

5.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

This section identifies and evaluates issues related to agriculture and forestry resources in the context of the Proposed Project and alternatives. It includes a description of existing land use conditions in relation to farmland designations, Williamson Act contracts, forest and timberland zoning, and related uses. This section further provides a discussion of applicable state, regional, and local plans and programs, and an evaluation of potential impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Project and alternatives.

5.2.1 Setting

Regional and Local Setting

Agriculture is a regionally important industry in Ventura County. In 2013, there were approximately 92,000 acres of irrigated cropland in the county. The five highest-value crops in the county were strawberries, avocados, raspberries, nursery stock, and lemons; these, along with numerous other crops and agricultural products, contributed to a countywide gross value of over 2 billion dollars (VCOAC, 2014).

Agricultural lands occur along Proposed Project Segment 2, as shown on **Figure 5.2-1, *Farmland in the Proposed Project Area***. Maps issued as part of the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) show that the existing rights-of-way (ROWs) in which the Proposed Project would be developed are located within areas designated as *Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance* ("Farmland") (CDC, 2012). Additionally, some of the lands along Segment 2 are in an Agricultural Preserve and/or covered by a Williamson Act contract (Ventura County RMA, 2013 and 2014). Williamson Act lands are shown in **Figure 5.2-2, *Williamson Act Land in the Proposed Project Area***.

As described in Section 5.11, *Land Use and Planning*, and shown on Figure 5.11-2, *Zoning Designations in the Proposed Project Vicinity*, nearly all of Segment 2 of the Proposed Project alignment traverses areas within Ventura County zoned *Agricultural Exclusive (AE)*. Additionally, Pole location 2 at the northeastern end of Segment 2 is located within the City of Moorpark in an area zoned *Agricultural Exclusive* (City of Moorpark, 2008); however, this area is not currently in agricultural use. There are no existing agricultural resources or zoning for agricultural use within or adjacent to Segments 1, 3, or 4 of the Proposed Project.

There are no designated forest lands within or adjacent to the Proposed Project alignment, nor is there zoning for forest land along the Proposed Project alignment (see Section 5.11, *Land Use and Planning*). However, Public Resources Code Section 12220(g) defines "forest land" as "land that can support 10percent 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." Nearly all of Segment 3 is located in open space lands managed by Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency (COSCA). This land includes mountainous terrain in a natural and mostly

undisturbed setting. The Conejo Canyons Open Space Management Plan (Management Plan), prepared by the COSCA, provides a comprehensive guide for the long-term management of the Conejo Canyons natural, cultural, and scenic resources, while providing for compatible passive multi-use, trail-based recreational activities. Because the Conejo Canyons area could support 10-percent native tree cover under natural conditions, and currently manages forest resources including aesthetics, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other benefits, this EIR considers land managed by COSCA as “forest land.” Ventura County does not contain land which produces timber commercially for eventual use as lumber or pulp. Several Christmas tree farms are zoned *Timberland Preserve (T-P)* pursuant to the provisions of the Timberland Preserve Zone of the County Zoning Ordinance. None of these Christmas tree farms is located near the Proposed Project alignment (Ventura County RMA, 2011). There is no timberland, as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526, within or near the Proposed Project alignment.

Regulatory Setting

Federal

No federal plans or policies concerning agriculture and forestry resources apply to the Proposed Project or alternatives.

