

5.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

5.2.1 Environmental Setting

Regional

Merced County's agricultural industry generated over \$2.7 billion in 2010; the County's most valuable crops are milk, almonds, chickens, and cattle (Merced County, 2010). Agriculture is a major component of the County's land use. Typically, large cattle ranches and farms are found in the western portion of the County, while smaller farms are located in the east (PG&E, 2011).

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) in 1982 to assess the location, quantity, and quality of agricultural lands and conversion of these lands to other uses. FMMP data are used in elements of some county and city general plans, in regional studies on agricultural land conversion, and in environmental documents as a way of assessing project-specific impacts on farmland. The FMMP classifies agricultural land as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land (DOC, 2011a). Prime Farmland has the best combination of physical and chemical features to support ongoing agricultural production; to be designated as Prime Farmland, farmland must have been irrigated in the four years prior to FMMP mapping.

According to the FMMP, there are nearly 1.2 million acres of agricultural land in Merced County, including approximately 270,000 acres of Prime Farmland. This means that 92 percent of the land in the County is used for agriculture, and 21 percent of the land in the County is classified as Prime Farmland.

Local

The proposed 14.41-mile 115 kV power line would be located primarily on or adjacent to agricultural land and pastureland. Figure 5.2-1, at the end of the section, shows existing agricultural uses within the project corridor (within 0.5 miles of the proposed power line). Agricultural operations in this area include fruits and nuts, field crops, grain and hay crops, pasture, nursery plants and berries, and vineyards. Figure 5.2-2, at the end of this section, shows the FMMP farmland classification for the project corridor. Most of the land within the power line route is classified as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. There are nearly 6,500 acres of Prime Farmland and over 2,000 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance within the project corridor (PG&E, 2011). Some smaller sections of the route are classified as Farmland of Local Importance; Unique Farmland; Semi-Agricultural and Rural Commercial Land; Confined Animal Agriculture; and Rural Residential Land. In addition, approximately one-third of the route passes through lands enrolled in Williamson Act contracts (see Figure 5.2-3 at the end of this section). There are 3,360 acres of Prime Williamson Act lands and 82 acres of Non-prime Williamson Act lands within 0.5 miles of the proposed route (PG&E, 2011).

A majority of the project route is designated for agricultural use and is zoned as General Agricultural by Merced County. The existing Cressey and Gallo Substations are both located in areas zoned General Agricultural. Within a half-mile of the project route southwest of Cressey Substation, small areas are designated as Agricultural Residential, Single-Family Residential, General Commercial, and General Manufacturing land uses; the corresponding Merced County zoning designations for these areas are Agricultural Residential, Residential, General Commercial, and Industrial, respectively.

Regulatory Setting

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act). The Williamson Act (California Government Code Section 51200-51207) enables participating local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners in order to restrict specific parcels of land to agricultural uses in return for reduced property tax assessments. Private land within locally designated agricultural preserve areas that meets certain minimum size and earnings requirements is eligible for enrollment under Williamson Act contracts. The Williamson Act program is administered by the DOC, in conjunction with local governments, which administer the individual contract arrangements with landowners. The landowner commits to keep contracted parcels in agricultural, recreational, open space or other compatible uses for a minimum of ten years. Each year the contract automatically renews unless a notice of non-renewal or an application for cancellation is filed. In return, the land is taxed based on the income generated from the use of the land as opposed to its unrestricted market value. Participation in the Williamson Act program is dependent on County adoption and implementation of the program and is voluntary for landowners. (DOC, 2011b; Merced County, 2009)

In 2009, California essentially eliminated State-sponsored financial support for the Williamson Act program. State support had previously been provided through “subvention” payments intended to compensate local governments for property tax losses resulting from Williamson Act enrollment. Senate Bill 863, signed on October 19, 2010, provides an opportunity for counties to offset a portion of the loss of Williamson Act subvention funds (DOC, 2011c). Participating counties (including Merced County) received a share of a one-time \$10 million subvention appropriation. In addition, the bill allows the reduction of Williamson Act contracts from ten years to nine years as of January 1, 2011. The one-year reduction in contract term reduces a landowner’s property tax savings by 10 percent and allows the resulting tax recapture to be transferred directly into the County’s General Fund to help partially offset lost revenue. SB 863 is set to expire in 2015 (Merced County, 2011c).

Local Plans

Merced County Year 2000 General Plan. The Merced County Year 2000 General Plan includes the following goals and objectives that are relevant to potential impacts to agricultural land:

- **Goal 2, Objective 2.A, Policy 1:** Conversion of agricultural land into urban uses shall be allowed only where a clear and immediate need can be demonstrated, based on population projections and lack of land availability for nonagricultural uses.
- **Goal 7, Objective 7.A, Policy 1:** Conversion of agricultural and other rural land into urban uses shall only be allowed where a clear and immediate need can be demonstrated based on anticipated growth and availability of public services and facilities. For proposals to expand an existing community into rural lands the available vacant land inventory within the urban boundary shall also be considered.
- **Goal 7, Objective 7.A, Policy 3:** Premature and uncoordinated division of land which forces the early cessation of valid agricultural uses shall be avoided.

