

# Section 3.2

## 3.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section describes existing conditions and the potential agricultural resource impacts associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Project and alternatives.

### 3.2.1 Existing Conditions

The Preferred Site for the El Casco Substation is located within the boundaries of the Norton Younglove Reserve. The area is designated for open space and conservation and is currently used for passive recreational purposes, such as hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian use. The substation would be constructed adjacent to an area of Prime Farmland to the north of the substation. This Prime Farmland runs along San Timoteo Creek. Figure 3.2-1 shows the Proposed Project and the lands adjacent to it with agricultural land designations.

Zanja Substation is located within the northwestern portion of the City of Yucaipa. The substation is located on land designated for rural living residential uses. Primary land uses in the vicinity of the substation include rural residential uses.

Banning Substation is located within the City of Banning. The substation is located on land designated for commercial/industrial uses. Primary land uses in the vicinity of the substation include commercial/industrial uses.

The southerly 115 kV subtransmission line route begins in Riverside County within the boundaries of the Norton Younglove Reserve and follows an existing subtransmission line corridor towards the City of Beaumont. The 115 kV subtransmission line runs along the southern extent of the City of Beaumont and the City of Banning with portions of the route in unincorporated Riverside County. Land uses within the vicinity of the 115 kV subtransmission line route include open space, residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial uses (as discussed in Section 3.9). This existing subtransmission line route runs adjacent to areas of Prime Farmland in Riverside County, west of the Cities of Calimesa and Beaumont (Figure 3.2-1). The proposed 115 kV subtransmission line route would also traverse adjacent to Prime Farmland and across a portion of 40 acres of Prime Farmland, just south of SR-60, west of the City of Beaumont.

The Mill Creek Communications Site is located on SCE-owned property within the San Bernardino National Forest. The site is located on land designated as a resource conservation area.

The proposed fiber optic system route begins in San Bernardino County within the City of Redlands. It follows existing pole and underground lines through the Cities of Yucaipa, Calimesa, Beaumont, and Banning, as well as through unincorporated areas of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Primary land uses within the vicinity of the proposed fiber optic system route are open space, residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial (as

discussed in Section 3.9). The proposed fiber optic system would run adjacent to Prime Agricultural Farmland along San Timoteo Creek, west of the cities of Calimesa and Beaumont. It would also run adjacent to a small area of Unique Farmland. (Riverside County 1994). (See Figure 3.2-1)

### 3.2.2 Significance Criteria

Impacts to agricultural resources are considered potentially significant if the project would:

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

#### 3.2.2.1 Farmland Classifications

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has established classifications for notable agricultural lands based on criteria for soil characteristics, climatic conditions, and water supply. In order of importance the classifications are:

- Prime Farmland: Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical properties for the production of crops;
- Farmland of Statewide Importance: Similar to Prime Farmland, but with minor shortcomings (e.g., steeper slopes, inability to hold water); and
- Unique Farmland: Land of lesser quality soils, but recently used for the production of specific high economic value crops.

The California Department of Conservation's (CDC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) provides information on agricultural land in California. This information is used to develop farmland conversion reports and compile farmland classification maps for the State. These farmland classification maps utilize data from the USDA NRCS soil survey and current land use information. FMMP maps have been created for all counties in California and depict currently urbanized lands and a qualitative sequence of agricultural designations.

**3.2.2.2 Williamson Act**

The CDC also oversees agricultural lands protected by the Williamson Act. The Williamson Act allows private landowners to contract with cities and counties to register lands as agricultural preserves with the object of preventing conversion to urban use. Land use in these reserves is to be restricted to open space and agricultural use. In exchange for agreeing to protect the land's agricultural or open space uses, the landowners receive reduced property taxes.

**3.2.3 Proposed Project Impacts****3.2.3.1 Construction Impacts**

Construction activities for all elements of the Proposed Project would not result in the conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use because existing agricultural operations would still continue to operate with or without the development of the Proposed Project. It is possible that some Prime and Unique Farmland may need to be graded for pulling stations or to allow access onto existing roads. However, this impact would be temporary and grading would be avoided in Prime and Unique agricultural soils if feasible. If grading must occur, then the soils would be stock piled and spread over the site and reclaimed after construction is complete. Ultimately, the Farmland would still be available for agricultural use. Therefore, the impact would be less than significant.

The construction of all elements of the Proposed Project would not result in an indirect impact resulting in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses.

The proposed 115 kV subtransmission line route runs through land that is currently subject to a Williamson Act contract. Specifically, between mile-markers 10.2 and 12.3, the subtransmission line would run through a registered Williamson Act preserve. Currently, SCE operates 115 kV subtransmission lines on wood pole structures in this area within existing utility easements. The construction of the Proposed Project involves replacing the existing 115 kV subtransmission lines with new 115 kV subtransmission lines on steel poles within the existing SCE right-of-way. Because the proposed 115 kV subtransmission lines would be located within the existing right-of-way, construction activities would not conflict with the existing Williamson Act agricultural preserves along this subtransmission line segment. No other areas associated with the Proposed Project elements would cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts.

In summary, project construction impacts related to agricultural resources would be less than significant.

**3.2.3.2 Operational Impacts**

Operation of the substations, subtransmission lines, and proposed fiber optic system would not result in the direct or indirect conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses. Operation of the Proposed Project would not conflict with land zoned for agricultural uses or land subject to Williamson Act contracts.

In summary, impacts to agricultural resources due to operation of the Proposed Project would be less than significant.

