

4.2 Agricultural Resources

This section identifies and evaluates issues related to agricultural resources in the context of the Proposed Project and alternatives. It includes a description of existing land use conditions in relation to agricultural resources and an evaluation of potential impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Project and alternatives. A discussion of applicable State, local and regional plans and/or programs is also included.

4.2.1 Setting

Existing Agriculture Resources

The San Joaquin Valley's fertile floor is extensively cultivated for both food crops and livestock. Consequently, Tulare County is typically rural in character, with open pastures and scattered ranches and residences. The County is the second-leading producer of agricultural commodities in the United States, with a total gross production value of 4.9 billion dollars in 2007 (Tulare County, 2008; Tulare County Agriculture Commissioner, 2008). The top 10 products produced in Tulare County in 2007, by total value, were: milk, oranges, cattle and calves, grapes, alfalfa, corn, walnuts, peaches, almonds, and plums (Tulare County Agriculture Commissioner, 2008).

Tulare County is known in particular for its citrus industry, with almost 111,000 acres of citrus (Tulare County Agriculture Commissioner, 2008). California's citrus industry ranks second in the United States after Florida. California produces 24 percent of the nation's oranges, and its crop accounts for 80 percent of those going to the fresh-market (USDA, 2008c). Tulare County is the number one producer of oranges in California, and the leading grower of fresh-market oranges in the nation (Tulare County, 2007a). Supporting oranges, lemons, and other citrus crops, Tulare County's 'Citrus Belt' extends from Porterville through Lindsay, Exeter and Dinuba. It is characterized by a climate, elevation, soil, and water availability that act as a buffer against frost (Visalia Times Delta, 2008).

According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, there are 1,393,456 acres of farmland in Tulare County, including its component cities (USDA, 2002). The Proposed Project would traverse parcels that are currently agricultural in nature, varying from orchards to row crops to grazing lands. The alternatives would traverse parcels that are primarily orchards, open space, and grazing lands. Table 4.2-1 shows the kinds of crops and estimated acreages for orchard and row crops currently grown in the rights-of-way (ROW) for the Proposed Project and alternatives. The most common crop grown in each ROW is oranges, followed by walnuts.

Important Farmland

To characterize the environmental baseline for agricultural resources, Important Farmland Maps produced by the California 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*

**TABLE 4.2-1
CROPS GROWN IN ROW OF PROPOSED PROJECT AND ALTERNATIVES**

Type	Total Acres			
	Proposed Project	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 6
Alfalfa	6.0	--	--	--
Almond	--	15.9	15.9	11.6
Cherry	2.6	5.2	7.8	5.2
Citrus	--	--	--	2.3
Corn	11.3	--	--	--
Grape	--	4.3	--	--
Grapefruit	0.2	--	--	--
Grass Hay	--	10.0	11.0	1.4
Kiwi	--	6.5	5.8	6.5
Lemon	2.9	--	--	--
Nectarine	--	1.5	--	--
Olive	5.6	12.7	11.6	16.7
Orange	108.1	94.2	73.1	125.4
Orange Grapefruit Mix	1.9	--	--	--
Peach	--	1.1	1.1	1.1
Plum	12.8	19.0	10.0	3.6
Pomegranate	3.0	--	--	--
Tangerine	2.6	8.4	2.4	2.5
Walnut	36.0	25.2	25.2	25.2
Total	193.1	204.2	163.9	201.5

NOTE: Existing ROW is estimated to have a width of 150 feet. Proposed ROW is estimated to have a width of 100 feet. Values rounded to one decimal point.

SOURCE: SCE, 2008c (Proposed Project and Alternatives 2, and 3); ESA, 2009 (Alternative 6).

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. The Department of Conservation's FMMP defines these map categories 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 4.2-2 shows the acres of farmland in Tulare County in 2004 and 2006, as well as the amount of recent farmland conversions.

**TABLE 4.2-2
FARMLAND CONVERSION FROM 2004–2006 IN TULARE COUNTY**

Land Use Category	Total Acres Inventoried		2004–2006 Acreage Changes		
	2004	2006	Acres Lost	Acres Gained	Net Change
Prime Farmland	384,388	379,762	5,907	1,281	-4,626
Farmland of Statewide Importance	339,579	332,159	8,961	1,541	-7,420
Unique Farmland	12,527	12,218	862	553	-309
Farmland of Local Importance	137,436	143,826	3,026	9,416	6,390
Grazing Land	440,620	440,135	1,100	615	-485
Agricultural Land Subtotal	1,314,550	1,308,100	19,856	13,406	-6,450

SOURCE: FMMP, 2008.