The Merced County Year 2000 General Plan includes the following land use designations, which are located within 0.5 miles of the power line route:

- **Agricultural.** This land use designation is generally applied to lands in the “valley floor” between the Sierra Nevada Foothills and the Diablo Range. Characteristic features of the areas designated Agricultural generally include: slope less than or equal to four percent, elevations less than 200 feet above sea level, very slow to moderate water runoff potential, very limited to moderate erosion potential, moderate to excellent water availability, and deeper more fertile topsoils. Primarily, the Agricultural

areas are used for cultivated agricultural practices that rely on good soil quality and water availability, and minimal slopes. There are other lands within these areas that have no agricultural use but have high open space value for recreation or wildlife. Other land use activities that may be appropriate include livestock facilities, wastewater lagoons, utility lines, and agricultural commercial facilities.

- **Agricultural Residential.** This designation is generally applied to areas considered appropriate for the construction of single-family dwelling units on large lots in a semi-rural environment, with less than a full range of public services. These areas may be used as a buffer between urban and rural land use activities. Conventional or manufactured single-family dwelling units are the primary land use activity in these areas, although other land use activities may include recreational and institutional facilities, animal husbandry or hobby farm activities, and all necessary accessory uses related to such uses.
- **Residential (Very Low and Low Density).** This designation is generally applied to areas considered appropriate for the construction of single-family dwelling units within a Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP). These areas provide for the majority of housing opportunities throughout the unincorporated communities in the County and are normally utilized in areas that may lack public water or sewer systems. Conventional or manufactured single-family dwelling units are the primary land use activity in these areas.
- **General Commercial.** This designation is generally applied to areas within an SUDP considered appropriate for general retail commercial activities. Typical uses in this area include retail commercial activities, personal and professional services, and recreational and institutional uses.
- **Industrial.** This designation is generally applied to areas within an SUDP considered appropriate and necessary for manufacturing and wholesale activities. Typical uses in these areas include research, processing, distribution, storage, or wholesale trade of various materials and products. Transportation facilities, such as air, rail or motor freight transfer services or maintenance facilities, and recreational or institutional activities may also be considered appropriate in these areas.

2030 Merced County General Plan Public Review Draft. The 2030 Merced County General Plan Public Review Draft, which was released for public review in February 2011, contains policies that shall govern the use of agricultural lands within the County once it is approved and adopted by the Board of Supervisors. This review draft contains the following policies relevant to potential impacts on agricultural land:

- **Goal AG-2, Policy AG-2.1:** Protect agriculturally designated areas and direct urban growth away from productive agricultural lands into cities, Urban Communities, and New Towns.
- **Goal AG-2, Policy AG-2.9:** Oppose the extension of urban services, such as sewer lines, water lines, or other urban infrastructure, into areas designated for agricultural use, unless necessary to protect public health, safety, and welfare.
- **Goal AG-2, Policy AG-2.12:** Encourage the voluntary merger of antiquated subdivision lots that conflict with adjacent agricultural uses, and continue to require environmental review of permits that could result in adverse environmental impacts in agricultural and rural areas, including traffic generation, groundwater contamination, stormwater drainage disposal, and air quality deterioration.
- **Goal LU-2, Policy LU-2.3:** Limit allowed land use within Agricultural and Foothill Pasture areas to agricultural crop production, farm support operations, and grazing and open space uses.
- **Goal LU-2, Policy LU-2.4:** Limit ancillary uses in Agricultural and Foothill Pasture areas to include secondary single-family residences, farmworker housing, agricultural tourism–related uses, and agricultural support services.

Merced County Zoning Districts. The following Merced County zoning districts are present within 0.5 miles of the power line route:

- **General Agricultural (A-1).** The purpose of the general agricultural zone is to provide for areas for more intensive farming operations dependent on higher quality soils, water availability and relatively flat topography, and agricultural commercial and/or industrial uses dependent on proximity to urban areas or location in sparsely populated low-traffic areas. Parcels smaller than 40 acres down to a minimum of 20 acres can be considered where agricultural productivity of the property will not be reduced.
- **Agricultural Residential (A-R).** The purpose of the agricultural residential zone is to provide areas for rural residential development and hobby farming and limited animal raising operations with less than a full range of urban services. It is intended that this zone typically serve as a transitional area between more dense urban communities and agricultural uses with the option of allowing either one unit or three units per acre.
- **Single-Family Residential (R-1).** The purpose of the single-family residential zone is to provide a full range of urban services and reserve appropriately located areas for family living at a range of low population densities consistent with sound standards of public health, welfare, and safety. It is the intent of this zone to protect the residential characteristics of an area and to promote a suitable environment for family life.
- **General Commercial (C-2).** The purpose of the general commercial zone is to provide areas for a wide variety of retail stores, entertainment establishments, offices and service businesses that serve unincorporated urban communities or regional markets. The C-2 districts are mainly located in the central business districts or along major transportation routes, such as arterial and major collector roads.
- **General Manufacturing (M-2).** The purpose of the general manufacturing zone is to provide for all types of manufacturing, distribution and storage uses. Uses within this zone tend to have moderate to high nuisance characteristics, such as noise, heat, glare, odor and vibration that may require separation from incompatible uses such as residential and office commercial. Typical uses in this zone include manufacturing of autos or trucks, asphaltic materials, glass, and paint products.

