

### 3.2 AGRICULTURAL AND FOREST RESOURCES

#### 3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section describes existing conditions and potential impacts on agricultural and forest resources as a result of construction, operation, and maintenance of the project. The analysis concludes that impacts on agricultural and forest resources will be less than significant. The project’s potential effects on agricultural and forest resources were evaluated using the significance criteria set forth in Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. The conclusions are summarized in Table 3.2-1 and discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.4.

**Table 3.2-1: CEQA Checklist for Agricultural and Forest Resources**

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	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 land?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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 by 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 uses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

#### 3.2.2 REGULATORY BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

##### 3.2.2.1 Regulatory Background

***Federal***

No federal regulations related to agricultural or forest resources are applicable to the project.

## **State**

### Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, better known as the Williamson Act (California Government Code Section 51200 et seq.), is designed to preserve agricultural and open space land. It establishes a program of private landowner contracts that voluntarily restrict land to agricultural and open space uses. In return, Williamson Act parcels receive a lower property tax rate consistent with their actual use instead of their market rate value. Lands under contract may also support uses that are “compatible with the agricultural, recreational, or open-space use of [the] land” subject to the contract (California Government Code Section 51201[e]).

### Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation (DOC), under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) to monitor the conversion of the state’s farmland to and from agricultural use. The FMMP maps agriculturally viable lands and designated farmland.

### Forest Taxation and Reform Act

Commercial timberlands are afforded protection through the state’s Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976, which mandates the creation of timberland preserve zones) to restrict and protect commercial timber resources.

### California Public Resources Code

The California Public Resources Code contains the following definitions:

- Forest Land: Section 12220(g) defines “forest land” 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: Section 4526 defines timberland as land—other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection as experimental forest land—that is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of a commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees.

## **Local**

Because the California Public Utilities Commission has exclusive jurisdiction over project siting, design, and construction, the project is not subject to local discretionary regulations. This section includes a summary of local zoning in the project area for agricultural use or forest land, and is provided for informational purposes and to assist with the CEQA review process.

Portions of land located along the project route are zoned for agricultural use. The Fulton-Shiloh segment passes over lands designated as Land Intensive Agriculture (LIA) and Agriculture and Residential (AR) districts, and the Shiloh-Fitch segment passes over lands designated as Diverse Agriculture (DA), LIA, and AR districts (see Figure 3.10-2: Zoning Designations Map in Section

3.10, Land Use and Planning). In addition, the Shiloh-Fitch segment crosses forest land and lands designated for Resources and Rural Development (RRD).

Portions of the project are located within protected lands under the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and a Sonoma County Conservation Easement (see Figure 3.2-1: Agricultural Resources Map). See Section 3.10, Land Use and Planning, for additional information about zoning in the project area.