The Proposed Project would traverse parcels that contain soils classified as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, *Unique Farmland*, *Farmland of Local Importance*, *Grazing Land*, and *Urban and Built-up Land* (Figure 4.2-1). Table 4.2-3 shows the acres of farmland in Tulare County that the ROW of the Proposed Project and alternatives would traverse. Forty-six percent of Proposed Project ROW would be located in land designated as *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, while 42 percent would be located in *Prime Farmland*. Approximately one percent of land in the Proposed Project ROW is designated *Urban and Built-up*. The Alternative 2 ROW

**TABLE 4.2-3
AGRICULTURAL LAND CONTAINED IN THE RIGHT-OF-WAY OF THE
PROPOSED PROJECT AND ALTERNATIVES**

	Total Acres in ROW			
	Proposed Project	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 6
Prime Farmland	97.3	89.3	68.2	67.2
Farmland of Statewide Importance	105.5	132.6	109.0	151.0
Unique Farmland	5.7	4.3	6.8	0.1
Farmland of Local Importance	8.2	61.8	53.7	48.6
Grazing Land	11.4	29.6	123.5	3.7
Urban and Built-up Land	2.8	14.0	14.0	14.0
Land not mapped by FMMP	0.0	9.0	6.7	6.9
Total	231.1	340.7	381.9	291.5

NOTE: Existing ROW is estimated to have a width of 150 feet. Proposed ROW is estimated to have a width of 100 feet. Values rounded to one decimal point.

SOURCE: FMMP, 2006.

would mainly traverse lands designated as *Farmland of Statewide Importance* and *Prime Farmland*. Alternative 3 would primarily traverse *Farmland of Statewide Importance* and *Grazing* (Figure 4.2-1). Alternative 6 would primarily traverse *Farmland of Statewide Importance* and *Prime Farmland* (FMMP, 2006).

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 34 percent of the land acreage in Tulare County is currently in a Williamson Act contract (Tulare County RMA, 2009). The Proposed Project would permanently disturb 23 acres of land currently under a Williamson Act contract (affecting approximately 66 parcels under contract), and temporarily disturb 36 acres. Alternative 2 would permanently disturb 35 acres of Williamson Act contracted land (affecting approximately 58 parcels under contract), and temporarily disturb 77 acres. Alternative 3 would permanently disturb 59 acres of Williamson Act contracted land (affecting approximately 53 parcels under contract), and temporarily disturb 103 acres. Alternative 6 would permanently disturb approximately 30 acres of Williamson Act contracted land (affecting approximately 74 parcels under contract), and temporarily disturb approximately 51 acres.

Regulatory Setting

State

California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the 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. The FMMP is an informational service only and does not have regulatory jurisdiction over local land use decisions. For the purpose of this environmental analysis and consistency with the Farmland Policy Act of 1981, farmland includes *Prime Farmland*, *Unique Farmland*, and *Farmland of Statewide Importance* or *Farmland of Local Importance*, and any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered to be an adverse impact.

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (commonly referred to as the Williamson Act) serves to preserve open spaces and agricultural land. It discourages urban sprawl and prevents landowners from developing their property for the greater land value of commercial and/or residential uses. The Williamson Act is a State program that allows agricultural landowners to pay reduced property taxes in return for their contractual agreement to retain the land in agricultural and open space uses for a period of 10 years. The term of the contract automatically renews each year, so that the contract always has a 10 year period left to function. The Williamson Act Program was revised by the enactment of Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) legislation during the 1998 legislative session, offering landowners greater property tax reduction in exchange for a longer contract term than under the Williamson Act Program.

Local

Tulare County General Plan (Proposed Project and Alternatives 2, 3 and 6)

For all County lands within the study area, the Tulare County General Plan land use designation is *Agriculture* (Washam, 2008). However, the Tulare County General Plan has two amendments that further classify agricultural lands in the County: the Rural Valley Lands Plan (1975) and the Foothill Growth Management Plan (1981). See Section 4.9, *Land Use, Planning, and Policies* for further discussion.

The following goals and policies identified in the Tulare County General Plan Land Use and Urban Boundaries Element may be applicable to the Proposed Project and alternatives:

Goal ILU.A: Retention of community identity, preservation of the agricultural economic base and control of urban sprawl.

Policy ILU.A.4: The predominant agricultural character of land between communities should be preserved.

Policy 1LU.A.5: Weight should be given to agricultural land quality and productivity in determining areas of urban expansion. Special emphasis should be given to the preservation of Class I soils and lands which produce or are capable of producing high value specialty crops by encouraging urban extensions into less productive areas where such opportunities are present.

The following policies identified in the Tulare County General Plan Environmental Resources Management Element may be applicable to the Proposed Project and alternatives:

Policy 6.I.5: Attempt to maintain agriculture as a primary, extensive land use, not only in recognition of the economic importance of agriculture, but also in terms of agriculture's real contribution to the economic conservation of open space and natural resources.

Policy 6.I.6: Recognize the need to utilize the Williamson Land Conservation Act on all agricultural lands throughout the county and not just within three miles of the city limits. It should support the concept that agriculture is a total, functioning system, which will suffer when any part of it is subjected to conflicts of land use, urban-based speculative tax procedures, or excessive fragmentation. It should be aggressive in its support, at the state level, of the use of the Land Conservation Act to protect viable agricultural and other open space lands throughout the county, without limitation by the rationale that only land within three miles of the city limits is threatened by urban uses. The County Board of Supervisors should pass a resolution stating that all lands in the county otherwise eligible for this program are subject to such pressure and should be included in the Williamson Land Conservation Act agricultural preserves. The Local Agency Formation Commission should concur in this action.

Policy 6.J.2: Urban uses should be permitted on Class I, II, and III soils only when they are located within the Spheres of Influence around each municipality and service center community within the county.

(Tulare County, 2001).