Applicant Proposed Measures

PG&E proposes to implement measures during the design, construction, and operation of the Proposed Project to ensure it would occur with minimal environmental impacts in a manner consistent with applicable rules and regulations. Applicant Proposed Measures (APMs) are considered part of the Proposed Project in the evaluation of environmental impacts. CPUC approval would be based upon PG&E adhering to the Proposed Project as described in this document, including this project description and the APMs, as well as any adopted mitigation measures identified by this Initial Study.

Table 5.2-1. Applicant Proposed Measures (APMs) Related to Agriculture and Forestry Resources

APM Number	Issue Area
Air Quality	
APM AQ-1	<p>Minimize Fugitive Dust. PG&E will minimize fugitive dust during construction by implementing the following measures. According to SJVAPCD, implementation of the following measures minimizes fugitive dust emissions to a less-than-significant level (SJVAPCD, 2002a).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible dust emissions (VDE) will not exceed 20 percent opacity during times when soil is disturbed. ▪ All disturbed areas, including storage piles, which are not being actively utilized for construction purposes, will be effectively stabilized to control dust emissions using water, chemical stabilizer/suppressants, or covering soils with a tarp or other suitable cover or vegetative ground cover. ▪ All onsite unpaved roads and offsite unpaved access roads will be effectively stabilized against dust emissions using water or chemical stabilizer/suppressant. ▪ All land clearing, grubbing, scraping, excavation, land leveling, grading, cut and fill, and demolition activities will be effectively controlled to prevent fugitive dust emissions by application of water or presoaking. ▪ When materials are transported offsite, all material will be covered, or effectively wetted to limit VDE, and at least 6 inches of freeboard space from the top of the container shall be maintained. ▪ All operations will limit or expeditiously remove the accumulation of mud or dirt from adjacent public streets at the end of each workday.* ▪ Following the addition of materials to, or the removal of materials from, the surface of outdoor storage piles, said piles will be effectively stabilized to control fugitive dust emissions by application of water or chemical stabilizer/suppressant. ▪ Within urban areas, track-out will be immediately removed when it extends 50 or more feet from the site and at the end of each workday. ▪ Vehicle speeds will be limited to 15 miles per hour on unpaved roads.
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	
APM HM-1	<p>Hazardous Substance Control and Emergency Response. PG&E will implement its hazardous substance control and emergency response procedures as needed. The procedures identify methods and techniques to minimize the exposure of the public and site workers to potentially hazardous materials during all phases of project construction through operation. They address worker training appropriate to the site worker's role in hazardous substance control and emergency response. The procedures also require implementing appropriate control methods and approved containment and spill-control practices for construction and materials stored on site. If it is necessary to store chemicals on site, they will be managed in accordance with all applicable regulations. Material safety data sheets will be maintained and kept available on site, as applicable.</p> <p>Project construction will involve soil surface blading/leveling, excavation of up to several feet, and augering to a maximum depth of 20 feet in some areas. No known soil contamination was identified within the project site. In the event that soils suspected of being contaminated (on the basis of visual, olfactory, or other evidence) are removed during site grading activities or excavation activities, the excavated soil will be tested, and if contaminated above hazardous waste levels, will be contained and disposed of at a licensed waste facility. The presence of known or suspected contaminated soil will require testing and investigation procedures to be supervised by a qualified person, as appropriate, to meet state and federal regulations.</p> <p>All hazardous materials and hazardous wastes will be handled, stored, and disposed of in accordance with all applicable regulations, by personnel qualified to handle hazardous materials. The hazardous substance control and emergency response procedures include, but are not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proper disposal of potentially contaminated soils. ▪ Establishing site-specific buffers for construction vehicles and equipment located near sensitive resources. ▪ Emergency response and reporting procedures to address hazardous material spills. ▪ Stopping work at that location and contacting the County Fire Department Hazardous Materials Unit immediately if visual contamination or chemical odors are detected. Work will be resumed at this location after any necessary consultation and approval by the Hazardous Materials Unit. <p>PG&E will complete its Emergency Action Plan Form as part of project tailboard meetings. The purpose of the form is to gather emergency contact numbers, first aid location, work site location, and tailboard information.</p>

