

Section 4.2

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4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section describes existing conditions and the potential agricultural resource impacts associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Project and alternatives.

4.2.1 Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Standards

4.2.1.1 Farmland Classifications

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has established classifications for notable agricultural lands based on criteria for soil characteristics, climatic conditions, and water supply. Notable agricultural lands are classified 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

Collectively, these valuable agricultural lands are referred to as Farmland. The USDA NRCS has mapped soils within Riverside County (NRCS 1993).

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

4.2.1.2 Williamson Act

The California Legislature passed the Williamson Act, in 1965, to preserve agricultural and open-space lands by discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses. The CDC oversees agricultural lands protected by the Williamson Act. According to the law, a landowner enters into a contract, agreeing to protect the land's open space or agricultural uses in order to receive reduced property taxes. Nearly 16.9 million of the state's 45 million acres of farm and ranch land are currently protected under the Williamson Act. 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). No Williamson Act parcels are crossed by the Proposed Project.

4.2.2 Significance Criteria

Impacts to agricultural resources are considered potentially significant if the project would:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use

4.2.3 Applicant Proposed Measures

No APMs for agricultural resources are proposed.

4.2.4 Environmental Setting

There are no lands designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance within the project area or on lands occupied by the existing substations associated with the Proposed Project. In addition, the Proposed Project components are not located on lands zoned for agriculture. No lands subject to Williamson Act contracts are crossed by the Proposed Project.

There is an area located north of I-10 and south of the Tri-Palm Estates community that is designated as Farmland of Local Importance. An existing 115 kV subtransmission line crosses this area. Farmland of Local Importance is identified by a local advisory committee and is either currently producing crops, has the capability of production, or is used for the production of confined livestock (CDC FMMP Guidelines). The area is not currently producing crops or used for the production of confined livestock. Analysis of Farmland of Local Importance is not required under CEQA significance criteria and is included in this section for informational purposes only.

4.2.5 Impact Analysis

4.2.5.1 Construction Impacts

Construction activities for all components of the Proposed Project would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use. The Proposed Project would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. The Proposed Project would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.

Transmission

There are no Williamson Act contracts within the community.

Construction of the Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use and would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. Therefore, the Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In would have no impact to agricultural resources.

Subtransmission

Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1)

The City of Palm Springs General Plan Update indicates that there is only one area within the City of Palm Springs designated as Prime Farmland, however, that area is not within the Farrell-Garnet Project Area (see Figure 2.3: New Devers 115 kV Subtransmission Area – Proposed Project and Alternatives). There are no Williamson Act contracts within the City (City of Palm Springs General Plan 2006). Construction of the Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1) would not conflict with existing zoning.

Construction of the Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1) would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use and would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. Therefore, the Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1) would have no impact to agricultural resources.

Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4)

There are no Williamson Act contracts within the community.

Construction of the Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4) would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use and would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. Therefore, the Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4) would have no impact to agricultural resources.

Subtransmission Line Reconfigurations

Construction of the proposed subtransmission line reconfigurations would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use and would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. Therefore, the proposed subtransmission line reconfigurations would have no impact to agricultural resources.

Substations

Construction of the proposed substation modifications would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use and would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. Therefore, the proposed substation modifications would have no impact to agricultural resources.

4.2.5.2 Operational Impacts

Operation of the Proposed Project would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use. The Proposed Project would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. The Proposed Project would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use. In summary, there would be no impact to agricultural resources due to operation of the Proposed Project.

4.2.6 Alternatives

Construction and operation of the subtransmission line alternatives would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use. The alternatives would not cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. In addition, the alternatives would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. In summary, there would be no impact to agricultural resources due to the construction and operation of the subtransmission line route alternatives.

4.2.7 References

California Department of Conservation (CDC). 2006. Division of Land Resource Protection. http://www.consrv.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/map_products/download_gis_data.htm

California Legislative Official Information. 2005. California Government Code section 51290-51295. <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>.

City of Palm Desert Comprehensive General Plan. City of Palm Desert. March 2004.

City of Palm Springs General Plan. 2006. <http://www.psplan.org> [cited November 2006]

City of Palm Springs General Plan Update. 2006. <http://www.psplan.org>. [cited November 2006].

Western Coachella Valley Area Plan. 2006. <http://www.rctlma.org/generalplan/ap2/wcvap.html> [cited October 2006].