Tulare County Zoning Ordinance (Proposed Project and Alternatives 2, 3 and 6)

The Tulare County Zoning Ordinance has specific zoning designations for agricultural lands. The AE-20, AE-40, and AE-80 Districts are intended to be applied to land areas which are used or are suitable for use for intensive agricultural production on 20, 40, and 80 acre minimum parcels, respectively. The AF District is intended to be applied to agricultural and open space protection. The A-1 District is intended to provide an area for agricultural production (Tulare County, 2007b). See Section 4.9, *Land Use, Planning, and Policies*, for further discussion.

City of Visalia General Plan (Proposed Project and Alternatives 2, 3 and 6)

The City of Visalia General Plan designates a portion of the parcels through which the Proposed Project and alternatives would traverse as *Agriculture*. The following policy and objective identified in the General Plan Land Use Element would be applicable to the Proposed Project and alternatives:

Policy 6.1.3: Preserve and enhance the planning area's natural features and resource lands.

Objective A: Protect agricultural land from premature urban development.

(City of Visalia, 1996).

The following goal identified in the General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element may be applicable to the Proposed Project and alternatives:

Goal 2, Objective C: Preserve and protect agricultural use on lands in and surrounding the Visalia Planning Area for open space purposes and managed production of resources.

(City of Visalia, 1989).

City of Visalia Zoning Ordinance (Proposed Project and Alternatives 2, 3 and 6)

The Proposed Project would not traverse any parcels zoned *Agriculture* by the City of Visalia Zoning Ordinance. Alternatives 2, 3 and 6 would traverse land zoned *Agriculture* (City of Visalia, 2008). See Section 4.9, *Land Use, Planning, and Policies*, for further discussion.

City of Farmersville General Plan (Proposed Project)

The City of Farmersville General Plan designates a portion of the parcels through which the Proposed Project would traverse as *Agriculture/Urban Reserve*. The following goal identified in the General Plan Land Use Element may be applicable to the Proposed Project:

Issue Nine: Agricultural Lands, Goal 1: Farmersville will ensure that its primary economic base (agriculture) is protected.

The following goal identified in the General Plan Conservation, Open Space, Parks and Recreation Element may be applicable to the Proposed Project:

Issue Four: Urban Boundaries and Farmland Protection, Goal 1, Objective 1: Preserve and protect agricultural lands as a means for providing open space and for the managed production of resources.

(City of Farmersville, 2002).

City of Farmersville Zoning Ordinance (Proposed Project)

The Proposed Project and alternatives would not traverse any parcels in the City of Farmersville zoned for agriculture.

4.2.2 Significance Criteria

The significance criteria for this analysis were developed from criteria presented in Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*. The project would result in a significant impact to agricultural resources if it would:

- 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; or
- 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.

4.2.3 Applicant Proposed Measures

No Applicant Proposed Measures have been identified by SCE to reduce project impacts on agriculture resources.

4.2.4 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Approach to Analysis

Based on the *CEQA Guidelines*, the analysis considers whether the Proposed Project would result in impacts to *Prime Farmland*, *Unique Farmland*, and *Farmland of Statewide Importance* (hereafter collectively referred to as Farmland). For information purposes, impacts to *Farmland of Local Importance* and *Grazing* are provided below; however, from a CEQA perspective, impacts to these agricultural designations are not considered significant, and consequently, do not require mitigation.

This impact analysis considers the potential agricultural effects of activities associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Project, including modification of the Rector, Springville, Vestal, and Big Creek 3 Substations. The proposed modifications at the Springville, Vestal, and Big Creek 3 Substations consist solely of electrical system and safety upgrades. All substation work would occur on previously disturbed areas within the existing footprint of the substations, and the associated construction, operation and maintenance activities would have no impact to agricultural resources. Similarly, the same type of electrical system and safety upgrade activities proposed for the Rector Substation would not have any potential impacts to agricultural resources.

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.

Impact 4.2-1: Construction activities would result in the temporary impacts to designated Farmland. *Less than significant with mitigation* (Class II)

Proposed Project construction would involve temporary and permanent impacts to Farmland. For purposes of analyzing impacts to agricultural lands, temporary impacts would occur in areas that would be used for construction-related purposes for the duration of the Proposed Project as well as to any work area and/or pull and tension sites that may need to be prepared for use during construction. Temporary impacts do not include work areas at pole sites that would not need preparation, as no grading would occur in these areas and the duration would be less than one day.

The Proposed Project would cause temporary disturbance to Farmland due to site preparation associated with: structure construction setup areas; structure removal area; wire-stringing tension, pull and splicing sites; and guard structure locations. No temporary impacts to Farmland would

occur from the use of the two staging areas, as the staging areas would be located at existing commercial facilities near the Proposed Project (SCE, 2008a).

Table 4.2-4 shows temporary and permanent impacts to Farmland and other designated agricultural land that would result from construction related activities associated with the Proposed Project.

**TABLE 4.2-4
TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS TO
AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

	Temporary Impacts (acres) ^a	Permanent Impacts (acres) ^a
Prime Farmland	29.5	16.1
Unique Farmland	2.2	0.7
Farmland of Statewide Importance	19.9	14.3
Total Farmland Impact	51.7	31.1
Farmland of Local Importance ^b	7.6	1.1
Grazing ^b	6.7	2.7

^a Values rounded to one decimal point.

^b From a CEQA perspective, impacts to these agricultural designations are not considered significant. They are provided in this analysis for informational purposes.

