

Chapter 5

Agriculture and Forestry

5.1 Overview

This chapter summarizes the environmental and regulatory settings for agriculture and forestry, and describes potential impacts to agriculture and forestry resources that could occur as a result of the Proposed Project.

5.2 Regulatory Setting

5.2.1 Federal Laws, Regulations, and Policies

Cleveland National Forest Land Management Plan

As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, and shown in Figure 2-2, the Proposed Project would be located on private property within the administrative boundary of the Cleveland National Forest (CNF). The CNF encompasses 420,877 acres within Orange, Riverside, and San Diego Counties, and is administered by the U.S. Forest Service. While the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) does not have jurisdiction over private property within the CNF's administrative boundary, this analysis considers the USFS's CNF Land Management Plan due to the Proposed Project's close proximity to national forest lands. Grazing and forestry goals and strategies identified in the USFS's *Land Management Plan for the National Forests in Southern California (Part 1)* (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] 2005a) and *Cleveland National Forest Strategy (Part 2)* (USDA 2005b) are included below for informational purposes.

- **National Strategic Plan Goal 6 – General.** Mission-related work in addition to that which supports the agency goals.
- **National Strategic Plan Goal 6 – Objective 3.** Maintain the environmental, social, and economic benefits of forests and grasslands by reducing their conversion to other uses.
- **CNF Strategy, Livestock Grazing (LG) 1 – Livestock Grazing.** Livestock grazing areas are maintained and remain sustainable and suitable over the long term.
- **CNF Strategy LG 2 – Rangeland Health.** Rangelands are healthy and sustainable over the long term. Rangelands are meeting or moving toward forest plan, ecosystem, and site-specific desired conditions.

1 5.2.2 State Laws, Regulations, and Policies

2 Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

3 The California Department of Conservation (CDOC) established the Farmland Mapping and
 4 Monitoring Program (FMMP) in 1982, as a non-regulatory program to provide a consistent
 5 and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California.
 6 Creation of the FMMP was supported by the Legislature and a broad coalition of building,
 7 business, government, and conservation interests. The first Important Farmland Maps,
 8 produced in 1984, covered 30.3 million acres in 38 counties. This is an ongoing data set that
 9 collects data every two years to understand changes in agricultural land in the state. Data
 10 now spans more than 24 years and has expanded to 49.1 million acres as modern soil surveys
 11 have been completed by the United States Department of Agriculture. FMMP now maps
 12 agricultural and urban land use for nearly 98 percent of the state's privately held land (CDOC
 13 2015a). FMMP rates and classifies agricultural land according to soil quality, irrigation status,
 14 and other criteria. Important Farmland categories are as follows (CDOC 2015b):

15 **Prime Farmland:** Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical
 16 features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. These lands have the soil
 17 quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high
 18 yields. Prime Farmland must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at
 19 some time during the 4 years before the FMMP's mapping date.

20 **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Farmland similar to Prime Farmland, but with
 21 minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture.
 22 Farmland of Statewide Importance must have been used for irrigated agricultural
 23 production at some time during the 4 years before the FMMP's mapping date.

24 **Unique Farmland:** Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the
 25 state's leading agricultural crops. These lands are usually irrigated but might include
 26 non-irrigated orchards or vineyards, as found in some climatic zones. Unique
 27 Farmland must have been cropped at some time during the 4 years before the
 28 FMMP's mapping date.

29 **Farmland of Local Importance:** Land of importance to the local agricultural economy
 30 as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.

31 California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)

32 The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (commonly referred to as the Williamson Act)
 33 allows local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of
 34 preventing conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. In exchange for
 35 restricting their property to agricultural or related open space use, landowners who enroll in
 36 Williamson Act contracts receive property tax assessments that are substantially lower than
 37 the market rate.

38 5.2.3 Local Laws, Regulations, and Policies

39 The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has exclusive jurisdiction over the siting
 40 and design of electric transmission facilities. Therefore, it is exempt from local land use and

1 zoning regulations. However, CPUC General Order (G.O.) 131-D states that in locating electric
 2 transmission facilities, the public utilities shall consult with the local agencies regarding land
 3 use matters. CPUC and NextEra Energy Transmission West, LLC (NEET West) have been in
 4 contact with applicable local agencies for the Proposed Project, and local laws and regulations
 5 are presented here for consideration of potential impacts related to hydrology and water
 6 quality.

