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CHAPTER 4 – ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-Than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Measures	Less-Than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland) (as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency) to non-agricultural use?	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2.0 Introduction

This section describes the existing agricultural resources in the vicinity of the San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) East County (ECO) Substation Project (Proposed Project) site and evaluates potential impacts to these resources that may result from construction or operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project. The Proposed Project components will not cross any land under a Williamson Act contract, nor will they cross any land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Farmland of Local Importance. Additionally, the Proposed Project components will not cross any land zoned for agricultural production; however, land currently in active agricultural use will be crossed and permanently impacted. Impacts to this land will be minimal and, as a result, the Proposed Project will have a less-than-significant impact on agricultural resources.

4.2.1 Methodology

The Proposed Project site analysis involved review of the San Diego County General Plan, the Central Mountain Community Plan, and the Mountain Empire Subregional Plan. The analysis also included review of aerial photographs and relevant maps, including the California Department of Conservation (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) map, the Williamson Act map for San Diego County, and San Diego County Land Use Designation and Zoning maps. Field visits to the site were also conducted to gather relevant information.

4.2.2 Existing Conditions

Regulatory Background

Federal and State

DOC FMMP Important Farmland Designations

The DOC Division of Land Resource Protection FMMP generates maps depicting Important Farmlands. These farmlands are categorized according to specific criteria, including soil quality and irrigation conditions. Approximately 94 percent of the FMMP study area is based on the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil classification system, which evaluates both physical and chemical conditions, including soil temperature, moisture regime, pH, flooding, groundwater depth, erodibility, permeability, and sodium content. FMMP maps are updated every two years using aerial imagery review, field reconnaissance, computer mapping analyses, and public input. The minimum land use mapping unit is 10 acres; smaller units of land are generally incorporated into surround map classifications.

The extent of farmland designation coverage in California is relative to the availability of NRCS soil survey data. In areas for which data is not available, a series of Interim Farmland definitions have been established to allow land use monitoring to occur until soil data is available.

The DOC has established eight land use classifications. A brief summary of each designation is as follows:

- **Prime Farmland:** Prime Farmland has the optimum combination of physical and chemical conditions that are able to sustain long-term agricultural production. The soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply on Prime Farmlands provides conditions to produce sustained high yields. Prime Farmlands must have been used for irrigated production within four years of the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Farmland of Statewide Importance is similar to Prime Farmland; however, these farmlands have minor shortcomings, such as a higher slope or decreased ability to store soil moisture. Similar to Prime Farmlands, Farmlands of Statewide Importance must have been used for irrigated production within four years of the mapping date.
- **Unique Farmland:** Unique Farmlands have lower quality soils and are used for the production of California's leading agricultural products. Unique Farmlands are typically irrigated but may also include non-irrigated vineyards or orchards found in certain climatic zones. Unique Farmlands must have been cropped within four years of the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Farmlands of Local Importance are farmlands that are vital to the local agricultural economy, as identified by each county's local advisory committee and board of supervisors.

- **Grazing Land:** Grazing Land is land on which existing vegetation is suitable for livestock grazing.
- **Urban and Built-Up Land:** Urban and Built-Up Land is defined as land that is occupied by buildings or other structures at a minimum density of one unit to 1.5 acres (or approximately six structures to 10 acres). This land is used for development purposes, including residential, commercial, industrial, construction, public administration, institutional, transportation yards, airports, cemeteries, golf courses, sewage treatment, sanitary landfills, and water control structures.
- **Other Land:** Other Land includes all lands that are not in any other map category, such as water bodies smaller than 40 acres; low-density rural developments; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; and brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing.
- **Water:** Water includes all perennial water bodies that are a minimum of 40 acres.

For the purposes of this section, “Important Farmlands” include Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance. In 2004, approximately 2.2 million acres of Important Farmlands were located within San Diego County.

Williamson Act Land Designations

The Williamson Act, also known as the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (California Government Code [CGC] § 51200 *et seq.*), preserves agricultural and open space lands from conversion to urban land uses by establishing a contract between local governments (i.e., city and county governments) and private landowners to voluntarily restrict their land holdings to agricultural or open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments based on farming or open space use rather than assessments based on the full market property value, which is typically 20 percent to 75 percent higher. Williamson Act contracts are valid for a minimum of 10 years and are automatically renewable after each 10-year term.

The Williamson Act also allows local governments to establish Agricultural Preserves, parcels of land for which cities or counties are willing to enter into Williamson Act contracts. Agricultural Preserves must include a minimum of 100 acres and typically avoid areas in which public utility improvements and associated land acquisitions may be necessary (CGC § 51230). Although the Williamson Act does not specify compatible land uses for property located adjacent to contract lands or Agricultural Preserves, it does state that cities and counties must determine compatible land use types while recognizing that temporary or permanent population increases frequently impair or hamper agricultural operations (CGC § 51220.5). In 2007, approximately 62,000 acres were under a Williamson Act contract in San Diego County.

Local

County of San Diego

Farmland of Local Importance is identified by each county, based on specific criteria established by that county’s board of supervisors and local advisory committee. In San Diego County,

Farmlands of Local Importance include lands that meet the criteria of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance (with the exception of irrigation requirements), as well as farmlands that are not included by the aforementioned categories but are economically important to the county. These lands have historically experienced productive yields for locally adapted crops. Soils within Farmlands of Local Importance in San Diego County are categorized by types suitable for truck crops, such as strawberries, potatoes, cucumbers, squash, romaine lettuce, celery, and cauliflower, as well as soils suitable for orchard crops, such as citrus and avocados.