SOURCE: FMMP, 2006.

In total, preparation of work areas and pull and tension sites would temporarily reduce the amount of Farmland available for agricultural purposes by approximately 51.7 acres. After the completion of construction, these acres would be returned to agricultural use. Implementation of the following mitigation measures would support the continued productive use of Farmland in the project area once construction is complete.

Mitigation Measure 4.2-1a: SCE and/or its contractors shall ensure that the following measures are taken, during construction of the Proposed Project:

- Replace soils in a manner that shall minimize any negative impacts on crop productivity. The surface and subsurface layers shall be stockpiled separately and returned to their appropriate locations in the soil profile.
- To avoid over-compaction of the top layers of soil, monitor pre-construction soil densities and return the surface soil (approximately the top three feet) to within five percent of original density.
- Where necessary, the top soil layers shall be ripped to achieve the appropriate soil density. Ripping may also be used in areas where vehicle and equipment traffic have compacted the top soil layers.

- Avoid working or traveling on wet soil to minimize compaction and loss of soil structure.
- Remove all construction-related debris from the soil surface. This shall prevent rock, gravel, and construction debris from interfering with agricultural activities.
- Remove topsoil before excavating in fields. Return it to top of fields to avoid detrimental inversion of soil profiles.

Mitigation Measure 4.2-1b: SCE and/or its contractors shall incorporate the following measures into the project construction plans and specifications specific to lands designated as Farmland:

- Coordinate construction scheduling as practicable so as to minimize disruption of agricultural operations by scheduling excavation to occur before or after the growing season.
- Minimize construction dust on crops by implementing Mitigation Measure 4.3-1b (see Section 4.3, *Air Quality*).
- Supply replacement crops and trees at a mitigation ratio of one to one, upon completion of construction. Coordinate planting of replacement crops and trees with landowners.

The above mitigation measures would reduce temporary construction impacts; however, a significant portion of affected Farmland contains walnut and orange orchards. It takes walnut trees and orange trees approximately 10 years to reach full maximum production (Purdue University, 2008; World Agro-forestry Center, 2008). Nonetheless, the Proposed Project's disturbance to walnut and orange orchards would be considered temporary in nature and would not result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use. From a CEQA perspective (i.e., impacts to the physical environment), because the lands would continue to be available for agriculture uses, the temporary disturbance to these lands would be less than significant after implementation of the above mitigation measures.

However, the CPUC recognizes that the temporary impacts to some crops (i.e., walnuts and orange orchards) could last for upwards of 10 years. While not an impact consideration in this CEQA analysis, it is noted here that the fiscal impacts related to loss of agricultural production would be addressed by SCE during its ROW acquisition process.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Impact 4.2-2: Construction activities would result in the permanent removal of designated Farmland. *Significant unmitigable* (Class I)

In addition to temporary impacts, the Proposed Project would cause permanent disturbance to Farmland due to construction of new permanent access roads and placement of 114 new poles and lattice towers. A 50-foot maintenance buffer would surround each pole and tower (SCE, 2008a).

However, some currently disturbed Farmland would have the potential to be returned to agricultural use. Under the Proposed Project, 12 existing lattice towers located in areas designated by the FMMP as Farmland would be removed, each of which has an approximate 24-foot by 24-foot base. Land covered by these existing towers that is not located within the maintenance area of new towers could be returned to productive agricultural use. The calculations for total permanent impacts take into account this potentially reclaimed land.¹

Table 4.2-4, above, provides a summary of the permanent impacts to Farmland from construction of the Proposed Project. In total, construction of the Proposed Project would result in a total permanent conversion of approximately 31.1 acres of Farmland, including 16.1 acres of *Prime Farmland*, 0.7 acres of *Unique Farmland*, and 14.3 acres of *Farmland of Statewide Importance*. A variety of crops are currently grown within these 31.1 acres, the most common of which are oranges (13.8 acres) and walnuts (4.6 acres). Table 4.2-5 provides the specific crops located on Farmland that would be permanently converted by the Proposed Project.

**TABLE 4.2-5
DESIGNATED FARMLAND CROPS PERMANENTLY
DISTURBED BY THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

Crop Type	Total Acres	
	Disturbed	Reclaimed
Alfalfa	0.7	--
Cherry	--	0.01
Corn	0.2	--
Lemon	0.6	--
Olive	1.0	--
Orange	13.8	--
Orange Grapefruit Mix	0.5	--
Plum	1.2	0.03
Pomegranate	0.2	--
Seasonal Corn	1.2	--
Tangerine	0.1	0.1
Walnut	4.6	--
Total	24.2^a	0.1

^a Total Farmland by crop does not add up to 31.1 acres because some Farmland is currently unplanted.

SOURCE: SCE, 2008c

¹ SCE's policy is to maintain a 50-foot maintenance area around poles and towers. However, within the existing ROW associated with the Proposed Project and alternatives, agricultural crops generally occupy what should be the maintenance areas around existing lattice structures. Therefore for purposes of this CEQA analysis, only the actual footprint of the existing lattice structures were included in reclamation calculations.

