

3.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

<i>Issues (and Supporting Information Sources):</i>	<i>Potentially Significant Impact</i>	<i>Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporation</i>	<i>Less Than Significant Impact</i>	<i>No Impact</i>
2. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES				
In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in the Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.				
Would the project:				
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined in Public Resources Code section 4526) or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to nonforest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

3.2.1 Environmental Setting

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 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. These map categories are defined by the Department of Conservation's FMMP as follows (Department of Conservation, 2010a):

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.

Existing Agriculture Resources

Table 3.2-1 shows the acres of Farmland in San Benito County and Monterey County in 2004 and 2006, as well as the amount of recent farmland conversions.

The Proposed Project would replace an existing power line in an existing utility corridor, diverting from the existing corridor only to construct the 1.3-mile Proposed River Crossing alignment, which would be constructed within new ROW to be acquired.

The Proposed Project would temporarily impact approximately 21 acres of Farmland (specifically, *Prime Farmland*) and 85 acres of *Grazing Land* and *Other Land*. Permanently, the Proposed Project would disturb less than 0.01 acre of Farmland (specifically, *Prime Farmland*) (Department of Conservation, 2010b). The Proposed Project would also temporarily impact approximately 73 acres of land under Williamson Act contract. Permanently, the Proposed Project would disturb less than one acre under Williamson Act contract.

**TABLE 3.2-1
FARMLAND CONVERSION FROM 2004–2006 IN SAN BENITO AND MONTEREY COUNTIES**

Land Use Category	Total Acres Inventoried		2004–2006 Acreage Changes		
	2004	2006	Acres Lost	Acres Gained	Net Change
San Benito County					
Prime Farmland	32,085	30,432	1,918	265	-1,653
Farmland of Statewide Importance	9,464	9,106	463	105	-358
Unique Farmland	2,625	2,580	213	168	-45
Farmland of Local Importance	27,389	26,482	3,021	2,114	-907
San Benito Agricultural Land Subtotal	71,563	68,600	5,615	2,652	-2,963
Monterey County					
Prime Farmland	169,369	167,636	2,711	978	-1,733
Farmland of Statewide Importance	44,546	43,402	1,585	441	-1,144
Unique Farmland	26,479	25,104	2,025	650	-1375
Farmland of Local Importance	--	--	--	--	--
Monterey Agricultural Land Subtotal	240,394	236,142	6,321	2,069	-4,252

SOURCE: Department of Conservation, 2010c.

Forest Land and Timberland

Public Resources Code section 12220(g) defines “Forest land” as “land that can support 10-percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions, and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits.” In turn, “timberland” is defined by Public Resources Code section 4526 as, “land, other than land owned by the federal government. . . , which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of any commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees.” Finally, “Timberland production zone” or “TPZ” is defined by Government Code section 51104(g) as “an area which has been zoned pursuant to [Government Code] Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses, as defined in subdivision (h). With respect to the general plans of cities and counties, ‘timberland preserve zone’ means ‘timberland production zone.’”

The Proposed Project would not traverse any land zoned for timberland production, any land used for growing of trees for commercial production of timber or other forest products. As discussed in Section 3.9, *Land Use*, the Proposed Project would be located primarily on land used for agricultural and rangeland, including grazing.

3.2.2 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 ten acres. The FMMP also produces a biennial 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, the term "Farmland" includes Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide 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 ten years. The term of the contract automatically renews each year, so that the contract always has a ten 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

San Benito County Zoning Ordinance

As discussed in Section 3.9, *Land Use*, the Proposed Project would traverse parcels designated as *Agricultural Productive (AP)* and *Agricultural Rangeland (AR)* under the San Benito County Zoning Ordinance. The intent of the AP district is to provide areas within the County to be used for agricultural production of any type as set forth in the general plan (San Benito County, 1984). Public utility facilities are allowed in the AP district with a conditional use permit. The intent of the AR district is to provide areas within the County to be used for agricultural rangeland purposes as set forth in the general plan (San Benito County, 1992). As with the AP district, public utility facilities are considered conditionally acceptable within the AR district.

