

## 4.2 Agricultural Resources

This section describes the agricultural resources in the area of the Proposed Project. The potential impacts are also discussed.

The Proposed Project components that do not involve ground disturbance, and do not interfere with existing or planned agricultural uses were not assessed. For this resource area, these components include installation of upgraded relay systems and equipment at the Newhall, Chatsworth, and San Fernando Substations and related support activities.

### 4.2.1 Existing Agricultural Setting

According to the annual *Los Angeles County Crop and Livestock Report*, agriculture accounted for an estimated \$270,915,000 in 2006 (Los Angeles County 2008). The primary agricultural products produced in Los Angeles County include ornamental trees and shrubs, bedding plants, root vegetables, orchard fruit, and alfalfa hay. As this report details, nursery products remain the number one crop produced in Los Angeles County. In addition to cultivated areas, there are an estimated 228,730 acres suited for grazing lands (California Department of Conservation [CDC], 2006). The emerging trend for agriculture in Los Angeles County is one of less farming and of less land being used for agricultural activities. The County is highly urbanized and much of the usable agrarian land has been developed. The 2002 United States Census of Agriculture counted a total of 1,543 farms in the County, showing a 7 percent decrease from the previous census in 1997 (Los Angeles County, 2008).

Section 21060.1 of CEQA defines agricultural land as “prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, or unique farmland, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California.” The State of California has modified the classifications for prime farmland and farmland of Statewide importance by requiring that these lands be irrigated (CDC 2008). Approximately 4 percent of land in Los Angeles County is classified as Important Farmland (CDC 2006) and is summarized in Table 4.2-1, Summary of Important Farmland in Los Angeles County.

**Table 4.2-1 Summary of Important Farmland in Los Angeles County**

	<b>Inventoried Acreage in Los Angeles County</b>	<b>Percent of Total Acreage in Los Angeles County</b>
Prime Farmland	32,610	3 percent
Farmland of Statewide Importance	1,024	< 1 percent
Unique Farmland	1,024	< 1 percent
Farmland of Local Importance	8,973	< 1 percent
<b>Important Farmland Total</b>	<b>43,631</b>	<b>4 percent</b>

Source: CDC 2006

As shown on Figure 4.9-2 prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) of the CDC, there is one 14.75-acre parcel of designated prime farmland immediately east of I-5 in the

city of Santa Clarita. The parcel is currently zoned for commercial use and the land use designation is that of Mixed Use (MX). Based on visual observations during the site visit, this parcel of land appeared to have been previously used as a horse rearing facility and did not appear to be in active use (Maddux, pers. comm. 2009). According to the Santa Clarita Valley's Technical Background Report (2004), this pocket of prime farmland is part of a larger area known as the I-5 Horse Ranch property, which has been identified as an area "susceptible to change" by County and City Planning staff (EIP Associates 2004). The area is expected to undergo residential or commercial development by the city of Santa Clarita (Smisko, pers. comm., 2009).

As shown on Figure 4.9-2, the vast majority of Los Angeles County land within the Proposed Project area is currently zoned A-2-2 (Heavy Agriculture). According to the County zoning code, the A-2 designation is intended to accommodate a variety of agricultural uses. Permitted uses include dairies, crop fields, animal hospitals, greenhouses, and the grazing of cattle, horses, sheep, llamas, and goats. Other permitted uses include oil wells and "the storage, handling, recycling and transportation of oil, gas and water to and from the premises" (Los Angeles County, 2008). Under the A-2 designation, "electric distribution substations, electric transmission substations and generating plants" are considered permitted uses provided a conditional use permit has first been obtained. The Storage Field is zoned for A-2 Heavy Agricultural use; however, it is not designated prime farmland and is not currently being used for agriculture. According to the County of Los Angeles General Plan (2008) Figure 6.4 Agricultural Resource Areas, the Storage Field has been primarily identified as an "unincorporated area" surrounded by areas of grazing lands. The majority of the existing SCE 66 kV sub-transmission route passes through County lands zoned as A-2 Heavy Agriculture and a small portion crosses City of Los Angeles lands zoned A1-Agricultural.