Mitigation Measure 4.2-2: For each acre of *Prime Farmland*, *Unique Farmland*, or *Farmland of Statewide Importance* that is permanently converted, SCE shall obtain one (1) acre of agricultural conservation easements. An agricultural conservation easement is a voluntary, recorded agreement between a landowner and a holder of the easement that preserves the land for agriculture. The easement places legally enforceable restrictions on the land. The exact terms of the easement are negotiated, but restricted activities shall include subdivision of that property, non-farm development, and other uses that are inconsistent with agricultural production. The mitigation lands must be of equal or better quality (according to the latest available FMMP data) and have an adequate water supply. In addition, the mitigation lands must be within the same county as the impact.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-2 would reduce the impact of the proposed conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, but not to a less than significant level. The reduction of approximately 31.1 acres of Farmland would result in the permanent conversion of Farmland. Therefore, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable.

Significance after Mitigation: Significant unmitigable.

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

Impact 4.2-3: Construction, operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project could conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract. *Less than significant* (Class III)

The Proposed Project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use. The Proposed Project would replace an existing transmission line in an existing utility corridor in Visalia, and the remaining new ROW would not conflict with any zoning or land use designations in Farmersville or Tulare County (see Section 4.9, *Land Use, Planning, and Policies*). In addition, agriculture is generally considered to be a compatible land use with utility corridors.

As discussed in the *Setting*, the Proposed Project would traverse land in Tulare County and the cities of Visalia and Farmersville designated for agricultural use. It would also permanently disturb 23 acres of land currently under a Williamson Act contract, and temporarily disturb 36 acres under a Williamson Act contract (see Figure 4.2-2). Government Code Section 51238 states that electrical facilities are a compatible Williamson Act use. The placement of transmission poles/towers on land currently under Williamson Act contract would not remove the land from Williamson Act contract status. Thus, there would be a less than significant impact related to Williamson Act status of parcels through which the Proposed Project would traverse. In addition, the transmission line would allow for many agricultural uses under and adjacent to the line.

Mitigation: None required.

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.

Impact 4.2-4: The Proposed Project could involve removal of orchards which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of additional Farmland to non-agricultural use. *Significant unmitigable (Class I)*

The Proposed Project is an energy infrastructure project, not a land development project, and it would not result in the type of impacts to agricultural resources that would be expected with a typical development project. The Proposed Project would not result in further urbanization of the area or make agricultural land vulnerable to the pressures of urbanization.

Nonetheless, the Proposed Project would have the potential to lead to the loss of Farmland to non-agricultural uses in areas where the ROW would require permanent removal of walnut orchards for maintenance purposes. Approximately 29 acres of walnut orchards located on designated Farmland would be removed from under proposed transmission lines in the new portion of the ROW. This loss of Farmland is in addition to the 4.6 acres of walnut orchards on Farmland that would be permanently disturbed by the Proposed Project, as discussed under Impact 4.2-2. Walnut trees can reach 60 feet in height (USDA, 2008b). According to SCE regulations, shrubs and trees located within the ROW (e.g., under the transmission lines) must be maintained to not exceed a 15-foot maximum height (SCE, 2008b). When cropped to 15 feet, walnut trees would no longer be productive. Consequently, the Proposed Project would cause the permanent removal of 29 acres of walnut orchards located within the ROW. Furthermore, because of the height restrictions, no reclaimed land in the existing ROW could be used for new walnut orchards. Though removal of walnut trees would not result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use, the presence of the ROW would create a permanent impact to productive walnut orchards. Furthermore, farmers may or may not replant an alternative crop within the ROW. In effect, this would lead to formerly productive Farmland becoming permanently unusable.

Other crops and trees growing in the ROW include orange orchards, other fruit trees, and row crops such as alfalfa and corn. However, unlike walnut trees, orange and other citrus trees are able to remain productive even when topped at 15 feet under transmission lines (USDA, 2008a). Consequently, orange orchards and the other crops growing in the ROW would not require permanent removal in the ROW for maintenance purposes.

Mitigation Measure 4.2-4: Implement Mitigation Measure 4.2-2.

While implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-4 would reduce the impact of the proposed conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, it would not reduce the impact to a less than significant level. The permanent removal of 29 acres of walnut orchards in designated Farmland would result in the conversion of a significant amount of agricultural land. Therefore, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable.

Significance after Mitigation: Significant unmitigable.

Impact 4.2-5: The Proposed Project could impact existing irrigation and other ancillary systems required for farming productivity, resulting in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. *Less than significant with mitigation* (Class II)

The Proposed Project could result in temporary or permanent removal, relocation, and/or replacement of ancillary farming systems such as water pumps, irrigation pipelines, and gas lines. Removing farmers' ability to irrigate crops and orchards could effectively render formerly productive Farmland unusable, resulting in the conversion of additional Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Mitigation Measure 4.2-5: SCE and/or its contractors shall incorporate the following measures into project construction plans and specifications specific to lands designated as Farmland:

- Ensure that existing drainage systems at Proposed Project sites that are needed for farming activities function as necessary so that agricultural uses are not disrupted.
- Coordinate with landowners to ensure that construction does not impact irrigation and/or other ancillary farming systems to a degree that farming practices cannot be maintained.
- Maintain existing levels of water available to farmers via the current irrigation system. This may include, but not be limited to, implementing re-routing and/or temporary irrigation systems.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-5 would ensure that no additional Farmland is indirectly converted to non-agricultural use because of impacts to existing irrigation and other ancillary systems required for farming productivity.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

4.2.5 Cumulative Impacts

Agricultural uses, including hundreds of dairies and thousands of acres of citrus and walnut groves, still dominate Tulare County's landscape; however, the County has seen a reduction in agricultural land due to urbanization. In 2006 (most recent inventory), the total acreage of Farmland in Tulare County was 736,494 acres. There has been a reduction of 12,355 acres of Farmland for Tulare County between 2004 and 2006 (see Table 4.2-2) (FMMP, 2008).