State

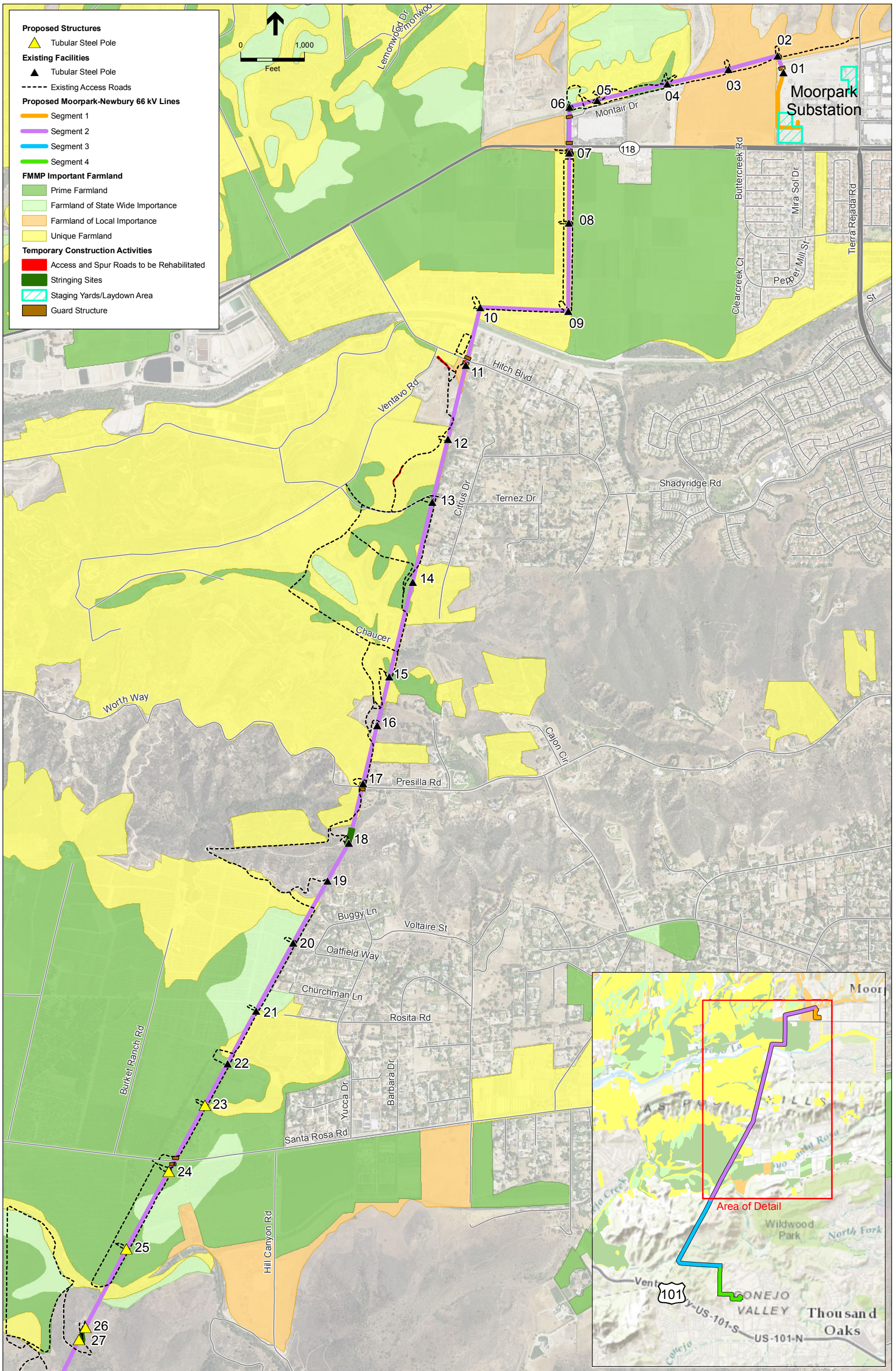
California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP)

The California Department of Conservation’s FMMP provides a classification system based on technical soil ratings and current land use (CDC, 2014). The FMMP is an informational service only and does not have regulatory jurisdiction over local land use decisions. The minimum land use mapping unit is 10 acres unless specified; smaller units of land are incorporated into the surrounding map classifications.

For the purposes of this environmental analysis and consistency with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Appendix G, the term “Farmland” refers to FMMP map categories *Prime Farmland*, *Unique Farmland*, and *Farmland of Statewide Importance* (hereafter collectively referred to as “Farmland”). Generally, any conversion of land from one of these categories to a lesser quality category or a non-agricultural use would be considered to be an adverse impact. These map categories are defined as follows (CDC, 2014):

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.

