land Subtotal	**606,630**	**583,274**	**40,138**	**16,782**	**-23,356**

SOURCE: California Department of Conservation (2002)

The Proposed Project would traverse through parcels that contain soils classified as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, or *Unique Farmland*. The Project would cross designated *Prime Farmland* on parcels 2, 3, and 13 through 19 (see **Figure 2.1-2**); designated *Farmland of Statewide Importance* on parcels 3, 4, 5, and 13; and designated *Unique Farmland* on parcels and 3, 5, 13. The Sonoma and Lakeville Substations are designated as *Urban and Built Land* (FMMP, 1984-2004).

Williamson Act Contracts

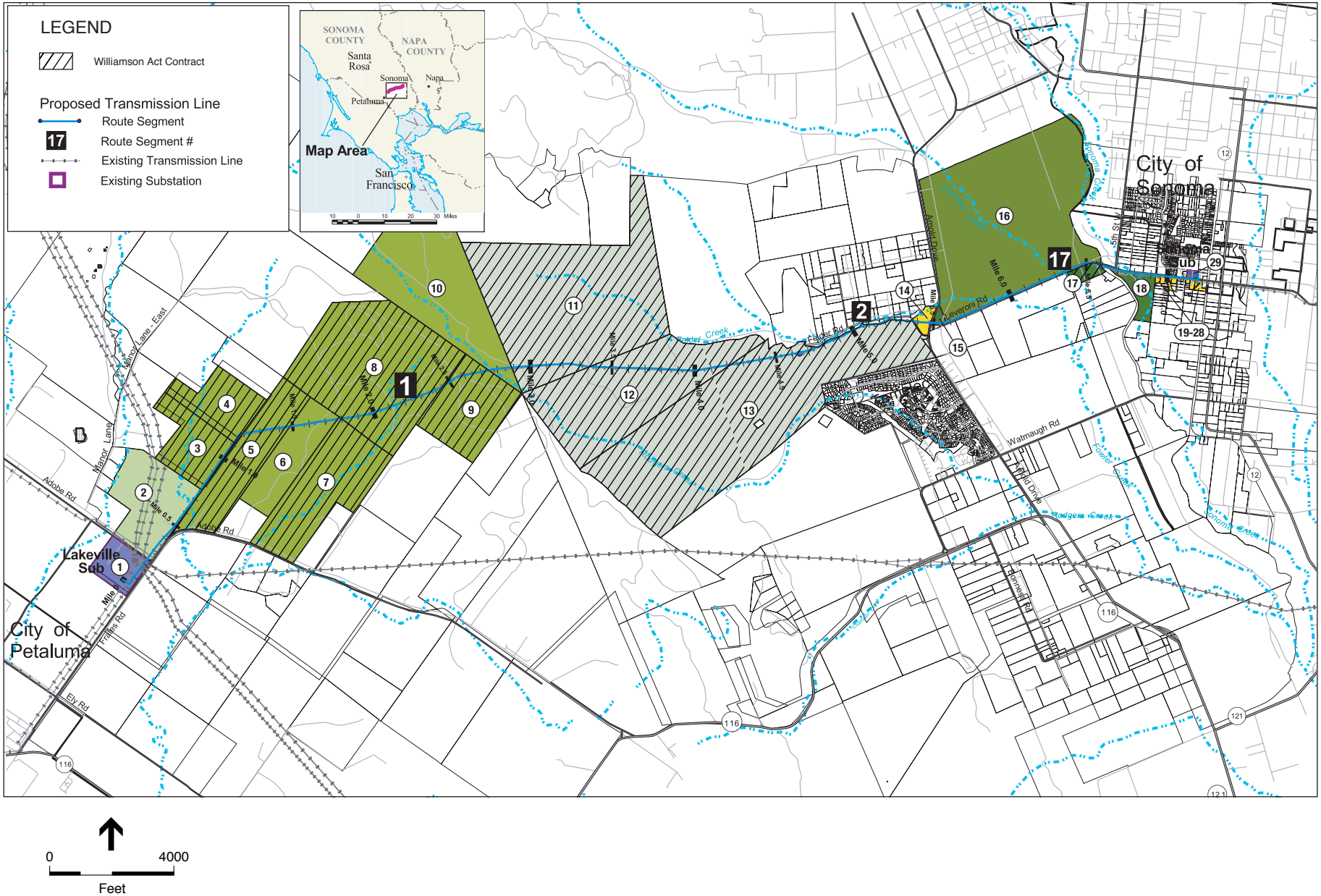
Williamson Act contracts are a tool often used by local governments to preserve agricultural and open space lands by discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses (see Regulatory Context below for more specific details). Approximately 30 percent of the land acreage in Sonoma County is currently in a Williamson Act contract (CSAC, 2005). In addition, **Figure 2.2-1** shows parcels through which the Proposed Project would traverse that are currently in a Williamson Act contract.