As a number of the projects discussed in Section 3.6, *Cumulative Projects*, are not yet in the environmental planning stage, the acreage of Farmland that could be converted by these projects is not known. However, in general, the acreage of Farmland in Tulare County is expected to decline. The Proposed Project would contribute incrementally to this decline.

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a, 4.2-1b, and 4.2-2 would minimize impacts under the Proposed Project; however, those measures would not reduce impacts related to the permanent reduction of agricultural lands to less than significant levels. Therefore, the incremental contribution of Farmland conversion associated with the Proposed Project would be a cumulatively considerable contribution to an existing significant cumulative impact. This impact would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

4.2.6 Alternatives

No Project Alternative

Under the No Project Alternative, the Proposed Project would not be implemented; therefore, no impacts to agricultural resource would occur (No Impact).

Alternative 2

a) Convert Farmland, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use.

Approximately 93 percent of Alternative 2 would cross land designated as *Prime Farmland*, *Unique Farmland*, and *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, *Farmland of Local Importance*, and *Grazing*. The majority of Alternative 2 would traverse *Prime Farmland* and *Farmland of Statewide Importance* (see Figure 4.2-1).

Alternative 2 crosses proportionately less Farmland than the Proposed Project. Construction activities would result in greater temporary disturbance; however a greater amount of land would be restored to agricultural uses following construction resulting in less permanent impacts to Farmland. Table 4.2-6 shows temporary and permanent impacts that would result from construction related activities associated with Alternative 2.

In total, preparation of work areas and pull and tension sites would temporarily reduce the amount of Farmland by approximately 88.0 acres, approximately 36.3 more acres than the Proposed Project. After the completion of construction, these acres would be returned to agricultural use and implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a and 4.2-1b would reduce these temporary impacts to a less than significant level. Like the Proposed Project, effects to Farmland containing walnut and orange orchards would be temporary in nature and would not result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant with mitigation (Class II).

In total, construction of Alternative 2 would result in a permanent conversion of approximately 24.0 acres of land designated as Farmland, approximately 7.2 acres less than the Proposed Project. The construction of roads and new pole sites would permanently disturb approximately

**TABLE 4.2-6
TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS TO
AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM ALTERNATIVE 2**

	Temporary Impacts (acres) ^a	Permanent Impacts (acres) ^a
Prime Farmland	33.9	9.5
Unique Farmland	2.6	0.6
Farmland of Statewide Importance	51.4	13.8
Total Farmland Impact	88.0	24.0
Farmland of Local Importance ^b	20.9	12.4
Grazing ^b	7.4	7.5

^a Values rounded to one decimal point.

^b From a CEQA perspective, impacts to these agricultural designations are not considered significant. They are provided in this analysis for informational purposes.

SOURCE: FMMP, 2006

25.8 acres of Farmland, while the removal of 151 existing towers would result in potential reclamation of 1.9 acres of Farmland. Crops growing on the 24.0 acres of Farmland that would be permanently disturbed are summarized below in Table 4.2-7. Alternative 2 would disturb approximately 4.7 less acres of oranges than the Proposed Project, and approximately 3.5 less acres of walnuts.

**TABLE 4.2-7
CROPS THAT WOULD BE PERMANENTLY DISTURBED BY
ALTERNATIVE 2**

Crop Type	Total Acres	
	Disturbed	Reclaimed
Almond	1.3	0.2
Cherry	0.0	0.1
Grape	0.3	--
Grass Hay	1.2	0.1
Kiwi	0.4	0.0
Nectarine	0.1	--
Olive	1.8	0.1
Orange	9.1	0.7
Peach	0.1	--
Plum	2.5	0.1
Tangerine	1.9	0.0
Walnut	1.1	--
Total	19.8^a	1.2

^a Total Farmland by crop does not add up to 24 acres because some Farmland is currently unplanted.

SOURCE: SCE, 2008c

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-2 would reduce the impact of the proposed permanent conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, but not to a less than significant level. Therefore, similar to the Proposed Project, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

Like the Proposed Project, Alternative 2 would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use; therefore, impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

Alternative 2 would traverse land in Tulare County and the City of Visalia zoned for agricultural use. Compared to the Proposed Project, Alternative 2 would permanently and temporarily disturb 12 and 41 more acres, respectively, of land currently under a Williamson Act contract (see Figure 4.2-2). However, electrical facilities are considered compatible with Williamson Act use. Therefore, although Alternative 2 would cause greater temporary and permanent impacts to lands under a Williamson Act contract, overall, impacts would remain less than significant (Class III).

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.

Similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 2 would not result in further urbanization of the area or make agricultural land vulnerable to the pressures of urbanization. However, like the Proposed Project, Alternative 2 would lead to the additional loss of designated Farmland and non-designated farmland to non-agricultural uses, due to permanent removal of walnut orchards under the ROW.