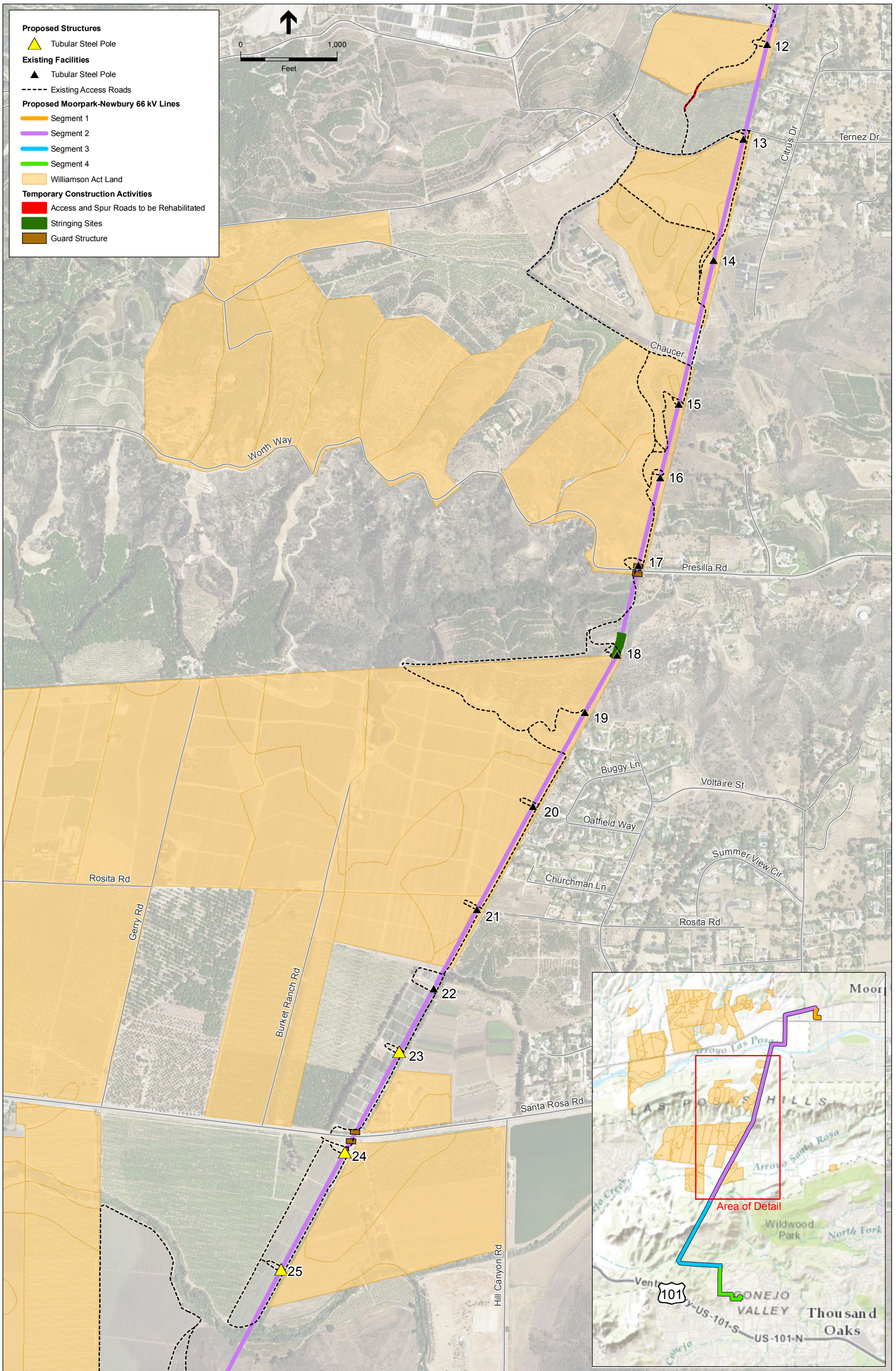
Unique Farmland: Land of lesser quality soils used for the production of specific high economic value crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. It is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic



SOURCE: SCE, 2013; CDC, 2014

Moorpark-Newbury 66 kV Subtransmission Line Project. 207584.15

Figure 5.2-1
Farmland in the Proposed Project Area



SOURCE: SCE, 2013; CDC, 2014

Moorpark-Newbury 66 kV Subtransmission Line Project. 207584.15

Figure 5.2-2
Williamson Act Land in the Proposed Project Area

zones in California. Examples of crops include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers.

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.

A fourth category is *Farmland of Local Importance*, which in Ventura County includes “soils that are listed as Prime or Statewide that are not irrigated, and soils growing dryland crops—beans, grain, dryland walnuts, or dryland apricots” (CDC, 2010). For the purposes of this environmental analysis and consistency with CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, the definition of “Farmland” does not include *Farmland of Local Importance* and so this category of land is not discussed further in the analysis of Proposed Project effects.

California Public Resources Code

The California Public Resources Code governs forestry, forests, and forest resources, as well as range and forage lands, within the state. “Forest land” is defined by Public Resources Code Section 12220(g) 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.” “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.”