Table 5.2-1. Applicant Proposed Measures (APMs) Related to Agriculture and Forestry Resources

Hydrology and Water Quality	
APM WQ-1	<p>SWPPP or Erosion Control Plan Development and Implementation. Following project approval, PG&E will prepare and implement a SWPPP, if required by state law, or erosion control plan to minimize construction impacts on surface water and groundwater quality. Implementation of the SWPPP or erosion control plan will help stabilize graded areas and reduce erosion and sedimentation. The plan will designate BMPs that will be adhered to during construction activities. Erosion and sediment control measures, such as straw wattles, covers, and silt fences, will be installed before the onset of winter rains or any anticipated storm events. Suitable stabilization measures will be used to protect exposed areas during construction activities, as necessary. During construction activities, measures will be in place to prevent contaminant discharge.</p> <p>The project SWPPP or erosion control plan will include erosion control and sediment transport BMPs to be used during construction. BMPs, where applicable, will be designed by using specific criteria from recognized BMP design guidance manuals. Erosion-minimizing efforts may include measures such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defining ingress and egress within the project site ▪ Implementing a dust control program during construction ▪ Properly containing stockpiled soils <p>Erosion control measures identified will be installed in an area before construction begins during the wet season and before the onset of winter rains or any anticipated storm events. Temporary measures such as silt fences or wattles, intended to minimize sediment transport from temporarily disturbed areas, will remain in place until disturbed areas have stabilized.</p> <p>A copy of the SWPPP or erosion control plan will be provided to the CPUC prior to construction for recordkeeping. The plan will be updated during construction as required by the SWRCB.</p>
Land Use and Planning	
APM LU-1	<p>Agriculture Impacts Avoidance and Compensation. To avoid or minimize potential less-than-significant impacts to agriculture, PG&E will work with farmers and ranchers to schedule project work, to the extent feasible, around their harvest and planting periods. Access across active fields will be negotiated with the farmer and/or landowner in advance of any construction activities. In areas containing permanent crops (i.e., grape vines, orchard crops, etc.) that must be removed to gain access to pole sites for construction purposes, PG&E will provide compensation to the farmer and/or landowner in accordance with its Project Damage Assessment and Resolution Program.</p>

5.2.2 Environmental Impacts and Assessment

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 forest carbon measurement methodology provided in 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?

Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
b. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 by 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Significance criteria established by CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G.

a. Would the project 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 WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. Most of the land along the power line route is classified as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. There are nearly 6,500 acres of Prime Farmland and over 2,000 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance within 0.5 miles of the proposed power line route (PG&E, 2011). Figure 5.2-2 shows the FMMP farmland classification for the project corridor.

The Proposed Project would require temporary ground disturbance at pole installation and removal locations and pull and tension sites. The project would require installation of approximately 241 new poles for the new power line and the removal of 170 poles for relocating existing distribution line. Pull and tension sites would be located every 0.5 to 2 miles depending on final project engineering. Work areas for pole installation and pull and tension sites would be approximately 40 feet wide (the width of PG&E’s right-of-way) and 200 feet long. Work at the Cressey Substation would occur within the current substation footprint. The Gallo Substation would be expanded by 4,500 square feet (0.1 acres). The expansion would cover a disturbed/developed area that would be acquired from the Gallo Winery. Work at the Gallo Substation would occur within the expanded substation footprint and small temporary work area that would also be located in a disturbed/developed area on the Gallo property. There would be 1-2 temporary staging areas along the project route that would cover approximately 10 acres each. Potential locations for these staging areas are shown in Figures 4-3a through 4-3h.

Construction activities at work areas, and access to and delivery of materials to these sites, may require some vegetation removal and tree trimming. On at least one property (on Eucalyptus Avenue and Mercedes Avenue), three almond trees would need to be removed. This property is designated as Prime Farmland. At this site, PG&E expects to obtain a right-of-way easement through the existing almond orchard for construction and maintenance activities. New poles for the proposed power line would be installed in the holes left when the three trees are removed. This configuration would prevent construction activities from interfering with the irrigation system on the property. The landowner would be compensated for the easement and for tree removal through PG&E’s Project Damage Assessment and Resolution Program. (PG&E, 2012a; PG&E, 2012b)

PG&E's current and proposed right-of-way and the Proposed Project work areas are located primarily along roads. However, many of these work sites are adjacent to active agricultural operations along the project route, and some work would occur within active agricultural areas. Most impacts to active agricultural operations would be temporary, and all work areas on active agricultural land would be available for farming use after construction is complete. Pole installation would cause very minimal permanent ground disturbance within PG&E's right-of-way (approximately 653 square feet or 0.015 acres) and would not interfere with continued agricultural use of affected properties. APM LU-1 specifies that PG&E would work with farmers and ranchers to coordinate scheduling to minimize impacts to agricultural operations to the extent feasible. This APM, by itself, is not adequate to reduce interference with agricultural operations to a less-than-significant level. APM LU-1 does not include any requirements related to which landowner/farmers would be notified, when they would be notified, what information they would be given, or how complaints about construction activities would be addressed. Mitigation Measure AG-1 (Coordinate with landowners/farmers/ranchers regarding construction) supplements APM LU-1 with additional requirements regarding timing and how complaints related to construction activities would be addressed.

