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CHAPTER 4 – ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-Than-Significant Impact with Mitigation	Less-Than-Significant Impact	No Impact
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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

4.2.0 Introduction

This section describes the agricultural resources in the vicinity of the Sierra Pacific Power Company 625 and 650 Line Upgrade Project (project) and analyzes potential impacts to these resources from construction and operation of the project. The California Department of Conservation's (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) has not designated any farmland within 25 miles of the project. Because the project components will not cross any land under a Williamson Act contract or any land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Farmland of Local Importance, the project will have no impact to agricultural resources.

4.2.1 Methodology

Research involved the review of the Town of Truckee General Plan, Tahoe City and Martis Valley Community Plans, Burton Creek State Park General Plan, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) Regional and Kings Beach Industrial Area Community Plans, United States (U.S.) Forest Service (USFS) Tahoe National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Plans, and the Placer County General Plan. A review of the DOC FMMP, Williamson Act parcels, land use designations, and zoning maps for the project area was also conducted. Additionally, field visits to the site were conducted to confirm land uses.

4.2.2 Existing Conditions

Regulatory Background

Federal and State

California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Important Farmland Designations

The DOC Division of Land Resource Protection FMMP generates maps depicting Important Farmlands. These farmlands are categorized according to specific criteria, including soil quality and irrigation conditions. Approximately 94 percent of the FMMP study area is based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service soil classification system, which evaluates both physical and chemical conditions, including soil temperature, moisture regime, pH, flooding, groundwater depth, erodibility, permeability, and sodium content. FMMP maps are updated every 2 years using aerial imagery review, field reconnaissance, computer mapping analyses, and public input. The minimum land use mapping unit is 10 acres; smaller units of land are generally incorporated into surrounding map classifications.

The DOC has established the following eight land use classifications:

- **Prime Farmland:** Prime Farmland has the optimum combination of physical and chemical conditions that are able to sustain long-term agricultural production. The soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply on Prime Farmlands provides conditions to produce sustained high yields. Prime Farmlands must have been used for irrigated production within 4 years of the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Farmland of Statewide Importance is similar to Prime Farmland; however, these farmlands have minor shortcomings, such as a higher slope or decreased ability to store soil moisture. Similar to Prime Farmlands, Farmlands of Statewide Importance must have been used for irrigated production within 4 years of the mapping date.
- **Unique Farmland:** Unique Farmlands have lower quality soils and are used for the production of California's leading agricultural products. Unique Farmlands are typically irrigated but may also include non-irrigated vineyards or orchards found in certain climatic zones. Unique Farmlands must have been cropped within 4 years of the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Farmlands of Local Importance are farmlands that are vital to the local agricultural economy, as identified by each county's local advisory committee and board of supervisors.
- **Grazing Land:** Grazing Land is land on which existing vegetation is suitable for livestock grazing.
- **Urban and Built-Up Land:** Urban and Built-Up Land is defined as land that is occupied by buildings or other structures at a minimum density of one unit to 1.5 acres (or approximately six structures to 10 acres). This land is used for development purposes,

including residential, commercial, industrial, construction, public administration, institutional, transportation yards, airports, cemeteries, golf courses, sewage treatment, sanitary landfills, and water control structures.

- **Other Land:** Other Land includes all lands that are not in any other map category, such as water bodies smaller than 40 acres; low-density rural developments; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; and brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing.
- **Water:** Water includes all perennial water bodies that are a minimum of 40 acres.

For the purposes of this section, “Important Farmlands” include Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance.

Williamson Act Land Designations

The Williamson Act, also known as the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (California Government Code [CGC] § 51200 *et seq.*), preserves agricultural and open space lands from conversion to urban land uses by establishing a contract between local governments (i.e., city and county governments) and private landowners to voluntarily restrict their land holdings to agricultural or open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments based on farming or open space use rather than assessments based on the full market property value, which is typically 20 percent to 75 percent higher. Williamson Act contracts are valid for a minimum of 10 years and are automatically renewable after each 10-year term.

The Williamson Act also allows local governments to establish Agricultural Preserves, parcels of land for which cities or counties are willing to enter into Williamson Act contracts. Agricultural Preserves must include a minimum of 100 acres and typically avoid areas in which public utility improvements and associated land acquisitions may be necessary (CGC § 51230). Although the Williamson Act does not specify compatible land uses for property located adjacent to contract lands or Agricultural Preserves, it does state that cities and counties must determine compatible land use types while recognizing that temporary or permanent population increases frequently impair or hamper agricultural operations (CGC § 51220.5).

Local

Nevada County

Farmlands of Local Importance are identified by each county, based on specific criteria established by that county’s board of supervisors and local advisory committee. In Nevada County, Farmlands of Local Importance are farmlands that have physical characteristics that would qualify as Prime or Statewide farmlands, except for the lack of irrigation water. Farmlands that produce crops that are not listed under Unique Lands, but that are important to the economy of the county include Christmas trees, sudan grass, meadow hay, chestnuts, poultry houses and feedlots, improved dryland pasture (not rangeland), and irrigated pasture.

Placer County

In Placer County, Farmlands of Local Importance are farmlands that are not covered by the categories of Prime, Statewide, or Unique Farmland. They include lands zoned for agriculture by the County Ordinance and the Williamson Act, dry farmed lands, irrigated pasture lands, lands that have the potential for irrigation from Placer County water supplies, and other agricultural lands of significant economic importance to the county.

Local Policies

The Town of Truckee General Plan, Tahoe City and Martis Valley Community Plans, Burton Creek State Park General Plan, TRPA Regional and Kings Beach Industrial Area Community Plans, USFS Tahoe National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Plans, and the Placer County General Plan were reviewed for agricultural resource policies that are relevant to the project. There were no agricultural resource policies that are relevant to the project within these plans.

Agricultural Setting

The project is not located on and will not cross any Important Farmland or land under a Williamson Act contract. However, the project components cross lands under the jurisdiction of Placer County and the TRPA, where the general plan land use designation and zoning designation allow timber harvesting, agriculture, and agricultural processing uses, as discussed in Section 4.9 Land Use. While none of the project area is under active crop cultivation, some timber harvesting occurs in the vicinity of the project components.

4.2.3 Impacts

Significance Criteria

Standards of significance were derived from Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. Impacts to agricultural resources will be considered significant if the project:

- Converts Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use for a long period of time or permanently
- Conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use
- Conflicts with a Williamson Act contract such that it must be cancelled
- Involves other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in permanent or long-term conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use

Question 4.2a – Farmland Conversion – *No Impact*

Because the project is not located on any land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, the project will not convert any land to non-agricultural uses, and no impact will result.

Question 4.2b – Zoning or Williamson Act Contract Conflicts – No Impact

The Placer County and TRPA land use designations for the project area allow for a variety of land uses, including agricultural uses. Utility facilities are also an allowed use as discussed in Section 4.9 Land Use; therefore, there is no conflict with the existing zoning. Upon project completion, the amount of land occupied by utility right-of-way will be similar to existing conditions. There will be no significant loss of land where agricultural uses are allowed. In addition, the project is not located on any land under a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, there will be no conflicts with zoning or Williamson Act contracts, and no impact will occur.

Question 4.2c – Other Farmland Conversion – No Impact

The project is not located on any Important Farmland or land zoned strictly for agricultural use. While some logging occurs in the vicinity of the project components, no active crop cultivation occurs. Therefore, conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use as a result of the project will not occur. Therefore, there will be no impact.

4.2.4 Applicant-Proposed Measures

Because the project will have no impact on agricultural resources, no avoidance or minimization measures are proposed.

4.2.5 References

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