2.2.2 Regulatory Context

State

California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (Non-regulatory)

The California Department of Conservation, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). The FMMP monitors the conversion of the state's farmland to and from agricultural use. The map series identifies eight classifications and uses a minimum mapping unit size of 10 acres. The FMMP also produces a biannual report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use.



SOURCES: Sonoma County (2005) and EDAW (2004)

Figure 2.2-1
Williamson Act Contracts

The FMMP maintains an inventory of state agricultural land and updates its "Important Farmland Series Maps"every two years (Department of Conservation, 2005).

The FMMP is an informational service only and does not have regulatory jurisdiction over local land use decisions. Three categories of farmland: [1] Prime Farmland, [2] Farmland of Statewide Importance, and, [3] Unique Farmland, are considered valuable and any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered to be an adverse impact.

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) (Non-regulatory)

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. Its intent is to preserve agricultural and open space lands by discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments which are much lower than normal because they are based upon farming and open space uses as opposed to full market value. Local governments receive an annual subvention of forgone property tax revenues from the state via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971. The vehicle for these agreements is a rolling term 10 year contract (i.e., unless either party files a "notice of nonrenewal" the contract is automatically renewed annually for an additional year). Several parcels within the project area are currently under Williamson Act contract (see **Figure 2.2-1**).

Local

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Non-regulatory)

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Sonoma County APOSD) permanently preserves the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. To this end, the District conserves greenbelts between cities, farmland, biological resources, wildlife habitat, and land for public recreation. The intent of the District is to further State policy on the preservation of open space and to implement the Open Space and Agricultural Resources Elements of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan. The principal focus of the program is to acquire conservation easements, but the District may acquire fee rights in property where the project is in conformity with the Expenditure Plan (APOSD, 2005).

Sonoma County General Plan

The Sonoma County General Plan Agricultural Resources Element defines agriculture as an industry which produces and processes food, fiber, and plant materials. The purpose of the Element is to establish policies to insure the stability and productivity of the County's agricultural lands and industries. The Element is intended to provide clear guidelines for decisions in agricultural areas. It is also intended to express policies, programs and measures that promote and protect the current and future needs of the agricultural industry. Policies expressed in the Agricultural Resources Element are intended to apply only to lands designated within the three

agricultural land use categories. The Agricultural Resources Element and Land Use Element include the following goals, objectives, and policies that are applicable to the Proposed Project:

- Policy AR-4e: Enforce provisions of existing state nuisance law (California Code Sub-section 3482.5 [the Right to Farm Act]).
- Goal LU-8: Protect lands currently in agricultural production and lands with soils and other characteristics which make them potentially suitable for agricultural use. Retain large parcel sizes and avoid incompatible non-agricultural uses.
- Objective LU-8.1: Avoid conversion of lands currently used for agricultural production to non-agricultural use.
- Objective LU-8.2: Retain large parcels in agricultural production areas and avoid new parcels less than 20 acres in the Land Intensive Agriculture category.
- Objective LU-8.3: Agricultural lands not currently used for farming but which have soils or other characteristics which make them suitable for farming shall not be developed in a way that would preclude future agricultural use. (Sonoma County PRMD, 1989)

Sonoma County Zoning Ordinance

The project crosses the following agricultural-related zoning districts: Land Extensive Agriculture (LEA), Land Intensive Agriculture (LIA*)*, and Agriculture and Residential (AR) (see **Figure 2.1-2** and **Table 2.1-2**). See Section 2.1, *Land Use and Planning* for descriptions of these zoning designations.