Approximately 12 acres of walnut orchards are located within the existing SCE ROW associated with Alternative 2 which is 17 acres less than the Proposed Project. Alternative 2 would permanently remove these walnut orchards from production. As with the Proposed Project, farmers may or may not replant an alternative crop within the ROW, which could lead to formerly productive agricultural land becoming permanently unusable. While implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-4 would reduce the impact of the proposed conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, it would not be reduced to a less than significant level. The permanent removal of 12 acres of walnut orchards would result in the conversion of Farmland. Therefore, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

Also similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 2 could result in impacts to irrigation systems and/or ancillary farming systems that could result in the indirect conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-5 would reduce the impact of this potential conversion of Farmland to less than significant (Class II).

Alternative 3

a) Convert Farmland, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use.

Approximately 95 percent of Alternative 3 would cross lands designated as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, *Unique Farmland*, *Farmland of Local Importance*, and *Grazing*. The majority of the Alternative 3 would traverse *Farmland of Statewide Importance* and *Grazing* (see Figure 4.2-1).

Construction of Alternative 3 would result in greater temporary impacts to Farmland, but less permanent impacts than the Proposed Project. Table 4.2-8 shows temporary and permanent impacts that would result from construction related activities associated with Alternative 3.

**TABLE 4.2-8
TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS TO
AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM ALTERNATIVE 3**

	Temporary Impacts (acres) ^a	Permanent Impacts (acres) ^a
Prime Farmland	29.4	6.6
Unique Farmland	6.3	0.9
Farmland of Statewide Importance	49.2	9.2
Total Farmland Impacts	85.0	16.7
Farmland of Local Importance ^b	27.4	7.5
Grazing ^b	38.8	42

^a Values rounded to one decimal point.

^b From a CEQA perspective, impacts to these agricultural designations are not considered significant. They are provided in this analysis for informational purposes.

SOURCE: FMMP, 2006

In total, preparation of work areas and pull and tension sites would temporarily reduce the amount of Farmland by approximately 85.0 acres, approximately 33.3 more acres than the Proposed Project. After the completion of construction, these acres would be returned to agricultural use and implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a and 4.2-1b would reduce these temporary impacts to a less than significant level. Like the Proposed Project, effects to Farmland containing walnut and orange orchards would be temporary in nature and would not result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant with mitigation (Class II).

In total, construction of Alternative 3 would result in a total permanent conversion of approximately 16.7 acres of land designated as Farmland, approximately 14.4 acres less than Proposed Project. While the construction of roads and new pole sites would permanently disturb

approximately 18.7 acres of Farmland, removal of 167 existing towers would result in potential reclamation of 2.0 acres. Crops growing on the 16.7 acres of Farmland that would be permanently removed are summarized below in Table 4.2-9. Alternative 3 would disturb approximately 7.5 less acres of oranges than the Proposed Project, and approximately 3.5 less acres of walnuts.

**TABLE 4.2-9
CROPS THAT WOULD BE PERMANENTLY DISTURBED BY
ALTERNATIVE 3**

Crop Type	Total Acres	
	Disturbed	Reclaimed
Almond	1.3	0.2
Cherry	0.4	0.0
Grass Hay	1.0	0.1
Kiwi	0.3	0.0
Olive	1.4	0.1
Orange	6.3	0.8
Peach	0.1	--
Plum	1.3	0.1
Tangerine	--	0.1
Walnut	1.1	--
Total	13.4^a	1.4

^a Total Farmland by crop does not add up to 16.7 acres because some Farmland is currently unplanted.

SOURCE: SCE, 2008c

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-2 would reduce the impact of the proposed permanent conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, but not to a less than significant level. Therefore, similar to the Proposed Project, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

Like the Proposed Project, Alternative 3 would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use; therefore, impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

Alternative 3 would traverse land in Tulare County and the City of Visalia zoned for agricultural use. Compared to the Proposed Project, Alternative 3 would permanently and temporarily disturb 36 and 67 more acres, respectively, of land currently under a Williamson Act contract (see Figure 4.2-2). However, electrical facilities are considered compatible with Williamson Act use. Therefore, although Alternative 3 would cause greater temporary and permanent impacts to lands under a Williamson Act contract, overall, impacts would remain less than significant (Class III).

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.

Similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 3 would not result in further urbanization of the area or make agricultural land vulnerable to the pressures of urbanization, but would lead to the additional loss of Farmland to non-agricultural uses due to loss of walnut orchards in the ROW.

Approximately 12 acres of walnut orchards are located within the existing SCE ROW associated with Alternative 3 which is 17 acres less than the Proposed Project. Alternative 3 would permanently remove these walnut orchards from production. As with the Proposed Project, farmers may or may not replant an alternative crop within the ROW, which could lead to formerly productive agricultural land becoming permanently unusable. While implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-4 would reduce the impact of the proposed conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, it would not be reduced to a less than significant level. The permanent removal of 12 acres of walnut orchards would result in the conversion of Farmland. Therefore, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

Also similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 3 could result in impacts to irrigation systems and/or ancillary farming systems that could result in the indirect conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-5 would reduce the impact of this potential conversion of Farmland to less than significant (Class II).

Alternative 6

a) Convert Farmland, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non agricultural use.