California Government Code

Chapter 6.7 of the Government Code (§§51100-51155) regulates timberlands within the state. “Timberland production zone” is defined in Section 51104(g) as an area that 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. In this context, “compatible uses” include any use that “does not significantly detract from the use of the property for, or inhibit, growing and harvesting timber” (Government Code §51104(h)). Watershed management, grazing, and the erection, construction, alteration, or maintenance of electric transmission facilities are examples of compatible uses. The general plans of cities and counties may use the term “timberland preserve zone,” which Government Code Section 51104(g) defines as equivalent to “timberland production zone.”

California Land Conservation Act of 1965

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) preserves open spaces and agricultural land in exchange for property tax breaks (Government Code §51200 et seq.). 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 implemented at the county level that allows agricultural landowners to contractually agree to

retain land included in an agricultural preserve¹ in agricultural or open space uses for a period of 10 years and, in return, to pay reduced property taxes. The term of the contract automatically renews each year unless not renewed or cancelled, so that the contract always has a 10-year period left.

Local

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) General Order No. 131-D explains that local land use regulations would not apply to the Proposed Project. However, for informational purposes, the goals and policies of local general plans and other planning documents pertaining to agriculture and forestry resources that would otherwise be relevant to the Proposed Project and alternatives are described below.

Ventura County General Plan

The following goals pertaining to agriculture identified in the Ventura County General Plan are relevant to this analysis (Ventura County, 2013):

Goal: Promote the efficient distribution of public utility facilities and transmission lines to assure that public utilities are adequate to service existing and projected land uses, avoid hazards and are compatible with the natural and human resources.

Policy 2: All transmission lines should be located and constructed in a manner which minimizes disruption of natural vegetation and agricultural activities and avoids unnecessary grading of slopes when not in conflict with the rules and regulations of the California Public Utilities Commission.

Ventura County Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance

Section 8104-1.2 of the Ventura County Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance (Ventura County Planning Division, 2011) defines the *Agricultural Exclusive (AE) Zone* as follows:

The purpose of this zone is to preserve and protect commercial agricultural lands as a limited and irreplaceable resource, to preserve and maintain agriculture as a major industry in Ventura County and to protect these areas from the encroachment of nonrelated uses which, by their nature, would have detrimental effects upon the agriculture industry.

Section 8103-0 establishes a minimum lot area of 40 acres for parcels zoned *AE*. Section 8105-4 indicates that aboveground transmission lines are allowed in the *AE* zone with a Planning Director-approved Conditional Use Permit. However, as described in Section 1.4.2, no local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required for the Proposed Project, since the CPUC has preemptive jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of Southern California Edison (SCE) facilities in California.

¹ An agricultural preserve defines the boundary of an area within which a city or county would be willing to enter into Williamson Act contracts with landowners: The boundary is designated by resolution of the city council or board of supervisors having jurisdiction. Agricultural preserves generally must be at least 100 acres in size.

The City of Moorpark

The City of Moorpark General Plan does not contain policies concerning agriculture or forestry resources that are relevant to the Proposed Project or alternatives (City of Moorpark, 1986). The Moorpark Zoning Ordinance indicates that utility structures are allowed in agricultural zones with an administrative permit (Municipal Code Section 17.20.050; City of Moorpark, 2013). However, as described in Section 1.4.2, no local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required for the Proposed Project, since the CPUC has preemptive jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of SCE facilities in California.

The City of Thousand Oaks

The City of Thousand Oaks General Plan does not contain policies concerning agriculture or forestry resources that are relevant to the Proposed Project or alternatives (City of Thousand Oaks, 1997).

Conejo Canyons Open Space Management Plan

The Conejo Canyons Open Space Management Plan (Management Plan) was prepared by the COSCA to provide a comprehensive guide for the long-term management of the Conejo Canyons natural, cultural, and scenic resources while providing for compatible passive multi-use, trail-based recreational activities. COSCA is a joint powers agency that was formed between the City of Thousand Oaks and the Conejo Recreation and Park District in 1977 in order to implement the adopted goals of the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the Thousand Oaks General Plan. The Conejo Canyons area is located in the northwestern corner of the City of Thousand Oaks.