2.2.3 Agriculture Resources Impacts and Mitigation Measures

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: *less than significant with mitigation incorporation*.

c) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use: *less than significant with mitigation incorporation*.

Substations

The Lakeville and Sonoma Substations are located on parcels that are not designated by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, or *Unique Farmland*; rather both parcels are designated by the FMMP as *Urban and Built Land*. Modifications to the substations, which would occur within the existing boundary and fence lines of the substations, would not result in the conversion of *Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance*

or any other changes in the existing environment that could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Transmission Line

As discussed in the Setting, the project would cross: designated *Prime Farmland* on parcels 2, 3, and 13 through 19 (see **Figure 2.1-2**); designated *Farmland of Statewide Importance* on parcels 3, 4, 5, and 13; and designated *Unique Farmland* on parcels and 3, 5, 13 (FMMP, 1984-2004).

Project construction would involve temporary construction staging areas, pull sites, helicopter landing areas, crane pads, and new access roads, some of which would be located on agricultural land. In total, these temporary uses would occupy about 30 acres of agricultural land. In particular, **Table 2.2-2** lists the staging areas and new roads would occupy lands designated as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, or *Unique Farmland*.

TABLE 2.2-2
NEW TEMPORARY STAGING AREAS AND ROADS

Temporary Construction Use	Location[a]	Farmland Designation
Pull Site 3a	Southern corner of Parcel 4	Farmland of Statewide Importance
Pull Site 3b	Parcels 4 and 5	Farmland of Statewide Importance
Pull Site 6a and 6b	Northeastern corner of Parcel 13	Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance
Landing Zone / Staging Area; Pull Sites 7a and 7b; and new temporary road	Southeast portion of Parcel 16	Prime Farmland and Other Land
Pull Site 8a	Northern edge of Parcel 28	Urban Built Up Land
Pull Site 4a	Northern portion of Parcel 6	Grazing Land
Pull Site 4b	Northern portion of Parcel 6	Grazing Land
New temporary road	South corner of Parcel 10	Grazing Land
New temporary road and new permanent road	South corner of Parcel 11	Grazing Land
New temporary road	Northern portion of Parcel 12	Grazing Land
New temporary road	Northwestern edge of Parcel 13	Grazing Land

[a] Refer to Figures 1-4(a) through 1-4(d)

SOURCE: FMMP (1984-2004)

Impact 2.2-1: The Proposed Project would result in the temporary removal of farmland that is designated *Prime Farmland* and *Farmland of Statewide Importance*. In total, the construction staging areas, pull sites and crane pads, and new access roads would temporarily reduce the amount of land available for agricultural purposes by about 30 acres, about half of which would be on lands designated as *Prime Farmland* and *Farmland of Statewide Importance*. This would be a less than significant impact with implementation of Mitigation Measure 2.2-1.

Mitigation Measure 2.2-1: PG&E shall preserve the topsoil beneath temporary construction activities areas (i.e., on staging areas, pull sites, and temporary access roads) on agricultural lands by laying fabric topped with a layer of gravel over the areas prior to their use. After construction activities are complete, PG&E shall remove the gravel and fabric and implement the measures specified in the SWPPP Plan which shall be prepared and submitted to the CPUC for approval prior to construction.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Similar to the existing transmission line, the project would occupy a small amount of prime agricultural land for the pole foundations and also for the new segments of permanent access roads. About 2.5 acres for new permanent dirt access roads and 0.03 acres for the new pole footings would be needed for the project. Of this amount, about 1/3 acre of additional land designated as *Prime Farmland*, *Unique Farmland* or *Farmland of Statewide Importance* would be permanently converted for the project, mainly for the segments of permanent dirt access roads leading up to the poles (PG&E PEA, 2004). **Table 2.2-3** provides a summary of the permanent access roads that would be created as part of the Proposed Project and their relationship to impacts to designated farmland.

