

<i>Issues (and Supporting Information Sources):</i>	<i>Potentially Significant Impact</i>	<i>Potentially Significant Unless Mitigation Incorporated</i>	<i>Less Than Significant Impact</i>	<i>No Impact</i>
II. 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 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?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SETTING

Contra Costa County is comprised of 470,400 acres, with over half (254,445) of these acres allocated to farmlands and harvested cropland. In 1999, the total gross value of agricultural products and crops reached \$86,693,780, a decline of \$71,470 compared to 1998 (Contra Costa County, 1996). Contra Costa County, like many others in California, has experienced a decline in the amount of agricultural land, due to such factors as urban encroachment.

From a historical standpoint, local agricultural operations adjacent to the pipeline alignment have been replaced with new residential and industrial development. The California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program inventoried agricultural resources acreage in 1998. According to the 1998 map, the alignment does not intersect with any Prime Farmlands, Farmland of Local Importance or Unique Farmlands. A small portion of land to the east of the Hercules Pump Station is designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance; however, these lands are not intersected by the actual alignment (California Department of Conservation, 1998).

The majority of the pipeline corridor lies within the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) easement, where several utility lines also exist. Land adjacent to this easement is primarily residential, commercial, and industrial. Approximately four miles of the Briones Hill Agricultural Preserve lies adjacent to the pipeline, west of the City of Martinez. At higher elevations (not adjacent to the pipeline), land is primarily used for grazing. North Richmond has some areas adjacent to the pipeline that are used for nursery crops (e.g., flowers, house plants, shrubs, and Christmas trees) grown in mainly greenhouse settings (Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 2000).

The pipeline originates within the City of Richmond at the Richmond Pump Station within the UPRR easement. Land uses adjacent to the 100-foot UPRR right-of-way are primarily designated for light industrial and residential uses. Light industrial zoning designations within Richmond, including areas between Parchester and north Richmond, allow for commercial nurseries with aboveground containment (City of Richmond, 1994). Any agriculturally related uses within the light industrial zone are considered an interim land use according to the policies contained within the Open Space and Conservation Element of the Richmond General Plan.

The North Richmond Shoreline Specific Plan Environmental Report referred to a 50 acre parcel consisting of dry cultivated pasture in 1992 south of Rheem Creek and west of the UPRR track (Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 2000). According to the document, agriculture activities on the property were not a viable economic use at that time. Subsequent aerial photograph interpretation revealed that this land is currently used for nursery crops with some small vacant areas. The remaining alignment of the pipeline within the City of Richmond encompasses several regional shorelines, devoted primarily to open space use.

Within the cities of Pinole and Hercules there are minor agricultural operations involving seasonally livestock grazing (City of Hercules, 1998, and City of Pinole, 1995). Properties containing these uses are not traversed by the pipeline alignment. The Briones Hills Agricultural Preserve is adjacently south of the pipeline alignment, east of Crockett and west of the City of Martinez. The preserve was created to maintain open space for agricultural, grazing, and parkland use (Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 2000). After review of aerial photographs for this portion of the alignment, no signs of current agricultural uses were observed within the preserve in areas adjacent to the pipeline alignment.

The 4,000-foot replacement section of the pipeline within the City of Martinez traverses through an urban environment and would not traverse any lands facilitating agricultural operations. The remaining portion of the alignment travels to the east and parallels the UPRR up the city of Pittsburg. This entire section of the alignment passes through mainly low-lying shoreline areas, which contain no existing agricultural operations. The majority of the agricultural uses that lie within Contra Costa County are located to the east of Antioch and are a considerable distance outside of the pipeline corridor (Contra Costa County, 1996).

REGULATORY SETTING

STATE REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

California Land Conservation Act

Under the provisions of the Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act 1965, Section 51200), landowners contract with the County to maintain agricultural or open space use of their lands in return for reduced property tax assessment. The contract is self-renewing and the landowner may notify the County at any time of intent to withdraw the land from its preserve status. Withdraw involves a ten-year period of tax adjustment to full market value before

protected open space can be converted to urban uses. Consequently, land under the Williamson Act Contract can be in either a renewal status or a nonrenewable status. Lands with a nonrenewable status indicate the farmer has withdrawn from the Williamson Act Contract and is waiting for a period of tax adjustment for the land to reach its full market value. Nonrenewable lands are candidates for potential urbanization within the next ten years (California Department of Conservation, 2000).

