

4.3 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

4.3.1 Introduction

This section describes agricultural resources in the project area for Segment 2 (Antelope to Vincent, including T/L route Alternatives AV1 and AV2) and Segment 3 (Antelope to Substations One and Two, including T/L route Alternatives A, B, and C, and Substations One and Two). The proposed 500 kV T/L routes associated with Segments 2 and 3 (refer to Figures 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3) begin in the City of Lancaster at the Antelope 220 kV Substation. Both Segments 2 and 3 also include 220 kV T/L components. This section discusses agricultural resources in both Los Angeles and Kern Counties, as the proposed Segment 2 is entirely within Los Angeles County, and the proposed Segment 3 extends north from Los Angeles County into southern Kern County.

Agricultural resources were evaluated by reviewing the Los Angeles County General Plan (Conservation and Open Space Element, January, 1980a, 1993), the Kern County General Plan (1994, 2004a), as well as the General Plans for the cities of Palmdale, Lancaster, and Tehachapi. Agricultural resources data were also obtained from the California Department of Conservation (Division of Land Resource Protection, and Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program), as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

4.3.2 County General Plan Policies

4.3.2.1 Los Angeles County

As stated in the Los Angeles County General Plan (1993), one of the County's goals is *"To preserve and protect prime agricultural lands, forests, fisheries, significant ecological areas and other biotic resources."* This general goal is soon to be revised and strengthened, as stated in the County's General Plan Update (2004b). The revised goal (Goal O-1 of the Conservation and Open Space Element) calls for preservation of productive farmland and land with agricultural opportunities to contribute to food production, open space and the local economy. The Goal O-1 is anticipated to enforce the following policies:

- Establish Agricultural Opportunity Areas, to identify prime agricultural soils and viable agricultural uses, where consistent with adjacent land uses and natural resources
- Support the establishment of voluntary agricultural preserves under the Williamson Act within Agricultural Opportunity Areas to preserve productive agricultural lands
- Support the Agricultural Commissioner's efforts to assist farmers and ranchers in their agricultural operations and discourage incompatible uses adjacent to farmlands

- Allow vacant land under utility lines to be used for agricultural activities, where such use is compatible with adjacent land uses

4.3.2.2 Kern County

Kern County considers the loss of valuable agricultural lands to urban development a prime concern. A basic question addressed in the County's General Plan (Land Use Element, 1994) is whether or not the unique resource of prime agricultural lands should be reserved for agriculture and urban growth directed to areas less suitable for agriculture.

Land division, even where actual development does not take place, can also adversely affect the County's agricultural resource base. This is particularly a problem in extensive agriculture areas, such as rangeland, where land values can be significantly increased beyond values based on agricultural productivity. Therefore, the following goals and policies relative to agricultural resources are stated in the 1994 General Plan:

- To contain new development within an area large enough to meet generous projections of foreseeable need, but in locations that would not impair the economic strength derived from the petroleum, agriculture, rangeland, or mineral resources, or diminish the other amenities that exist in the County.
- Areas designated for agricultural use, which include Class I and II agricultural soils with surface delivery water systems, would be protected against residential and commercial subdivision and development activities.
- Areas identified by the Soil Conservation Service (now the NRCS) as having high rangesite value would be reserved for extensive agriculture uses, or as resource reserve if located within a County water district.
- Appropriate resource uses of all types would be encouraged as desirable and consistent in undeveloped portions of the County regardless of General Plan designation.

Kern County also addresses energy development in their General Plan (Energy Element, 1990). In the Plan, the County addresses the fact that full realization of the County's wind-generated electricity may be hampered due to the lack of adequate power transmission capacity. Therefore, one of the County's policies is to support the construction of additional transmission capacity for wind energy developments where land use and other constraints are minimal.

4.3.3 Farmland Conversion Trends

4.3.3.1 Los Angeles County

While Los Angeles is commonly viewed as an urbanized county, there is substantial crop production ongoing in the Antelope Valley area of the county. Despite the recent increase in agriculture in the Antelope Valley, Los Angeles County continues to report a net loss in agricultural acreage. Approximately 6,684 acres of agricultural lands (1,577 acres of “important farmland,” and 5,107 acres of grazing land) were converted to another use between the years 2002-2004 (California Department of Conservation [CDOC], 2005). Refer to Table 4.3-1 for a summary of farmland conversion between 2000 and 2002 in Los Angeles County. This, however is a decrease in land use conversion, however, as approximately 14,188 acres of agricultural lands (8,045 acres of “important farmland,” and 6,143 acres of grazing land) were converted to another use between the years 2000-2002 (CDOC, 2004).