Section 2.4 of the Management Plan identifies a number of ROWs held by a variety of public utilities that traverse the Conejo Canyons area, including the following for SCE:

“Southern California Edison (SCE) electrical transmission lines and towers are located just beyond and parallel to the western boundary of the plan area. Portions of the access road ROW for the transmission lines traverse the western boundary of the Canyons West OSU [Open Space Unit]. SCE also has local transmission lines and access easements along the southern portion of the Canyons West OSU (Figure 2-8: SCE Easements). Dirt roads provide access through these easements, and some also serve as multipurpose trails. Two minor transmission lines serve the Hill Canyon Treatment Plant. The first runs from the Western Canyon area through the lower Conejo Creek to the plant. The second line runs from the Rancho Conejo Industrial Park down the canyon to the plant.”

5.2.2 Significance Criteria

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a project would result in significant agriculture resources effects on the environment if it would:

- 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;
- b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;

- c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code §12220(g)), timberland (as defined in Public Resources Code §4526) or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code §51104(g));
- d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; or
- 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.

5.2.3 Applicant Proposed Measures

No applicant proposed measures have been proposed to address impacts of the Proposed Project on agriculture or forestry resources.

5.2.4 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Approach to Analysis

This analysis uses land use and agricultural designation maps produced by planning and resource agencies, including the California Department of Conservation and local governments, to determine whether the Proposed Project would directly or indirectly affect land used for agricultural or forestry uses, and analyzes the significance of such impacts based on the potential for the Proposed Project to convert such lands to non-agricultural or non-forestry uses or to cause nuisances that would indirectly affect the ability to continue to use them for agricultural or forestry use.

- 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.**

Impact 5.2-1: The Proposed Project would not convert Farmland to non-agricultural use. Less than significant (Class III)

Impacts related to the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use could occur temporarily as a result of ground-disturbing activities and/or permanently as a result of long-term occupation of agricultural lands by non-agricultural structures or uses.

As described in Section 3.4, *Overview of the Proposed Project*, Segment 2 of the Proposed Project would include the installation of two tubular steel pole (TSP) foundations at pole locations 26 and 27. As shown in Figure 3-6, *Proposed Activities within Segments 2 and 3*, proposed new TSP sites 26 and 27 are located on a hill south and east of existing agricultural areas. The location of these proposed TSP foundations is shown as “other land” on the FMMP map for Ventura County (CDC, 2012). Therefore, ground disturbance associated with the installation of these TSP foundations, and the location of the temporary stringing site located between them, would not affect Farmland. The other structures constructed in Segment 2 would

be TSPs installed on existing foundations, which would not permanently disturb any land. The Proposed Project would not permanently disturb areas of Farmland not currently disturbed, and therefore would not result in the long-term conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Additional temporary ground disturbance associated with Segment 2 could result from guard structure installation and the use of string-pulling and helicopter landing sites. As shown in Figure 3-6, the proposed guard structures at pole location 17 would be located on either side of Presilla Road, to the east of the existing Moorpark-Ormond Beach 220 kV lines. The stringing site north of pole location 18 similarly would be located east of these lines. Both locations are in areas shown as “other land” on the FMMP map (CDC, 2012). The proposed guard structures north of pole location 24 would be within an area designated as *Prime Farmland*, but would be located within existing disturbed locations and removed after Proposed Project construction. Similarly, the helicopter landing site west of Pole 27 (see Figure 3-6) would be located on previously disturbed land not currently in agricultural production, but designated as *Unique Farmland*. The temporary uses associated with the Proposed Project are not expected to permanently convert these locations to non-agricultural use. This impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation: None required.

**b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.
(No Impact)**

The Proposed Project would not be located within an area zoned for agricultural use within the City of Thousand Oaks.

As described in the Ventura County Land Conservation Act Guidelines, “In accordance with Government Code Sections 51231, 51238, and 51238.1, ‘compatible uses’ are those which are permitted, or conditionally permitted by the Ventura County Zoning Ordinance in the AE-40 ac or CA zones” (Ventura County Board of Supervisors, 2013). As described above, aboveground transmission lines are allowed in AE zones with a Conditional Use Permit, or in the case of the Proposed Project, with a Permit to Construct (PTC) from the CPUC, which preempts local jurisdiction. Furthermore, the Proposed Project would not reduce the size of any parcel zoned AE-40 to below the 40-acre minimum, because it would be constructed within an existing ROW currently occupied by existing transmission lines. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not conflict with agricultural zoning in unincorporated Ventura County.

As also described above, within the City of Moorpark, utility structures are allowed in agricultural zones with an administrative permit, or in the case of the Proposed Project, with a PTC from the CPUC, which preempts local jurisdiction. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not conflict with agricultural zoning in the City of Moorpark.