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) which 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 program also produces a biannual report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use. The program maintains an inventory of state agricultural land and updates its "Important Farmland Series Maps" and every two years. The FMMP is an informational service only and does not constitute state regulation of local land use decisions (California Department of Conservation, 2000). Four categories of farmland, Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance, are considered valuable and any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered to be an adverse impact. As indicated in the 1998 FMMP Map, the pipeline alignment does not pass through any areas designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance (California Department of Conservation, 1998).

LOCAL REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

Contra Costa County

The Contra Costa County General Plan Conservation Element provides the framework for preserving the remaining agricultural lands that reside within the County. The following policies are contained within the Agriculture Section of the Conservation Element and dictate what uses are permitted on agriculturally designated lands:

Policy 8-29 - Large contiguous areas of the County should be encouraged to remain in agricultural production, as long as economically viable.

Policy 8-30 - In order to reduce adverse impacts on agricultural and environmental values, and to reduce urban costs to taxpayers, the County shall not designate land located outside the Urban Limit Line for an urban land use.

Policy 8-31 - Urban development in the future shall take place within the Urban Limit Line and areas designated by this plan for urban growth.

Policy 8-32 - Agriculture shall be protected to assure a balance in land use. The policies of Measure C 1990 shall be enforced.

Policy 8-33 - The County will encourage agriculture to continue operating adjacent to developing urban areas.

Policy 8-34 - Urban developments shall be required to establish effective buffers between them and land planned for agricultural uses.

Policy 8-35 - Residents in or near agricultural areas shall be informed and educated regarding the potential nuisances and hazards associated with nearby agricultural practices.

Policy 8-36 - Agriculture shall be protected from nuisance complaints from non-agricultural land uses.

Policy 8-37 - The use of toxic and nutritive chemicals by agricultural operators shall be minimized.

Policy 8-38 - Agricultural operations shall be protected and enhanced through encouragement of Williamson Act contracts to retain designated areas in agricultural use.

Policy 8-39 - A full range of agriculturally related uses shall be allowed and encouraged in agricultural areas.

Policy 8-40 - A 4-acre minimum parcel size for prime productive agricultural land (Class I and II Soils per SCS and Use Capability Classification) shall be established by the County for land outside the designated Urban Unit line. To the extent feasible, the County shall enter into preservation agreements with cities in the County designed to preserve land for agriculture.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES IMPACTS DISCUSSION

a-c) As discussed in the Regulatory Setting, the Pipeline does not traverse any areas designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance. Therefore, the proposed valuation and transfer of the Pipeline would not result in a subsequent conversion of Farmland as shown on maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use. Additionally, the continued operation and construction of the 4,000-foot replacement section in the City of Martinez would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, would result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use. As a result, no impact is expected.

In Martinez, a four-mile segment of the pipeline is adjacent to, but does not cross, the Briones Hill Agricultural Preserve, which is currently under a Williamson Act contract. Operations in the past have not conflicted with the current use, and therefore, it is assumed that the continued operation of the pipeline in this general vicinity would not

conflict with existing the agricultural zoning designation, or Williamson Act contract. As a result, no impact is expected.

REFERENCES

- California Department of Conservation, 2000. Online. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program and Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)
- California Department of Conservation, 1998. Farmland Designation Map for Contra Costa County, 1998.
- Contra Costa County, 1996. Contra Costa County General Plan 1995-2010.
- City of Richmond, 1994. Richmond General Plan, Volume One – Goals, Policies, Guidelines, Standards, and Implementation Programs.
- Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 2000. Proponents Environmental Assessment to Establish market Value for and Sell its Richmond-to-Pittsburg Fuel Oil Pipeline and Hercules Pump Station Pursuant to Public Utilities code Section 367 (B) and 851. Application Number 00-05-035.
- City of Hercules, 1998. City of Hercules General Plan.
- City of Pinole, 1995. City of Pinole General Plan.