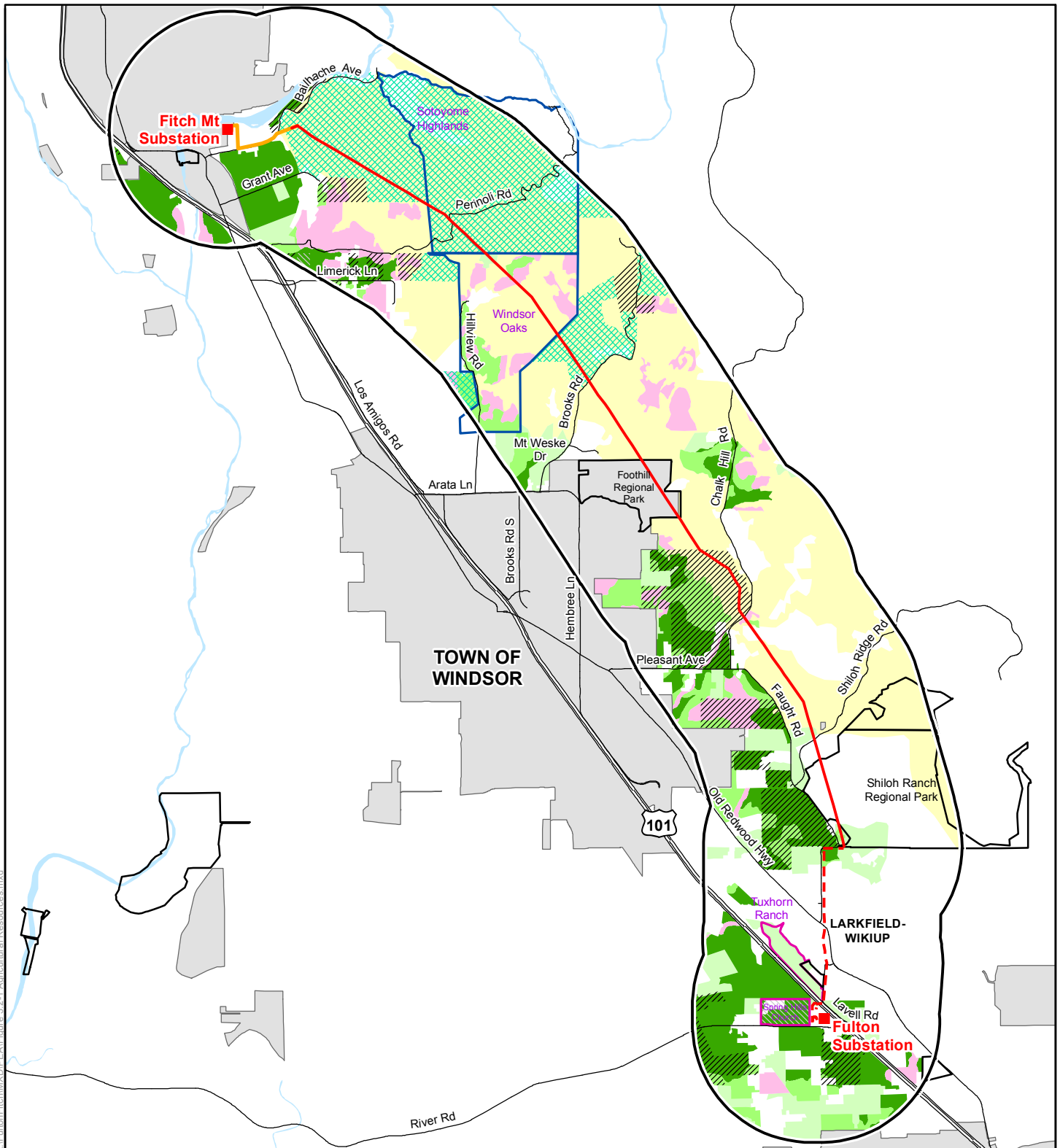
### **3.2.2.2 Methodology**

Various sources were consulted to complete the analysis for agricultural and forestry resources, including the DOC FMMP data and maps; Williamson Act contract map for Sonoma County; aerial photographs; and, Sonoma County General Plan, zoning ordinances, and maps. The mapped agricultural and forestry designations and contracted lands were compared with the project route, with particular focus on the proposed locations for installation of new towers and poles, which represent the locations with the greatest potential to impact these land uses. In addition, a field visit to the site was conducted to gather relevant information pertaining to the land uses at the project site and surrounding areas.

## **3.2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

### **3.2.3.1 Regional**

The approximately 1.8-mile-long Fulton-Shiloh segment, which extends from Fulton Substation to an existing pole located in the southwest corner of Shiloh Ranch Regional Park, traverses predominantly urban and built up lands in the Larkfield-Wikiup residential neighborhood; however, small portions of the segment cross and/or are adjacent to land designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance (Department of Conservation 2012; Sonoma County 2014). The approximately 8.1-mile-long Shiloh-Fitch segment, which extends from the southwest corner of Shiloh Ranch Regional Park to the Fitch Mountain #1 Tap, crosses and is adjacent to land designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance, Unique Farmland, and Grazing Land. Production of a variety of agricultural commodities occurs within the project area. The area also contains vineyards, pasture lands, semi-agricultural land, and idle fields. As of 2012, there were approximately 160,215 acres of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance located throughout Sonoma County, which accounts for approximately 16 percent of the land within County boundaries.