Additionally, various local agencies put forth agricultural resource policies. The San Diego County General Plan, Central Mountain Community Plan, and Mountain Empire Subregional Plan were reviewed for agricultural resource policies relevant to the Proposed Project. Of these plans, only one agricultural resource policy was found to be relevant to the Proposed Project. This is Land Use Goal 2.5 of the San Diego County General Plan, which strives to “encourage continuance and expansion of agricultural uses in appropriate portions of the unincorporated area.”

Agricultural Setting

East County Substation

The ECO Substation will not be located on or adjacent to any Important Farmlands or land under a Williamson Act contract. The nearest location of Important Farmland is approximately 2.7 miles west of the proposed substation site and includes Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland.

Southwest Powerlink Loop-In

The Southwest Powerlink (SWPL) loop-in will not be located on or adjacent to any land under a Williamson Act contract or any Important Farmlands. The nearest location of Important Farmland is approximately 2.7 miles west of the proposed SWPL loop-in and consists of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland.

138 kV Transmission Line

The 138 kilovolt (kV) transmission line will not cross any Important Farmland or land under a Williamson Act contract; however, on the Jacumba Valley Ranch property located between approximate Milepost 3.1 and 3.3, the transmission line will cross land actively used for the agricultural production of row crops. Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance is located approximately 700 feet south of the proposed alignment between these mileposts.

Boulevard Substation Rebuild

The Boulevard Substation rebuild site will not be located on or adjacent to any land designated as Important Farmland or land under a Williamson Act contract. The nearest location of Important Farmland is approximately 1.3 miles southwest of the proposed substation rebuild site and is comprised of Prime Farmland.

White Star Communication Facility Rebuild

The White Star Communication Facility rebuild site is not located on or adjacent to any Important Farmland or land held under a Williamson Act contract. The nearest Important Farmland is approximately 1.5 miles east of the White Star Communication Facility rebuild site and is comprised of Farmland of Local Importance.

4.2.3 Impacts

Significance Criteria

Standards of significance were derived from Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. Impacts to agricultural resources will be considered significant if the Proposed Project:

- Converts Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use for a long period of time or permanently
- Conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract
- Involves other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in permanent or long-term conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use

Question 4.2a – Farmland Conversion – *No Impact*

Construction of the Proposed Project components will not occur on any land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance; therefore, the Proposed Project will not convert any of these lands to non-agricultural uses and no impact will result.

Question 4.2b – Zoning or Williamson Act Contract Conflicts – *No Impact*

Construction of the Proposed Project components will not occur on any land zoned for agricultural use; therefore, no impacts to agriculturally zoned land will result.

Question 4.2c – Other Farmland Conversion

Construction – Less-than-Significant Impact

Temporary

The Jacumba Valley Ranch property, which includes active agricultural production of organic lettuce row crops, will be crossed by the proposed 138 kV transmission line. Approximately two transmission structures will be erected on the property. In order to provide a safe work space, each transmission structure will require approximately 70 feet by 70 feet of cleared workspace for construction activities. Additionally, temporary disturbance of an approximately 115 feet by 115 feet area may be required for staging and operation of vehicles and equipment to facilitate each pole installation. Therefore, a total of approximately 0.8 acre of temporary disturbance is anticipated for the construction of both transmission structures. Roads will also need to be constructed in order to access these transmission structures. Spur roads to the transmission structures will be constructed off of existing farm roads, thereby minimizing the amount of disturbance. Roads will be a maximum of approximately 14 feet wide and a total of 430 feet in

length, resulting in a total area of approximately 0.14 acre that will be temporarily disturbed and removed from production due to Proposed Project-related use. The total agricultural portion of Jacumba Valley Ranch is approximately 320 acres; the area that will be temporarily removed from agricultural production represents 0.3 percent of this total. Therefore, impacts to agricultural resources will be less than significant.

Permanent

Approximately two 138 kV transmission line structures will be erected on agricultural land on the Jacumba Valley Ranch property as part of the Proposed Project. The base of each of these structures will have a diameter of approximately five feet, resulting in a permanent loss of approximately 40 square feet of active agricultural land. Permanent access roads will result in the additional loss of 0.14 acre. The total agricultural portion of Jacumba Valley Ranch is approximately 320 acres; the area that will be permanently removed from agricultural production represents well under one percent of the total agricultural area. In addition, the 138 kV transmission line will run parallel to the existing SWPL, which is located 150 feet north, through the property. Therefore, this agricultural land is already divided by an existing transmission line and the proposed 138 kV right-of-way (ROW), which will directly abut the existing linear ROW. Crops will be permitted to grow within these ROWs within the confines of SDG&E's ROW Encroachment Guidelines. Therefore, impacts to agricultural resources will be less than significant.

Additional generation tie-lines (gen-ties) to the proposed ECO Substation may be constructed in the future and may potentially result in the conversion of agricultural resources. Refer to Section 4.16 Cumulative Analysis for information regarding future gen-ties.

Operation and Maintenance – Less-than-Significant Impact

SDG&E will periodically need to conduct operation and maintenance activities for the Proposed Project. On the Ketchum Ranch property, inspection of the 138 kV transmission line will occur on an infrequent basis (anticipated to be annually) and will be conducted by visual inspections from access roads. Spur roads to the transmission structures and access roads used for the agricultural field will be utilized to access the proposed transmission line. Additionally, existing access roads for the SWPL, that will run parallel to the proposed 138 kV transmission line, will be used to conduct inspections and operation and maintenance activities for the proposed transmission line, as needed. SDG&E will coordinate with the landowner to use the existing agricultural field and SWPL access roads. Due to the infrequency of inspections and minimal nature of the operation and maintenance activities, any impacts from them will be less than significant.

4.2.4 Applicant-Proposed Measures

Because the Proposed Project will have less-than-significant impacts on agricultural resources, no avoidance or minimization measures are proposed.

4.2.5 References

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