Approximately 93 percent of Alternative 6 would cross lands designated as *Prime Farmland*, *Farmland of Statewide Importance*, *Unique Farmland*, *Farmland of Local Importance*, and *Grazing*. The majority of the Alternative 6 would traverse *Farmland of Statewide Importance* and *Prime Farmland* (see Figure 4.2-1).

As discussed in the setting, since Alternative 6 was developed by the EIR Preparers, detailed construction metrics have not been developed by SCE. Nevertheless, using construction metrics derived from SCE data developed for Alternative 2 (described in detail in Chapter 3), construction of Alternative 6 would likely result in greater temporary and less permanent impacts to Farmland than the Proposed Project. Table 4.2-10 shows estimated temporary and permanent impacts that would result from construction related activities associated with Alternative 6.

In total, preparation of work areas and pull and tension sites would temporarily reduce the amount of Farmland by approximately 72.2 acres, approximately 20.5 more acres than the Proposed Project. However, after the completion of construction, temporarily disturbed acres would be returned to agricultural use and implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a and 4.2-1b would

**TABLE 4.2-10
TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS TO
AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM ALTERNATIVE 6**

	Temporary Impacts (acres) ^a	Permanent Impacts (acres) ^a
Prime Farmland	28.1	6.7
Unique Farmland	0.0	0.0
Farmland of Statewide Importance	44.1	24.0
Total Farmland Impacts	72.2	30.7
Farmland of Local Importance ^b	14.7	9.6
Grazing ^b	0.4	0.8

- ^a Values rounded to one decimal point. Temporary and permanent impact values represent approximations based upon information for Alternative 2 provided by the project applicant and information provided in the PEA. See Chapter 3 for details on construction assumptions.
- ^b From a CEQA perspective, impacts to these agricultural designations are not considered significant. They are provided in this analysis for informational purposes.

SOURCE: FMMP, 2006

reduce these temporary impacts to a less than significant level. Like the Proposed Project, effects to Farmland containing walnut and orange orchards would be temporary in nature and would not result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant with mitigation (Class II).

In total, construction of Alternative 6 would result in a total permanent conversion of approximately 30.7 acres of land designated as Farmland, approximately 0.4 acres less than Proposed Project. While the construction of roads and new pole sites would permanently disturb approximately 32.0 acres of Farmland, removal of 138 existing towers would result in potential reclamation of 1.3 acres. Crops growing on the 30.7 acres of Farmland that would be permanently removed are summarized below in Table 4.2-11. Alternative 6 would disturb approximately 6.9 more acres of oranges than the Proposed Project, and approximately 3.5 less acres of walnuts.

While implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-2 would reduce the impact of permanent conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, it would not be reduced to a less than significant level. Therefore, similar to the Proposed Project, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

Like the Proposed Project, Alternative 6 would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use; therefore, impacts would be less than significant (Class III).

**TABLE 4.2-11
CROPS THAT WOULD BE PERMANENTLY DISTURBED BY
ALTERNATIVE 6**

Crop Type	Total Acres ^a	
	Disturbed	Reclaimed
Almond	1.0	0.1
Cherry	0.0	0.1
Grape	0.1	0.0
Kiwi	0.4	0.0
Olive	2.1	0.0
Orange	21.2	0.5
Peach	0.1	0.0
Plum	0.7	0.0
Stone fruit	0.4	0.0
Tangerine	0.3	0.0
Walnut	1.1	0.0
Total^b	27.4	0.7

^a Values rounded to one decimal point. Temporary and permanent impact values represent approximations based upon information for Alternative 2 provided by the project applicant and information provided in the PEA. See Chapter 3 for details on construction assumptions.

^b Total Farmland by crop does not add up to 30.7 acres because some Farmland is currently unplanted.

SOURCE: SCE, 2008c; ESA, 2009

Alternative 6 would traverse land in Tulare County and the City of Visalia zoned for agricultural use. Based on construction metrics described in Chapter 3, compared to the Proposed Project Alternative 6 would likely permanently and temporarily disturb seven and 15 more acres, respectively, of Williamson Act Contracts (see Figure 4.2-2). However, electrical facilities are considered compatible with Williamson Act use. Therefore, although Alternative 6 would cause temporary and permanent impacts to lands under a Williamson Act contract, overall, impacts would remain less than significant (Class III).

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.

Similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 6 would not result in further urbanization of the area or make agricultural land vulnerable to the pressures of urbanization, but would lead to the additional loss of Farmland to non-agricultural uses due to loss of walnut orchards in the ROW.

Approximately 12 acres of walnut orchards are located within the existing SCE ROW associated with Alternative 6, which is 17 acres less than the Proposed Project. Alternative 6 would permanently remove these walnut orchards from production. As with the Proposed Project, farmers may or may not replant an alternative crop within the ROW, which could lead to formerly productive agricultural land becoming permanently unusable. While implementation of

Mitigation Measure 4.2-4 would reduce the impact of the proposed conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses, it would not be reduced to a less than significant level. The permanent removal of 12 acres of walnut orchards would result in the conversion of Farmland. Therefore, permanent impacts to Farmland would be significant unmitigable (Class I).

Also similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 6 could result in impacts to irrigation systems and/or ancillary farming systems that could result in the indirect conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-5 would reduce the impact of this potential conversion of Farmland to less than significant (Class II).

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