TABLE 2.2-3
NEW PERMANENT ROADS

Permanent New Use	Location[a]	Farmland Designation
New permanent road	North corner of Parcel 9	Grazing Land
New permanent road	Northern portion of Parcel 12	Grazing Land
New permanent road	Parcel 14	Prime Farmland
New permanent road	Northeast edge of Parcel 17	Prime Farmland
New permanent road	Northwest corner of Parcel 18	Prime Farmland

[a] Refer to Figures 1-4(a) through 1-4(d).

SOURCE: FMMP (1984-2004)

Impact 2.2-2: The installation of pole foundations and construction of new permanent access roads would result in the permanent conversion of approximately 0.33 acres of land designated as *Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance,* and *Unique Farmland*. This would be a less than significant impact.

Mitigation Measure 2.1-1

As a result of the Land Use analysis (see Section 2.1), Mitigation Measure 2.1-1 would require the new 115 kV single-circuit transmission line to be undergrounded beneath Leveroni Road from approximately Fifth Street West to the Sonoma Substation (see **Figure 2.1-4**). The underground portion of the transmission line would be about 1/2 mile

in length. To ensure that implementation of this mitigation measure would not result in any additional environmental impacts, this analysis as it pertains to impacts to agricultural resources is included below.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 2.1-1 would not result in any additional impacts to *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, and *Unique Farmland* because the undergrounded portion of the transmission line would be located beneath the Leveroni Road right-of-way.

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract: *less than significant.*

Substations

The Lakeville and Sonoma Substations are located on parcels that are zoned Public Facilities (Sonoma County) and Gateway Commercial (City of Sonoma), respectively. Neither substation site is located on a parcel that is under a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, modifications to the substations, which would occur within the existing boundary and fence lines of the substations, would not result in any conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract.

Transmission Line

The project would traverse nine parcels which are currently in Williamson Act contracts. Under the Williamson Act, these parcels are subject to an arrangement by the private landowners and Sonoma County to voluntarily restrict land to agricultural and compatible open-space uses. In total, an additional 1.84[1] acres of Williamson Act land would be used for pole foundations and permanent access roads. Government Code Section 51238(a)(1) states that "…the erection, construction, alteration, or maintenance of …electric… facilities are hereby determined to be compatible uses within any agricultural preserve." Government Code Section 51238(a)(2) further states that "[n]o land occupied by …electric…facilities shall be excluded from an agricultural preserve by reason of that use." Therefore, the placement of transmission poles and access roads as well as temporary pull sites and staging areas on land currently under Williamson Act contract would not remove the land from Williamson Act contract status nor would it conflict with the provisions of any of the Williamson Act contracts.

Additionally, the project would not conflict with existing zoning for agriculture use. The transmission line would traverse agriculturally-zoned parcels including parcels zoned Land Extensive Agriculture, Land Intensive Agriculture, and Agriculture and Residential. The transmission line would be constructed (and operated) within an existing easement owned by PG&E along an existing transmission line corridor. Additionally, agricultural uses could continue to occur beneath and adjacent to the transmission line.

[1] The additional 1.84 acres is in addition to Williamson Act land that is already being used for the existing transmission line and existing access roads.

Mitigation Measure 2.1-1

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 2.1-1 would not result in any additional conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract because the undergrounded portion of the transmission line would be located beneath the Leveroni Road right-of-way, which is not zoned for agriculture or within a Williamson Act contract. Leveroni Road is a developed paved road, and therefore, any disturbance to Leveroni Road would not result in adverse impacts to agricultural resources.

References – Agriculture Resources

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