X:\Fulton\Fitch\MXD\PEA\Figure 3.2-1 Agricultural Resources.mxd

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: red;">■</span> Substation</li> <li><span style="color: red;">—</span> Shiloh-Fitch Segment</li> <li><span style="color: red;">- - -</span> Fulton-Shiloh Segment</li> <li><span style="color: orange;">—</span> Fitch Mountain #1 Tap</li> <li><span style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> 1 Mile Buffer</li> <li><span style="border: 1px solid pink; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Conservation Easement</li> <li><span style="border: 1px solid blue; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Sonoma County</li> <li><span style="border: 1px solid blue; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District</li> </ul>	<p><b>Williamson Act Contract</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black;"></span> Type I Contract</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></span> Type I Contract [Phase-Out Status]</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></span> Type II Contract</li> </ul>	<p><b>Farmland Mapping and Management Program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #006400;"></span> Prime Farmland</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90;"></span> Farmland of Statewide Importance</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90;"></span> Farmland of Local Importance</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFB6C1;"></span> Unique Farmland</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFFF00;"></span> Grazing Land</li> </ul>	<p><b>Figure 3.2-1</b> Agricultural Resources Map <i>Fulton-Fitch Mountain Reconductoring Project</i></p> <p>1:75,000</p> <p>0 0.5 1 Miles</p>
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### 3.2.3.2 Local

#### **Williamson Act and Important Farmland**

##### Fulton-Shiloh Segment

Land use along the Fulton-Shiloh segment consists primarily of urban and rural residential areas, with some public and agricultural lands near Fulton Substation and Shiloh Ranch Regional Park. As shown in Figure 3.2-1: Agricultural Resources Map, the Fulton-Shiloh segment traverses one mapped area of land under Williamson Act contract for approximately 0.12 mile. The Fulton-Shiloh segment crosses parcels designated as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance on the south side of Shiloh Ranch Regional Park, and the parcel on the north side of Fulton Substation is designated Farmland of Local Importance. The Fulton-Shiloh segment crosses approximately 0.3 mile of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance. Figure 3.2-1: Agriculture Resources Map provides the locations where the project crosses Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance, and land under Williamson Act contract.

##### Shiloh-Fitch Segment

Land use along the Shiloh-Fitch segment consists primarily of agricultural lands and lands used for rural development. As shown in Figure 3.2-1: Agricultural Resources Map, the Shiloh-Fitch segment traverses 3.11 miles of agricultural land under Williamson Act contract. In addition, this segment crosses various parcels designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance and Unique Farmland; it also traverses Non-Prime Agricultural Land, designated as Farmland of Local Importance, Farmland of Local Potential, and Grazing Land. The Shiloh-Fitch segment crosses approximately 0.13 mile of Farmland of Statewide Importance and Unique Farmland.

#### **Sonoma County Zoning Districts**

Sonoma County agricultural zoning designations allow for public utility facilities. The following agriculture-related zoning districts are crossed or are immediately adjacent to the existing alignment (see Figure 3.10-2: Zoning Designations Map in Section 3.10, Land Use and Planning).

**Land Intensive Agriculture.** The purpose of the LIA district is to protect lands best suited for permanent agricultural use and capable of relatively high production per acre of land, and to implement the provisions of the LIA land use category of the General Plan and the policies of the Agricultural Resources Element. Parcels zoned for LIA are crossed or lie immediately adjacent to portions of the existing alignment along the Fulton-Shiloh and Shiloh-Fitch segments.