The NRCS identifies soil suitability for agriculture as varying from “prime” to “poor.” Prime Farmland (P), as defined by NRCS, is the farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. Other important farmland categories include Farmland of Statewide Importance (S), Unique Farmland (U), Farmland of Local Importance (L), and Grazing Land (G). S is similar to P but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less moisture. U is land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county’s board of supervisors. G is land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

Approximately 33,218 acres of Los Angeles County are identified as Prime Farmland (CDOC, 2005). The 1993 Los Angeles General Plan states that 450,000 acres of prime agricultural soil [then] remain undisturbed by urbanization. However, the majority of this farmland is located in the Antelope Valley where water costs and climatic conditions limit productivity. In the south county, urban growth has eliminated most agricultural acreage. As a result, the remaining agricultural activity has become very specialized, shifting to crops of high value, such as nursery products, cut flowers, vegetables, and fruits.

Under the California Land Conservation Act of 1968 (known as the Williamson Act), the owner of an agricultural parcel may enter into a contract with a county in which the owner agrees to maintain agricultural operations on the parcel for a 10-year period. In exchange, the county assesses the property for tax purposes based solely on the agricultural value of the parcel, lowering the property tax obligation of the property owner.

4.3.3.2 Kern County

Kern County has expressed concern for the potential conversion of prime and important farmland to urban uses and the resultant loss for agricultural use. The County recognizes that

TABLE 4.3-1
FARMLAND CONVERSION IN LA COUNTY FROM 2002 TO 2004
(IN ACRES) ¹

Land Use Category		Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Local Importance	Grazing Land	Total Agricultural Land	Urban and Built-up Land	Other Land	Total Converted
Prime Farmland	to:	--	0	4	22	401	427	40	900	1,367
Farmland of Statewide Importance	to:	0	--	0	0	0	0	0	44	44
Unique Farmland	to:	0	0	--	0	54	54	25	12	91
Farmland of Local Importance	to:	0	0	17	--	57	74	1	0	75
Important Farmland Subtotal		0	0	21	22	512	555	66	956	1,577
Grazing Land ^{2,3}	to:	1,194	78	20	566	--	1,858	1,241	2,008	5,107
Agricultural Land Subtotal		1,194	78	41	588	512	2,413	1,307	2,964	6,684
Urban and Built-up Land ⁴	to:	71	0	0	0	8	79	--	405	484
Other Land ³	to:	1,133	56	14	1	14	1,218	1,934	--	3,152
Water Area	to:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Acreage Converted		2,398	134	55	589	534	3,710	3,241	3,369	10,320

¹ Due to the incorporation of digital soil survey data (SSURGO) during this 2005 update, acreages for farmland, grazing and other land use categories may differ from those published in the 2000-2002 California Farmland Conversion report.

² Conversion to Other Land primarily the result of the use of improved digital imagery to delineate oil field boundaries on the Val Verde and Newhall quads.

³ Conversion to Prime Farmland primarily due to newly irrigated agricultural land in the Antelope Valley.

⁴ Conversion from Urban and Built-up Land primarily the result of the use of improved digital imagery to delineate more distinct urban boundaries.

implementation of the updated General Plan could potentially result in the ultimate loss through actual development, not merely a change in the General Plan designations, of 71,841 acres of prime and important farmland. An additional estimated 8,000 to 9,000 acres of prime and important farmland could be converted to urban uses if certain areas are developed and approved for proposed Specific Plans. Also, approximately 55,000 of resource land used for grazing could be converted to urban uses if all of the proposed areas are developed and approved for Specific Plans (Kern County General Plan, 2004e).

There would be an eventual loss of additional agriculture production as certain lands with General Plan designations for residential, commercial and industrial uses are eventually developed. The Kern County zoning ordinance allows the A (Intensive Agriculture) and A-1 (Limited Agriculture) designation as an interim use and is considered consistent with the General Plan. Kern County considers these lands, although used for agriculture, to be permanently committed in the future to an urban use through the approval by the Board of Supervisors of non-agricultural General Plan designations.

Kern County continues to report a net loss in agricultural acreage. Approximately 12,097 acres of agricultural lands (8,647 acres of “important farmland,” and 3,450 acres of grazing land) were converted to another use between the years 2000-2002 (CDOC, 2004; 2002-2004 conversion data for Kern County is currently unavailable). Refer to Table 4.3-2 for a summary of farmland conversion between 2000 and 2002 in Kern County.

Approximately 530,079 acres of Kern County are identified as Prime Farmland (CDOC, 2004). This is 497,697 acres more Prime Farmland than exists in the County of Los Angeles. At the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, Kern County is the most diverse and productive farming area in the world, producing over 250 different crops. Kern County alone outranks the agricultural production of 20 states.

4.3.4 Important Farmland

4.3.4.1 Segment 2

The existing SCE Antelope 220 kV Substation is located on historical grazing land. The proposed 500 kV T/L for Segment 2 traverses a small patch of potential Prime Farmland approximately 2 miles south of the Antelope Substation. This farmland area is less than 1-mile long in extent. From there, the proposed T/L for Segment 2 does not traverse any other significant farmland throughout the rest of the 21.5-mile-long segment. However, grazing land is traversed at the northern end of Segment 2.