**3.2.3.3 Applicant Proposed Mitigation Measures**

Because impacts to agricultural resources would be less than significant, no mitigation measures are required.

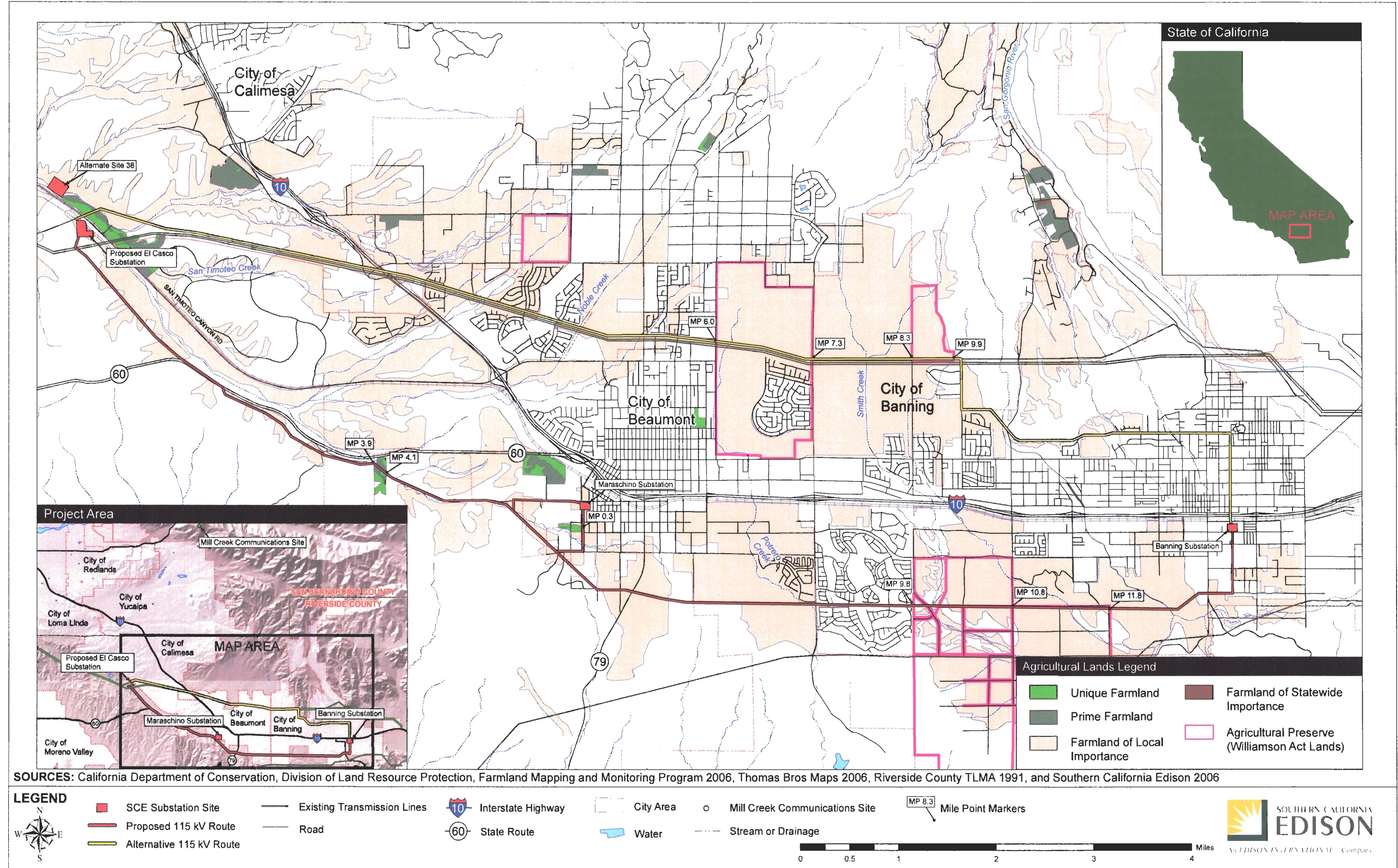
**3.2.4 Alternatives****3.2.4.1 Northerly 115 kV Subtransmission Line Route Alternative**

The northerly 115 kV subtransmission line route would result in the construction of the subtransmission line within existing SCE rights-of-way. Agricultural operations currently occurring within the vicinity of these existing easements would continue to operate regardless of whether the 115 kV subtransmission lines are constructed. The northerly 115 kV subtransmission line route would not result in conflicts with land zoned for agricultural uses or subject to Williamson Act contracts and would not result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses. In summary, impacts to agricultural resources due to the construction and operation of the subtransmission line route alternative would be less than significant.

**3.2.4.2 Site 38 (Alternate Site)**

Currently, the alternative substation location at Site 38 is not used for agricultural operations. The area is designated for open space and conservation as a result of the adoption of the Oak Valley Specific Plan. Additionally, the areas surrounding the substation site are not currently used for agricultural operations and are designated for development under the Oak Valley Specific Plan. Therefore, this site alternative would not result in the conversion of Farmland or cause potential conflicts with land zoned for agricultural use or land subject to Williamson Act contracts. In summary, impacts to agricultural resources due to the construction and operation of the substation at the Site 38 site alternative would be less than significant.

Figure 3.2-1, Agricultural Lands in the Project Area



SOURCES: California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program 2006, Thomas Bros Maps 2006, Riverside County TLMA 1991, and Southern California Edison 2006