The Proposed Project would not result in the conversion of any designated Farmland to non-agricultural use, but it could temporarily interfere with active agricultural operations, and the project would require some removal of orchard trees, and possibly other permanent crops as well. Agricultural landowners/operators would be compensated for losses of permanent crops, and PG&E would minimize impacts to active agricultural operations through the implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-1. In addition, APMs AQ-1 (minimize fugitive dust) would minimize any potential impacts to agriculture from fugitive dust; APM HM-1 (hazardous substance control and emergency response) would minimize potential for hazardous materials to agricultural areas; and APM WQ-1 (SWPPP or erosion control plan) would minimize potential water quality impacts. With the implementation of these measures, impacts related to Farmland conversion would be less than significant.

MM AG-1 Coordinate with landowners, farmers, and ranchers regarding construction activities.
Coordination shall include the following:

Advance Notice. Prior to construction, the Applicant shall give at least 30 days advance notice of the start of construction-related activities. Notification shall be provided by mailing notices to all properties within 300 feet of the project route. The announcement shall:

- Describe where and when construction is planned; and
- Provide contact information for a point of contact for complaints related to construction activities.

Prior to commencing ground disturbing activities, the Applicant shall submit a copy of the template used for the notification letter and a list of the landowners notified.

As specified in APM LU-1, the Applicant shall "work with farmers and ranchers to schedule project work, to the extent feasible, around their harvest and planting periods in order to minimize disruptions to agricultural operations. Access across active fields shall be negotiated with the farmer and/or landowner in advance of any construction activities. In areas containing permanent crops (i.e., grape vines, orchard crops, etc.) that must be removed to gain access to pole sites for construction purposes, the Applicant shall provide compensation to the farmer and/or landowner in accordance with PG&E's Project Damage Assessment and Resolution Program" [APM LU-1].

Reporting of Complaints. The Applicant shall document all complaints and strategies for resolving complaints in regular reporting to the CPUC.

b. Would the project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The proposed power line route passes exclusively through areas zoned General Agricultural (A-1), although there are some small areas with other zoning designations within 0.5 miles of the route. The project area contains existing utility infrastructure, and implementation of the Proposed Project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use. The Proposed Project is also compatible with the policies related to agricultural impacts in the Merced County Year 2000 General Plan and the review draft of the 2030 Merced County General Plan. While the project route is located in a predominantly agricultural area, it is intended to increase service reliability, including reliability of electric service for agricultural operations. It would not trigger an increase in urban growth in the area that would contribute to the conversion of agricultural land.

As shown in Figure 5.2-3, approximately one-third of the power line route passes through land enrolled in Williamson Act contracts. There are 3,360 acres of Prime, and 82 acres of non-Prime Williamson Act lands within 0.5 miles of the proposed power line route (PG&E, 2011). As described in Section 5.2.1(a), most of the impacts of project construction (and future operations and maintenance) would be temporary. Any impacts to permanent crops would be compensated in accordance with APM LU-1. The one agricultural property where tree removal would initially be required is not enrolled in a Williamson Act contract.

According to California Government Code Section 51238.1, activities may be compatible with Williamson Act enrollment if: (1) The use will not significantly compromise the long-term productive agricultural capability of the subject contracted parcel or parcels or on other contracted lands in agricultural preserves; (2) The use will not significantly displace or impair current or reasonably foreseeable agricultural operations on the subject contracted parcel or parcels or on other contracted lands in agricultural preserves; and (3) The use will not result in the significant removal of adjacent contracted land from agricultural or open-space use. California Government Code Section 51238 also recognizes that notwithstanding any determination of compatible uses by the county or city, the erection of electric facilities is determined to be a compatible uses within any agricultural preserve, unless the county or city makes a finding to the contrary after notice and hearing. The Proposed Project meets these compatible use criteria and would not require any changes in zoning or cancellation of Williamson Act contracts; therefore, conflicts with zoning and Williamson Act contracts would be less than significant.