Other than the pocket of prime farmland in the city of Santa Clarita, there are no other areas of "important farmland" designated within the Proposed Project vicinity. Due to regional topography, several designated agricultural areas within the Proposed Project area are not currently used for agricultural purposes (City of Santa Clarita, 2009). Presently, the only Williamson Act contract in the County is for the preservation of open space on Santa Catalina Island (Los Angeles County 2008). Therefore, there are no Williamson Act contracted lands in the project area.

## **Regulatory Framework**

Note, Article XII, section 8, of the California Constitution states, "[a] city, county, or other public body may not regulate matters over which the Legislature grants regulatory power to the [Public Utilities] Commission." The Public Utilities Code authorizes the CPUC to "do all things, whether specifically designated in this act or in addition thereto, which are necessary and convenient in the exercise of such power and jurisdiction." Cal. Pub. Util. Code §701. Other Public Utilities Code provisions generally authorize the CPUC to modify facilities, to secure adequate service or facilities, and to operate so as to promote health and safety. Thus, under the California Constitution and Public Utilities Code, the CPUC has broad authority to preempt local regulation of public utilities, particularly when a local government attempts to unduly burden a public utility use or operations. Cities and Counties cannot impose regulations that place significant burdens on utility operations. In addition, in the context of electric utility projects, CPUC G.O. 131-D, Section XIV.B states that "Local jurisdictions acting pursuant to local authority are preempted from regulating electric power line projects, distribution lines, substations, or electric facilities constructed by public utilities subject to the Commission's jurisdiction. However in locating such projects, the public utilities shall consult with local agencies regarding land use matters."

Consequently, public utilities are directed to consider local regulations and consult with local agencies, but the county and city agricultural regulations are not anticipated to apply to the Proposed Project.

### **County of Los Angeles General Plan- Land Use Element (1993)**

This PEA discusses currently applicable provisions of the General Plan<sup>1</sup>. The following policies pertaining to agriculture from the Land Use Element (1993) of the Los Angeles County General Plan are potentially relevant to the Proposed Project:

***Land Use Element, Policy 10:*** In urban areas, encourage the retention of economically viable agricultural production, e.g., high value crops such as strawberries, cut flowers, nursery stock, etc., through the identification and mitigation of significant adverse impacts resulting from adjacent new development.

***Land Use Element, Policy 20:*** Protect identified Potential Agricultural Preserves by discouraging inappropriate land division and allowing only use types and intensities compatible with agriculture.

***Land Use Element, Policy 21:*** In non-urban areas outside of Potential Agricultural Preserves, encourage the retention and expansion of agriculture by promoting compatible land use arrangements and providing technical assistance to involved farming interests.

The following policies from the Land Use Element of the city of Santa Clarita and city of Los Angeles may be relevant to the Proposed Project.

### **City of Santa Clarita General Plan Land Use Element (1991)**

***Land Use Element, Policy 2.8:*** Explore the utility ROWs for tree farms, nurseries, row crops, trails, and greenbelts.

### **City of Los Angeles General Plan Conservation Element (2001)**

***Conservation Element, Section 2:*** Continue to encourage the retention of parcels in agricultural and low density land use and zoning categories that will encourage their retention in agricultural and related use.

## **4.2.2 Significance Criteria**

The significance criteria for assessing the impacts to agricultural resources come from the CEQA Environmental Checklist. According to the CEQA Checklist, a project causes a potentially significant impact if it would:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, to nonagricultural use;

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<sup>1</sup> An updated version of the Los Angeles County General Plan (2008) is currently under review and being proposed for adoption.

- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; or
- Involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use.

### 4.2.3 Applicant Proposed Measures

There are no APM's associated with agricultural resources.

### 4.2.4 Environmental Impact Analysis

The potential impact to agricultural resources from construction and operation of the Proposed Project was evaluated using the stated CEQA significance criteria and is presented in this section. For the purpose of presenting potential agricultural resource impacts, construction and operation impacts are discussed together for each CEQA criteria.

*Would the Proposed Project convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, to nonagricultural use?*

Within the city of Santa Clarita, the proposed SCE 66 kV sub-transmission modification roughly parallels the eastern boundary of a 14.75-acre parcel of prime farmland. This area of prime farmland is not in active agricultural production and the city of Santa Clarita has zoned the area for commercial use (pers comm. with City of Santa Clarita 2009). The alignment of the proposed SCE 66 kV sub-transmission modification follows an existing transmission right-of-way and would involve the replacement of poles along an already disturbed area. Other than this 14.75-acre parcel of prime farmland, there are no other areas of designated farmland in the Proposed Project area. Project components within the Storage Field, including the proposed Central Compressor Station, the proposed PPL, the proposed SCE Natural Substation, the proposed office trailer and guard house relocation would not convert designated farmland to nonagricultural use, as no designated farmlands exist within the Storage Field property or in the immediate area. Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use. There would be no impact.