Monterey County Zoning Ordinance

The Proposed Project would traverse parcels designated as *Permanent Grazing* in the Monterey County Zoning Ordinance. The *Permanent Grazing* designation provides a district to preserve,

protect, and enhance those productive exclusive grazing lands in the County of Monterey. Uses generally permitted in this district include all soil dependent agricultural uses including crop and tree farming, dry land farming, livestock farming, greenhouses and vineyards. Public and quasi-public land uses such as public utilities are conditionally permitted within this district (Monterey County, 1997).

3.2.3 Applicant Proposed Measures

PG&E proposes the following applicant proposed measure (APM) to minimize impacts on agricultural resources from the Proposed Project. The impact analysis in this MND assumes that this APM would be implemented to reduce impacts to agricultural resources discussed below.

APM AG-1: Compensate for reduced agricultural production and loss of use. PG&E will offer appropriate compensation for land held in private ownership as part of the acquisition of temporary construction easements or permanent utility easements. PG&E will compensate property owners for removal of any structures, crops, or agriculture-related improvements required to construct the project. PG&E will negotiate easements with private landowners for the temporary or permanent use of agricultural areas. Upon completion of the project, the areas will be left as specified in the individual agreements. In addition, PG&E will prepare a SWPPP (see APM HYDRO 1 [Prepare and implement a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan] in Section 3.8, *Hydrology and Water Quality*) to ensure that areas affected by construction are restored to pre-construction conditions.

3.2.4 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

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: *LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT*.

The Proposed Project would result in temporary disturbance to agricultural lands in areas that would be used for staging, pull and/or tension sites, crane pads, temporary shoo-fly line tie-in connections and associated poles, and new access roads. New permanent access roads associated with the Proposed Project and new poles placed within the Proposed River Crossing alignment would result in permanent disturbance to agricultural lands. Approximately 106 acres of land designated for agricultural purposes would be temporarily disturbed during construction. Of the total agricultural acreage disturbed, approximately 21 acres are classified as Farmland (specifically, *Prime Farmland*) by the FMMP. Of the total agricultural acreage disturbed, less than 0.01 acre of Farmland (specifically, *Prime Farmland*) would be disturbed permanently. No *Unique Farmland* or *Farmland of Statewide Importance* would be disturbed by the Proposed Project either temporarily or permanently. Furthermore, with implementation of APM AG-1, PG&E would negotiate easements with private landowners for the temporary or permanent use of agricultural areas, leave areas as specified in individual agreements with landowners upon completion of the project, and prepare a SWPPP to ensure that areas affected by construction are restored to pre-construction conditions. Therefore, since all temporarily impacted Farmland would be restored following completion of construction activities and/or left as specified in individual agreements with

landowners, and less than 0.01 acres of Farmland would be permanently impacted, impacts would be less than significant.

**b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract:
NO IMPACT.**

The Proposed Project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural uses, as it would generally replace an existing power line in an existing utility corridor with the exception of the 1.3-mile Proposed River Crossing alignment, which would be constructed within new ROW to be acquired. Although this new ROW is currently used for agricultural purposes, as discussed in Section 3.9, *Land Use, Planning, and Policies*, the Proposed Project is consistent and would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use.

Approximately 73 acres of land currently under Williamson Act contract would be temporarily disturbed during proposed construction activities; however, less than one acre of land would be permanently converted to a non-agricultural use. Moreover, Government Code Section 51238 states that electrical facilities are a compatible Williamson Act use. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not remove the land from Williamson Act contract status, and no impact would occur.

c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined in Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g): LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT.