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

NO IMPACT. The project corridor does not contain any designated timberland; therefore, there would be no impact.

d. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

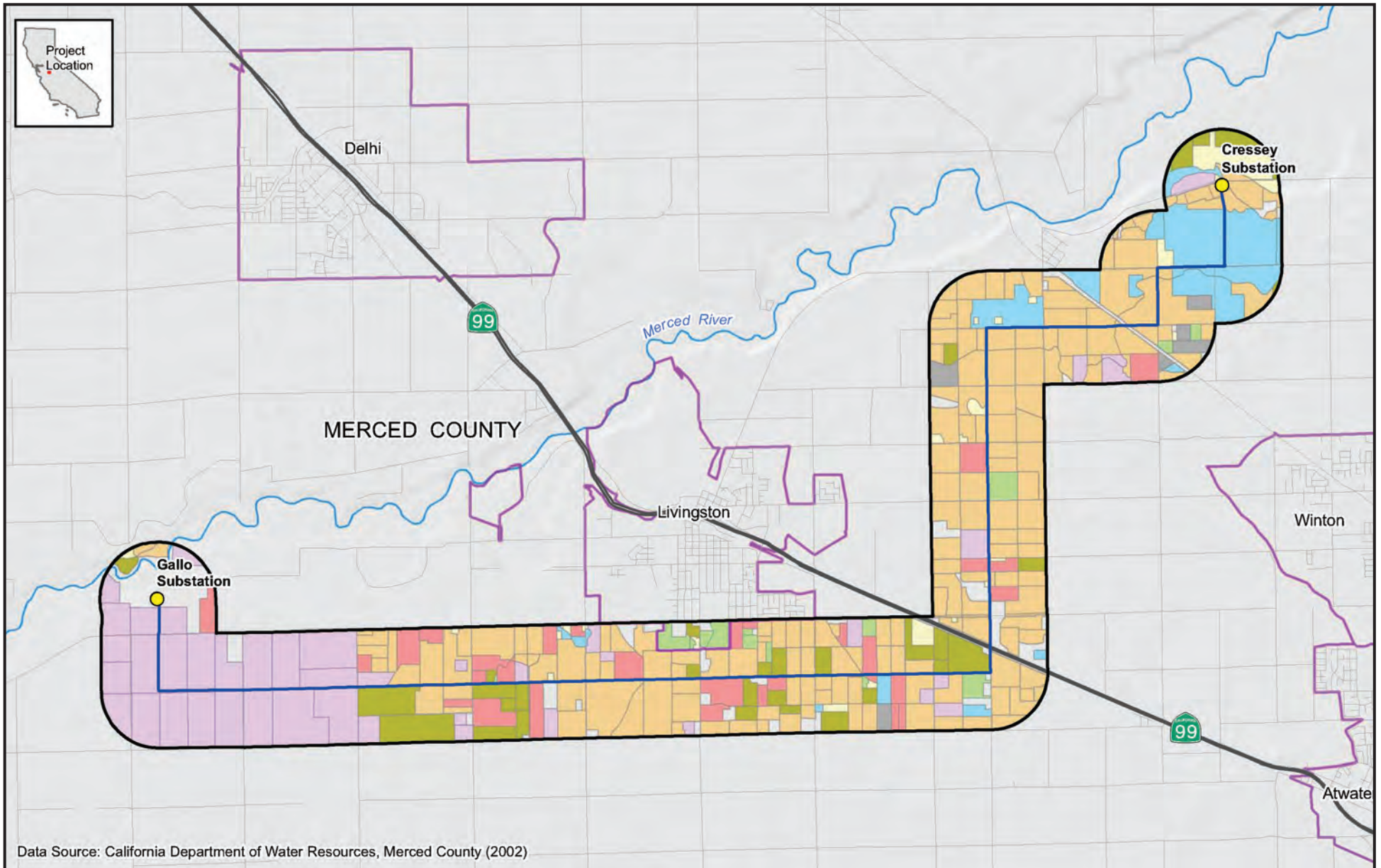
NO IMPACT. The project corridor does not contain any forest land; therefore, there would be no impact.

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?

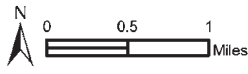
LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. As described in Section 5.2.2(a) above, work areas for the Proposed Project, and access and delivery of materials to these sites, could temporarily disturb existing agricultural operations along the power line route. However, after project construction is complete, farming and grazing activities would continue throughout the project corridor.

Orchards and other crops in the project area are dependent on pollination by honey bees. The Proposed Project would generate electric and magnetic fields (EMF). EMF issues are discussed generally in Appendix B of the PEA for the project (PG&E, 2011). Some recent studies show a link between EMF from cellular phones and cellular towers and negative effects on bees (Das, 2011; Favre, 2011), but these studies do not address EMF from transmission lines. Studies specifically addressing the impacts on bees from power line EMF indicate that hives are susceptible to shocks from some electric fields (at least 1.8 to 4.1 kV/m) (Kavet and Silva, 2010). At the edge of the right-of-way for the proposed 115 kV power line, electrical currents would be less than 0.25 kV/m (Great River Energy, 2012). This potential impact would not result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. Therefore, even if hives are located directly adjacent to the right-of-way, impacts related to electrical currents would be less than significant.

The project is intended to increase electric service reliability, including reliability of service for agricultural operations. The project would not induce growth and would not convert any Farmland to non-agricultural use. There is no forest land in the project area, so there would be no conversion of forest land to non-forest use. With the implementation of APM LU-1, impacts would be less than significant.