**Diverse Agriculture.** The purpose of the DA district is to enhance and protect those land areas where soil, climate, and water conditions support farming, but where small acreage intensive farming and part-time farming activities are predominant or farming may not be the principal occupation of the farmer, and to implement the provisions of the diverse agriculture land use category of the General Plan and the policies of the Agricultural Resource Element. Parcels zoned for DA are crossed or lie immediately adjacent to portions of the existing alignment along the Shiloh-Fitch segment.

**Resources and Rural Development.** The purpose of the RRD district is to implement the provisions of the resources and rural development land use category of the General Plan, namely to provide protection of lands needed for: (1) commercial timber production, geothermal production, and aggregate resources production; (2) protection of watershed, fish and wildlife habitat, and biotic resources; and (3) agricultural production activities that are not subject to all of the policies contained in the agricultural resources element of the General Plan. The RRD district is also intended to allow very low-density residential development and recreational and visitor-serving uses where compatible with resource use and available public services. Parcels zoned for RRD district are crossed or are located immediately adjacent to portions of the existing alignment along the Shiloh-Fitch segment.

**Agriculture and Residential.** The purpose of the AR district is to provide lands for raising crops and farm animals in areas designated primarily for rural residential use pursuant to Objective LU-6.5 and Policy LU-6d of the General Plan. Objective LU-6.5 is intended to create two rural residential zoning districts that provide different levels of permitted crop and animal production in the Rural Residential land use category. Policy LU-6d provides for different levels of crop and animal production in the rural residential land use category by creating an “Agriculture and Residential” and a “Rural Residential” zoning district, one that permits unlimited animal and crop production on parcels two or more acres in size, and one that limits agricultural activities regardless of parcel size. Policy LU-6d specifies that, “in neither zoning district will the agricultural activities be considered the primary use of the land, nor will all of the policies of the Agricultural Resources Element apply.” Parcels zoned AR district are crossed or are located immediately adjacent to portions of the existing alignment along the Fulton-Shiloh and Shiloh-Fitch segments.

### ***Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District***

A portion of the proposed project alignment is located within protected lands under the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, as shown in Figure 3.2-1: Agricultural Resources Map. Windsor Oaks, established in February of 1998, includes oak woodlands, vineyards, riparian corridors, and open pastures. Sotoyome Highlands, established in December of 1996, includes more than 1,800 feet of river frontage, grazing pastures, and river and mountain plants and wildlife. The Spring Hills Church easement is located on parcels to the west side of Fulton Substation. See Section 3.10, Land Use and Planning, for additional information about parcels crossed by the alignment that fall within the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

## **3.2.4 APPLICANT-PROPOSED MEASURES AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS**

The following sections describe significance criteria for agricultural and forest resources impacts derived from Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, provide Applicant-Proposed Measures (APMs) to reduce impacts, and assess potential project-related construction and operational impacts on agricultural and forest resources.

### **3.2.4.1 Significance Criteria**

According to Section 15002(g) of the CEQA Guidelines, “a significant effect on the environment is defined as a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions which exist in the area

affected by the proposed project.” As stated in Section 15064(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, the significance of an activity may vary with the setting. Per Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the potential significance of project-related impacts on agricultural and forest resources were evaluated for each of the criteria listed in Table 3.2-1, as discussed in Section 3.2.4.3.

**3.2.4.2 Applicant-Proposed Measures**

No APMs are proposed to reduce impacts on agricultural and forest resources. APMs related to tree and vegetation removal are discussed in Section 3.4, Biological Resources.

**3.2.4.3 Potential Impacts**

Project impacts on agriculture and forest resources were evaluated against the CEQA significance criteria, as discussed below. This section evaluates potential project impacts from both the construction phase and operation and maintenance (O&M) phase.

The project includes reconductoring existing 60 kV and 230 kV electric utility lines between Fulton Substation and Fitch Mountain #1 Tap. The O&M activities required for the reconducted power and transmission lines will not increase from those currently required for the existing system; thus, no operation-related impacts related to agricultural and forest resources will occur. Therefore, the impact analysis is focused on construction activities that are required to install the new conductor, replace and remove poles, perform minor substation modifications, and establish required access and work areas, as described in Chapter 2.0, Project Description.