*Would the Proposed Project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?*

Except for the portion of the 66-kV route within the City of Santa Clarita, the entire project site is zoned for agricultural uses by either the County or City of Los Angeles. However many of these areas are not in active agricultural production. The Proposed SCE 66 kV sub-transmission modification would involve one-to-one pole replacement of existing poles along an existing utility corridor, however additional poles may be required to maintain minimum clearances.

Electric utility infrastructure is an allowable use within these zoning codes and thus would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use. A small portion of new ROW within the Storage Field property may need to be widened, however no existing buildings or structures would need to be moved. The land is zoned for agriculture, which includes grazing. The Proposed Project would not impede or diminish the current zoning because there would be no physical barrier to limit the free movement of cattle and other livestock from one side of the Proposed SCE 66 kV sub-transmission line to the other. There are

currently no Williamson Act contracted lands in the Proposed Project area; therefore the Proposed Project would not remove land from Williamson Act status.

Project components within the Storage Field, including the proposed Central Compressor Station, the proposed PPL, the proposed SCE Natural Substation, the proposed office trailer and guard house relocation are also located within the County's A-2 (Heavy Agriculture) zoning designation. Under the A-2 designation, gas storage is considered a permitted use, as are electric transmission substations provided a conditional use permit has first been obtained. Currently, the Aliso Canyon Storage Facility operates under a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) approved by the City and County of Los Angeles. The CUP limits of conformance have been defined by Exhibit A, the facility "plot plan". The Proponent will submit to the County of Los Angeles a revised Exhibit A showing the location of new facilities for inclusion in the CUP permit file, per the request of the County Planning Department. .

Although the Storage Field is zoned for agricultural use, it is not actively used for agricultural purposes. According to SoCalGas, there are no known Grazing Rights established for the Storage Field; however there are occasional sheep and cattle that graze within the area (Schroeder, pers comm. 2009). As indicated in Section 4.4 Biological Resources, project activities that are proposed to occur within the Plant Station area (locations of proposed office trailer relocation and proposed Central Compressor Station) of the Storage Field will likely take place entirely in areas that have been previously disturbed during the original construction of this facility. The location for the proposed SCE Natural Substation is also heavily disturbed. Because the nature of the Proposed Project involves the replacement of buildings and infrastructure in areas that have been previously disturbed during the original development of these facilities, there would be no loss of grazing lands for any future agricultural use. Based on the final project design, a relatively small amount of grasslands may be affected during construction; however these would be temporary impacts and would not impact future grazing activities. Furthermore, disturbed areas would be revegetated after construction.

In addition, proposed modifications at the SCE San Fernando Substation would occur on land currently zoned Agricultural Suburban (A, RA). SCE proposes to modify the San Fernando Substation with the removal of four existing LSTs and installation of four TSPs, three of which may occur outside of the substation boundary. This substation and the towers in the immediate vicinity, including those that will be replaced, are located in a developed or landscaped urban area devoid of designated farmland or grazing areas. As the area is not currently used for agriculture and the Proposed Project would not impact the agricultural zoning designation or convert usable farmland to a nonagricultural use, the Proposed Project would have no impact on future use.

*Would the Proposed Project involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use?*

The Proposed Project is located entirely within existing SCE ROWs and areas that have been previously disturbed during the original development of these facilities on the Storage Field property. Construction and pole locations have been designed to avoid farmland to the extent possible, and the majority of such areas would be restored following project construction. Any impacts from pole placement would be temporary. The Proposed Project would involve minor, localized impacts related to vegetation removal and temporary soil disturbance. Thus, the Proposed Project would not create any changes in the environment that would result in conversion of existing farmland to nonagricultural use.

### 4.2.5 Mitigation Measures

The Proposed Project was determined to have **no impact** on agricultural resource therefore no mitigation is required or proposed.

### 4.2.6 References

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