Data Source: California Department of Water Resources, Merced County (2002)

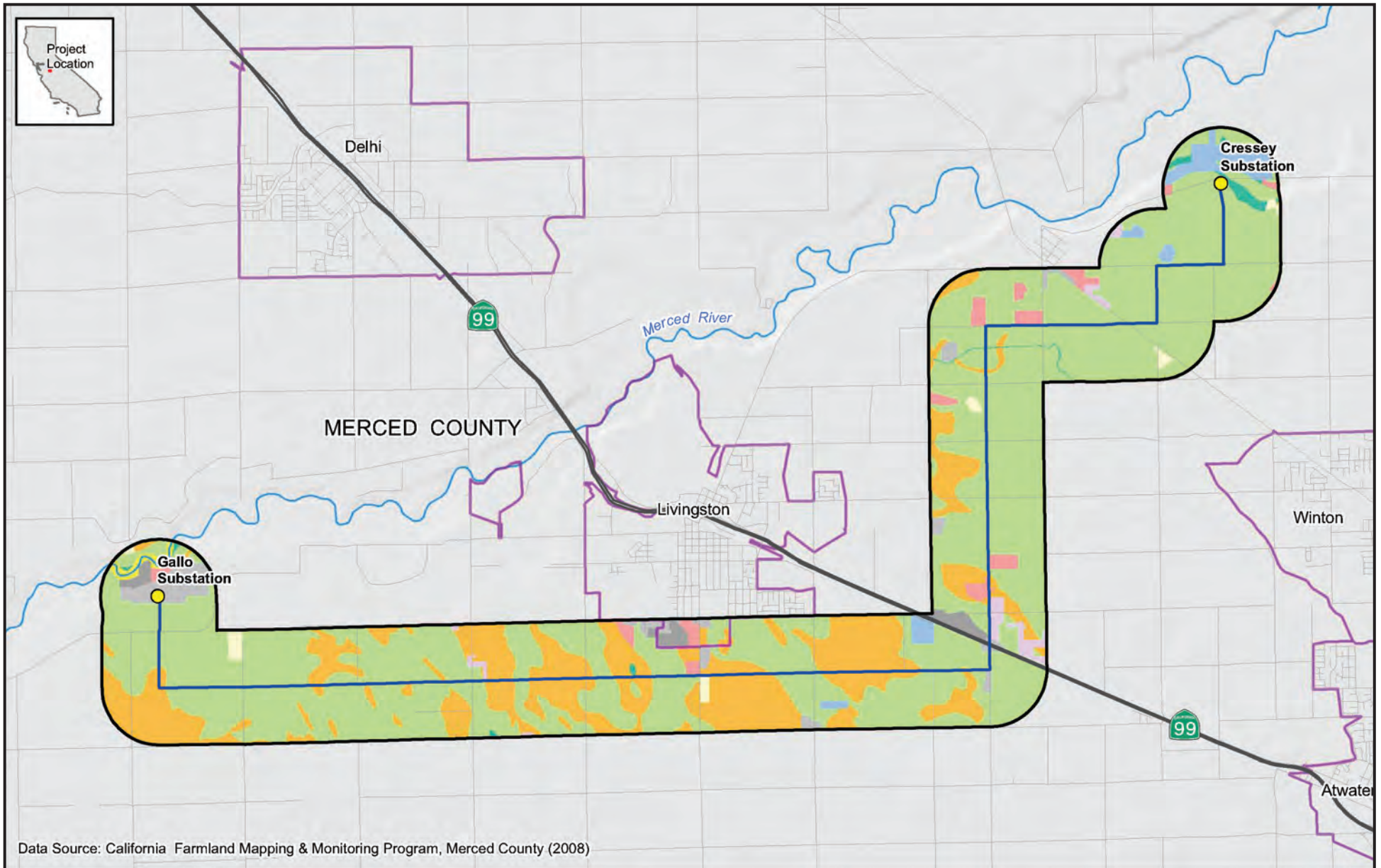


Source: PG&E, 2011.

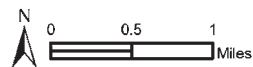
- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ● Substation | — River | ■ Pasture |
| — Cressey-Gallo Power Line Route | Existing Ag Use | ■ Semiagricultural |
| ○ Half-mile Radius Around Power Line Route | ■ Deciduous Fruits and Nuts | ■ Truck, Nursery, and Berry Crops |
| □ City Boundary | ■ Field Crops | ■ Vineyard |
| — State Highway | ■ Grain and Hay Crops | |
| — Road | ■ Idle Field | |

Figure 5.2-1
Existing Agriculture Uses

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Data Source: California Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program, Merced County (2008)