The Proposed Project would not require forest land or timberland to be rezoned, and does not cross land designated as *Timberland Production Zone (TPZ)*. With the exception of the 1.3-mile Proposed River Crossing alignment, the Proposed Project would be located entirely within existing PG&E ROW where similar infrastructure currently exists. For these areas, the existing land use would not change, and there would be no conflict with existing zoning (*AP* and *AR* in San Benito County, and *Permanent Grazing* in Monterey County). Similarly, the 1.3-mile Proposed River Crossing alignment would traverse land designated by the San Benito County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance as *AP* and *AR*. This analysis conservatively assumes that such land meets the definition of “forest land” and/or “timberland”; however, the Proposed Project would not conflict with either type of zoning. Although CEQA does not provide a specific definition of “comply” in the context of determining a project’s consistency, case law interpreting the requirement that a local government’s activities be consistent with its General Plan provide that “zoning ordinance [for example] is consistent with the city's general plan where, considering all of its aspects, the ordinance furthers the objectives and policies of the general plan and does not obstruct their attainment.” *City of Irvine v. Irvine Citizens Against Overdevelopment*, 25 Cal.App.4th 868, 879 (1994). The 1.3-mile Proposed River Crossing alignment is zoned the same as the other portions of the Proposed Project within San Benito County and would not obstruct the attainment of any forest or timberland policies or objectives, including Chapter 19.33 of the San Benito County Code, concerning the management and conservation of woodlands. Accordingly, the potential impact of the Proposed Project on existing forest land and timberland zoning would be less than significant.

**d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use:
LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT.**

The loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest uses could have direct or indirect impacts on the environment. For example, forests remove greenhouse gases (GHGs) from the atmosphere rather than emit GHGs. Accordingly, the loss or conversion of forest land could remove existing carbon stock (i.e., carbon stored in vegetation) and remove existing carbon sequestration potential. Monterey County experienced an increase in carbon stock sequestered in forest land from 38,608 tons of carbon (t C) in 1987 to 39,661 t C in 1997 (a difference of 1,053 t C), while San Benito County experienced a decrease during the same timeframe from 68,232 t C to 53,259 t C (a difference of 14,973 t C). CEC, *Baseline Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Forest, Range and Agricultural Lands in California* (March 2004) Table 2-10. The loss or conversion of forestland also might have an effect on other forest resources, such as aesthetics, biological resources, and water quality.

As discussed in Section 3.4, *Biological Resources*, the Proposed Project would remove approximately 144 native oak trees, mostly coast live oaks, and three other native trees, and would trim approximately 124 native oak trees and approximately 14 other native trees including willows and California bay laurel. However, the removed trees would be spread out in various locations along the power line alignment, which would reduce the areas of converted forest land to small, fragmented patches. In addition, implementation of APM BIO-10 would track protected trees removed during construction and replace all impacted trees per local standards. Accordingly, the potential impact of the Proposed Project on the loss or conversion of existing forest land would be less than significant. Although not required for this impact, biological resources Mitigation Measure 3.4-7 also requires post-planting care to ensure survivability of replacement trees, which would strengthen the intent of APM BIO-10.

e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use: NO IMPACT.

The Proposed Project would not involve additional changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could temporarily or permanently result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or of forest land to a non-forest use. The presence of a transmission line is generally a compatible use with agriculture and forestry, and the Proposed Project does not include any features that would indirectly result in the conversion of such lands.

Further, impacts to existing water pumps and irrigation pipelines could remove farmers' ability to irrigate crops, which could effectively render previously productive agricultural land unusable. However, PG&E has committed to conducting pre-construction records searches to identify water wells and well fields in order to avoid impacts to well-related infrastructure (see also Section 3.16, *Utilities and Service Systems*). Therefore, effects on existing irrigation infrastructure would not result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Accordingly, the Proposed Project would have no impact on the conversion of agricultural land or forest land resulting from other changes in the environment.

References

- Department of Conservation, 2010a. FMMP, Important Farmland Map Categories, website (http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/mccu/Pages/map_categories.aspx), accessed on February 12, 2010.
- Department of Conservation, 2010b. FMMP, Important Farmland, GIS Data, website (<ftp://ftp.consrv.ca.gov/pub/dlrp/FMMP/2008/>), accessed on February 12, 2010.
- Department of Conservation, 2010c. FMMP, Important Farmland, County Land Use Conversion Tables, website (http://redirect.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/county_info_results.asp), accessed on February 12, 2010.
- Monterey County, 1997. *Monterey County Code, Chapter 21.34 – Regulations for Permanent Grazing Zoning Districts or “PG” Districts*, codified 1997.
- San Benito County, 1984. *Code of Ordinances, Section 25.07.020*, codified 1984.
- San Benito County, 1992. *Code of Ordinances, Section 25.07.003*, codified 1992.