**a) Would the project convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP, to non-agricultural use? Less-than-Significant Impact**

Construction of the project will temporarily impact approximately 2 acres (1 acre along the Fulton-Shiloh segment and 1 acre along the Shiloh-Fitch segment) of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance for working areas around light duty steel poles and tubular steel poles (TSPs), staging areas, helicopter landing zones, temporary overland access roads, and pull and tension sites. Farmland designations are shown in Figure 3.2-1: Agricultural Resources Map. Temporary impacts on designated farmland associated with the project are indicated in Table 3.2-2: Estimated Temporary Impacts on Farmland. As new poles will replace existing poles on a one-for-one basis (and within 35 feet of the existing pole locations and in line with the existing conductor) in areas designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance, no permanent conversion of farmland will occur as a result of construction activities or operations.

**Table 3.2-2: Estimated Temporary Impacts on Farmland**

Project Component	Farmland Type	Temporary Impact on Farmland (acres)
Fulton-Shiloh Segment	Prime Farmland	0.65
	Farmland of Statewide Importance	0.33
Shiloh-Fitch Segment	Farmland of Statewide Importance	0.94
	Unique Farmland	0.01
<b>Total Acres</b>	--	<b>1.93</b>

Construction activities have the potential to temporarily interfere with agricultural operations by restricting landowner access to the agricultural areas where active construction is taking place. Because construction will progress quickly, construction activities are not expected to take place near any one structure location for more than a few days. Existing fences may need to be temporarily removed and irrigation facilities could be damaged by heavy equipment. Once construction is completed, all temporary access roads and construction work areas in agricultural areas will be restored for continued agricultural use; an access road may be retained for agricultural use at the request of a landowner. Agricultural impacts will be temporary and less than significant.

**b) Would the project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract? *Less-than-Significant Impact***

Both the Fulton-Shiloh and Shiloh-Fitch segments include lands zoned for agriculture, and on Williamson Act contracted prime agricultural land and non-prime agricultural land. Temporary construction work areas will be located on lands designated as non-prime and prime agricultural land. During reconductoring of the power and transmission lines, temporary agricultural impacts will result from pole replacements, delivery and staging of construction materials, and construction workers traversing the land to access the project area. Because the project will only cause temporary impacts due to reconductoring and replacement of existing facilities, the impacts will be less than significant.

**c) Would the project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12229(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***

No areas of protected forest land, timberland, or commercial timberland are located within the project area. Therefore, the project will not conflict with the zoning of forest lands or the conversion of timberland, and no impact will occur.

**d) Would the project result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? *Less-than-Significant Impact***

The Shiloh-Fitch segment of the proposed alignment spans approximately 4.8 miles of Valley Oak Habitat Combining District forest land. Construction of the project will temporarily impact approximately 10.5 acres of Valley Oak Habitat Combining District forest land collectively, as a result of pole replacements, delivery and staging of construction materials, and construction workers traversing the land to access the project areas. Areas selected for staging of materials are within clearings within the larger forested area, and areas around existing poles and replacement sites are generally open due to ongoing vegetation removal; however, portions of Valley Oak Habitat Combining District forest land may be cleared further prior to use. Most individual structures will only require an approximately 50-foot radius centered on each pole, and construction activities are not expected to take place near any one structure location for more than a few days. See Section 3.4, Biological Resources, for additional information concerning tree and vegetation removal. Approximately two poles will be removed and two three-pole structures will be replaced with single TSPs in areas designated as forest land; pole replacements will otherwise occur on a one-to-one basis in forest land. No permanent conversion of forest



land would occur as a result of construction activities. Thus, impacts will be less than significant.

**e) Would the project 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***

The project will replace existing power and transmission lines that are located within existing utility corridors. Therefore, project implementation will not discourage the continued use of surrounding land for agricultural purposes. No impact will occur.

### 3.2.5 REFERENCES

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