TABLE 4.3-2
FARMLAND CONVERSION IN KERN COUNTY FROM 2000 TO 2002
(IN ACRES)

Land Use Category		Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Local Importance	Grazing Land	Total Agricultural Land	Urban and Built-up Land	Other Land	Total Converted to Another Use
Prime Farmland ^{1,2}	to:	--	28	64	0	2,410	2,502	1,279	1,603	5,384
Farmland of Statewide Importance ^{1,2}	to:	56	--	21	0	77	154	31	1,472	1,657
Unique Farmland ²	to:	1	12	--	0	290	303	0	1,303	1,606
Farmland of Local Importance	to:	0	0	0	--	0	0	0	0	0
Important Farmland Subtotal		57	40	85	0	2,777	2,959	1,310	4,378	8,647
Grazing Land ^{3,4}	to:	1,352	394	242	0	--	1,988	351	1,111	3,450
Agricultural Land Subtotal		1,409	434	327	0	2,777	4,947	1,661	5,489	12,097
Urban and Built-up Land ⁵	to:	187	4	16	0	55	262	--	358	620
Other Land ^{6,7}	to:	2,664	759	1,401	0	2,595	7,419	3,522	--	10,941
Water Area	to:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Acreage Converted	to:	4,260	1,197	1,744	0	5,427	12,628	5,183	5,847	23,658

¹ Conversions between Important Farmland categories primarily due to corrections made to soil unit identification.

² Conversion to Grazing and Other Land primarily due to land left idle for three update cycles in the northeastern portion of the county.

³ Conversion to Prime Farmland primarily due to newly irrigated agricultural land.

⁴ Conversion to Other Land primarily due to identification of vacant land adjacent to the airport, ranchettes and aggregate mines.

⁵ Conversion from Urban and Built-up Land primarily the result of the use of digital imagery to delineate more distinct urban boundaries.

⁶ Conversion to Prime and Unique Farmland due to newly irrigated agricultural land including citrus groves, turf farms and alfalfa.

⁷ Conversion to Grazing Land due to newly identified grazing on specified areas of the Kern National Wildlife Refuge.

4.3.4.2 Segment 3

The proposed 500 kV T/L route for Segment 3 (i.e., Antelope to Substation One) traverses potential Prime Farmland and grazing land at the south end of the route, just north of the Antelope Substation. Grazing lands are traversed until the proposed route approaches the community of Rosamond. At Rosamond, the route traverses an area of potential Prime Farmland (approximately 2 miles in length along the route). Unique farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance also exist directly north of the Prime Farmland. Grazing land exists at the north end of the proposed 500 kV T/L route, and along the proposed 220 kV route between Substation One and Two, including the proposed substation locations.

4.3.5 Alternative T/L Routes**4.3.5.1 Segment 2**

Alternative AV1 is a short 2.1-mile-long segment, located parallel to and east of the proposed Segment 2 route, beginning at MP 5.7 and ending at MP 7.7. Alternative AV2 is 3.1 miles long, departing from the proposed T/L route at MP 8.1 and traversing the Ritter Ranch and Anaverde specific plan areas to a juncture with the proposed T/L route at approximately MP 14.8.

Alternative AV1 does not traverse any designated farmland or grazing land. However, Alternative AV2 does traverse Farmland of Local Importance near MP 1.5. The alternative route traverses less than 1 mile of this farmland.

4.3.5.2 Segment 3

Alternative A traverses a small area (less than one mile) of Prime Farmland approximately 3 miles north of the Antelope Substation. Alternatives A and B (refer to Figures 3-1 and 3-3) do not traverse any other potential Prime Farmland at the south end of Segment 3; only grazing lands are traversed. Both alternatives do, however, traverse potential Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance near Rosamond. Alternative B traverses a small portion of potential Prime Farmland that exists directly north of the proposed “Copa De Oro/Kern Ross Estate,” (at MP 12.5) and Alternative A also traverses a small portion of Farmland of Statewide Importance (at MP 16.5).

Similar to the proposed 500 kV T/L route, Alternatives A, B, and C (220 kV) only traverse grazing lands at the northern ends of the routes. A large area of potential Prime Farmland exists near the north end of the route, south of Tehachapi, however, none of the proposed or alternative T/L routes traverse it.

The alternative 500 kV and 220 kV substation locations in the Tehachapi Wind Farm Area (Substation One and Substation Two) are located on grazing lands.

4.3.6 Modifications to Substations

The Antelope Substation, as well as Substations One and Two (and their associated alternatives) are located in areas with soils that are capable of supporting grazing uses. The SCE Antelope Substation was converted to electric transmission-related use years ago and any farmland potential at the site was negated at the time of construction. The proposed modifications to the Antelope and Vincent substations would not occur on land that is currently grazed. No important farmlands are located at or adjacent to the existing substations, or within the areas proposed for the new substations (Substations One and Two) to be constructed.