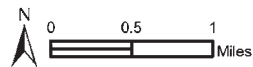
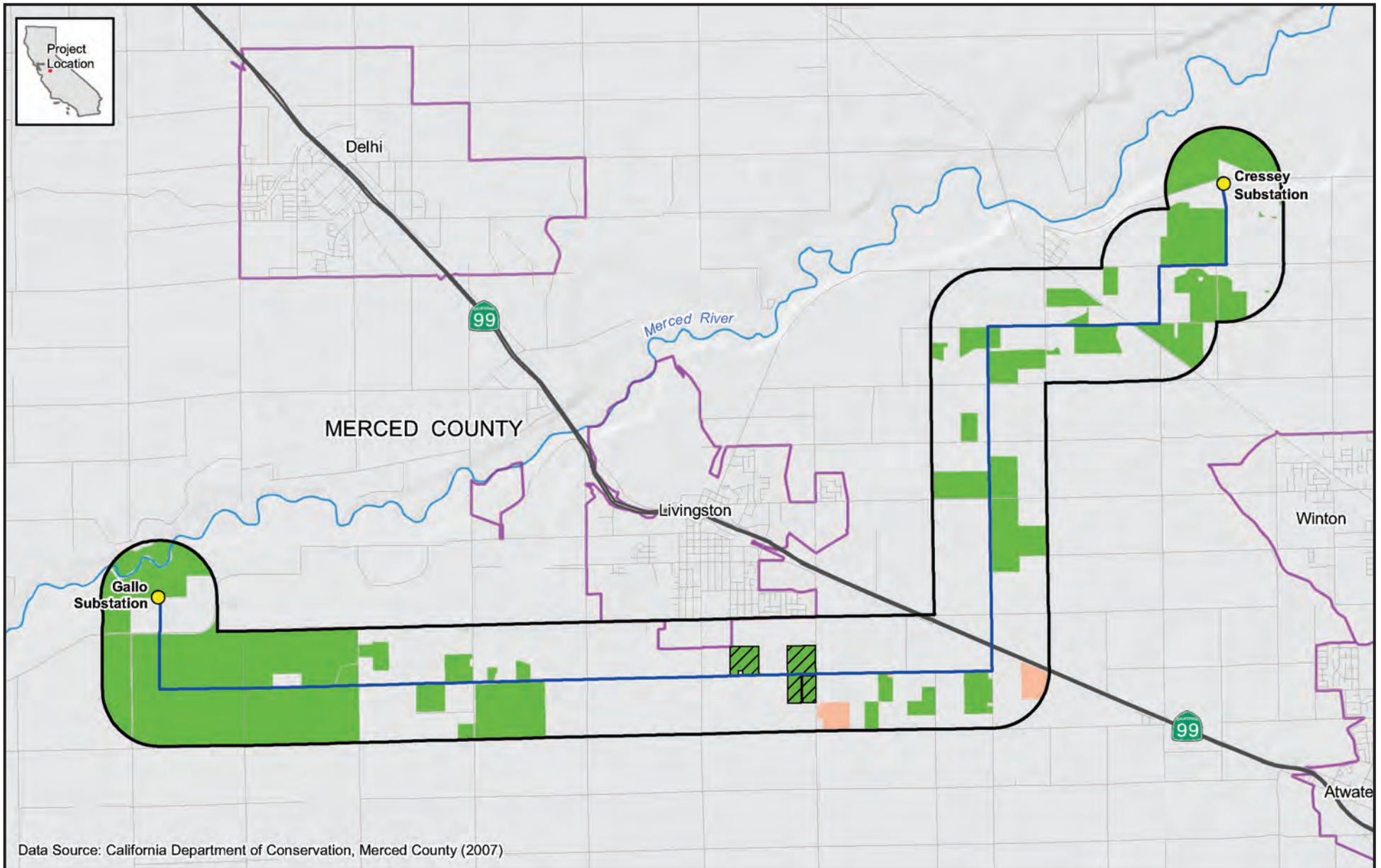


- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ● Substation | — River | ■ Semi-Agricultural and Rural Commercial Land |
| — Cressey-Gallo Power Line Route | CA Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program | ■ Confined Animal Agriculture |
| ○ Half-mile Radius Around Power Line Route | ■ Prime Farmland | ■ Urban and Built Up Land |
| □ City Boundary | ■ Farmland of Local Importance | ■ Rural Residential Land |
| — State Highway | ■ Farmland of Statewide Importance | ■ Nonagricultural and Natural Vegetation |
| — Road | ■ Unique Farmland | ■ Vacant or Disturbed Land |

Source: PG&E, 2011.

Figure 5.2-2
FMMP Farmland Classification

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Source: PG&E, 2011.

- Substation
- Cressey-Gallo Power Line Route
- Half-mile Radius Around Power Line Route
- City Boundary
- State Highway
- Road
- ~ River
- Williamson Act Land Classes**
- Prime Agricultural Land
- Non-prime Agricultural Land
- Land in Non-renewal Process

Figure 5.2-3
Williamson Act
Program Contracts

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