Pole locations 12 through 21 are within lands under a Williamson Act contract. The Proposed Project does not include ground disturbance at these locations, but would include installation of conductor along this alignment. At these pole locations, conductor would be installed on existing structures within an existing SCE ROW. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not affect agricultural lands under a Williamson Act contract, and thus would not conflict with such contracts (No Impact).

c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code §12220(g)), timberland (as defined in Public Resources Code §4526) or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code §51104(g)). (No Impact)

As described above, there is no zoning for forest land or timberland, or timberland zoned Timberland Production, within or adjacent to the Proposed Project alignment. Segment 3 of the Proposed Project would traverse land under the jurisdiction of COSCA that meets the definition of “forest land” as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g). As shown in Section 5.11, *Land Use and Planning*, Figure 5.11-2, *Zoning Designations in the Proposed Project Vicinity*, land within COSCA’s jurisdiction is zoned by Ventura County as *Open Space*, and is zoned by the City of Thousand Oaks as *Open Space – Protected Ridgeline Overlay Zone*. In Ventura County, aboveground transmission lines are allowed in *Open Space* zoning designations with a Conditional Use Permit (Ventura County, 2014). However, a use permit is a discretionary land use instrument, and so not required for the Proposed Project. In the City of Thousand Oaks, electric transmission lines are recognized as exempted from the zoning ordinance. Furthermore, as is discussed in Section 5.11, *Land Use and Planning*, the Proposed Project would not result in a conflict with the *Protected Ridgeline Overlay Zone* as it would result in a less-than-significant impact on visual resources. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not conflict with existing zoning of forest land, and would not cause rezoning of forest land (No Impact).

d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. (No Impact)

As described above, there is no forest land within or adjacent to the Proposed Project alignment. Therefore, the Proposed Project would have no impact on the conversion of forest land to non-forest use (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. (No Impact)

As described above, there is no forest land within or adjacent to the Proposed Project alignment. Therefore, the Proposed Project would have no direct impact on the conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

For portions of the Proposed Project that would be constructed or installed within existing agricultural lands, per the analysis under criteria a) and b), the Proposed Project would not convert Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Other changes in the existing environment that could result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or of forest land to non-forest use may include changes in water availability to these lands, inducement of population growth that could result in new housing or other facilities being built within these lands, or the installation of structures that could impede farming practices.

As discussed in Section 5.10, *Hydrology and Water Quality*, the Proposed Project would not result in substantial changes in surface hydrology or water quality, nor would it result in groundwater drawdown or changes in groundwater recharge or water quality. Therefore, it would not cause changes in the availability or quality of water that supports agricultural or forest uses.

Additionally, as discussed in Section 5.14, *Population and Housing*, the Proposed Project would not result in substantial population growth or in the construction of housing that may be built on Farmland or forest land.

A comment received during the scoping process indicated that the installation of overhead transmission lines could impede the use of aerial farming practices (e.g., for pest management). The Proposed Project would be collocated with existing overhead lines and tall structures in all portions of the alignment within or near Farmland; therefore, the addition of a transmission line within an existing in-use transmission ROW would have a minimal incremental impact on the ability to use aerial farming practices in the Proposed Project area, and is not expected to result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Accordingly, the Proposed Project would have no impact with respect to other changes in the environment that could convert Farmland or forest land (No Impact).

5.2.5 Alternatives

No Project Alternative 1

Under No Project Alternative 1, the Proposed Project would not be implemented; therefore, there would be no impact related to agriculture and forestry resources (No Impact).

No Project Alternative 2

Under No Project Alternative 2, the Proposed Project would not be constructed and all of the infrastructure already constructed for the Moorpark-Newbury 66 kV Subtransmission line would be removed, with the exception of the previously installed LWS poles and energized conductor. Several of the TSPs, TSP foundations, and slurry-filled foundation holes within agricultural areas in Segment 2 would be removed. However, the areas from which these structures would be removed are within existing SCE ROW, and are therefore not currently in agricultural use. It is possible that up to approximately 1 acre of Farmland could be returned to agricultural use after these structures are removed (SCE, 2013). Therefore, implementation of this alternative would not convert Farmland to non-agricultural use, conflict with agricultural zoning or a Williamson Act contract, conflict with or cause rezoning of forest land or timberland, convert forest land to non-forest use, or involve other changes in the environment that could convert Farmland or forest land (No Impact).

References – Agriculture and Forestry Resources

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