7 ***San Diego County General Plan***

8 The Proposed Project site is located within unincorporated San Diego County and is therefore
 9 included within the County of San Diego General Plan (General Plan). The General Plan serves
 10 to prevent agricultural land use conflicts, preserve agricultural resources, and support the
 11 long-term presence and viability of agricultural industry as an important component of the
 12 region's economy and open space linkage. The General Plan contains the following relevant
 13 policies to agricultural and forestry resources and the Proposed Project (San Diego County
 14 2011a):

- 15 ▪ **Goal LU-2 - Maintenance of the County's Rural Character.** Conservation and
 16 enhancement of the unincorporated County's varied communities, rural setting, and
 17 character.
- 18 ▪ **Policy LU-5.3 - Rural Land Preservation.** Ensure the preservation of existing open
 19 space and rural areas (e.g., forested areas, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and
 20 corridors, wetlands, watersheds, and groundwater recharge areas) when permitting
 21 development under the Rural and Semi-Rural Land Use Designations.
- 22 ▪ **Policy LU-7.1 - Agricultural Land Development.** Protect agricultural lands with
 23 lower density land use designations that support continued agricultural operations.
- 24 ▪ **Policy COS-6.2 - Protection of Agricultural Operations.** Protect existing
 25 agricultural operations from encroachment of incompatible land uses.
- 26 ▪ **Policy COS-6.4 - Conservation Easements.** Support the acquisition or voluntary
 27 dedication of agriculture conservation easements and programs that preserve
 28 agricultural lands.

29 ***Alpine Community Plan***

30 The Alpine Community Plan is a subcomponent of the General Plan. The Alpine Community
 31 Plan implements the goals and policies of the County General Plan for the Alpine area. The
 32 Alpine Community Plan contains the following relevant policies to agricultural and forestry
 33 resources and the Proposed Project (San Diego County 2011b):

- 34 ▪ **Policy 1.** It is intended that agricultural zones be used to implement the Semi-Rural
 35 and Rural Land Use Designations to ensure continuation of agricultural uses.
- 36 ▪ **Policy 5.** Encourage the formation of Agricultural Preserves in areas with active
 37 agricultural operations and in locations that will be optimal for future production of
 38 food and fibers.

1 **5.3 Environmental Setting**

2 As described in Chapter 13, *Land Use and Planning*, the Proposed Project is located within
3 lands that are zoned for crop and animal agricultural use (A72). Existing land uses in the
4 vicinity of the Proposed Project include undeveloped/rural, utility/electric transmission
5 infrastructure, and low-density residential. While the Project area and portions of the Project
6 site may have been used for livestock grazing in the past, currently there does not appear to
7 be any agricultural or grazing activity in the area. Based on a review of the CDOC's Important
8 Farmland Finder, no portion of the Static VAR compensator (SVC) site and land traversed by
9 the proposed transmission line is located on Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide
10 Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance. Similarly, no lands under
11 Williamson Act contract are located within the Proposed Project area (CDOC 2014a and
12 2014b). Figure 2-2 in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, shows the extent of the CNF and the
13 Proposed Project's location within the CNF's administrative boundary. The Proposed Project
14 is not zoned for forest land, timberland, or timberland zoned for Timberland Production.

15 **5.4 Impact Analysis**

16 **5.4.1 Methodology**

17 The analysis of agriculture and forestry resource impacts was qualitative in nature and
18 involved comparing aspects of the Proposed Project to the significance criteria described
19 below. The plans, policies, and regulations described in Section 5.2, "Regulatory Setting,"
20 above, as well as existing land uses and mitigation obligations described in Section 5.3,
21 "Environmental Setting," were considered in the impacts analysis.

22 **5.4.2 Criteria for Determining Significance**

23 Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and professional expertise, it was
24 determined that the Proposed Project would result in a significant impact on aesthetics if it
25 would:

- 26 A. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as
27 shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP of the California Resources
28 Agency, to nonagricultural use;
- 29 B. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;
- 30 C. Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public
31 Resources Code Section 12220[g]), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code
32 Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by
33 Government Code Section 51104[g]);
- 34 D. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use in a
35 manner that will significantly affect timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity,
36 water quality, recreation, or other public benefits, or
- 37 E. Involve other changes in the existing environment that, because of their location or
38 nature, could result in a conversion of Farmland to a nonagricultural use.

1 **5.4.3 Environmental Impacts**

2 **Impact AGR-1: Conversion of Farmland to Nonagricultural Uses (No** 3 **Impact)**

4 The Proposed Project is not located in any areas that are designated Prime Farmland, Unique
5 Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant
6 to the FMMP. Therefore, no impact would occur.

7 **Impact AGR-2: Conflict with Existing Zoning for Agricultural Use or** 8 **Williamson Act Contract (Less than Significant)**

9 ***Federal and State Plans, Policies, and Regulations***

10 As noted in Section 5.2, “Regulatory Setting,” the Proposed Project would be located on
11 private property and therefore would not be subject to USFS jurisdiction. However, this
12 analysis considers the CNF Land Management Plan because the Project site would be located
13 within the administrative boundary of the CNF and in relatively close proximity to CNF lands.
14 As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, to construct the SVC, NEET West would acquire
15 a 6-acre portion of APN 523-040-080 in fee title. The Proposed Project would appear to
16 conflict with the CNF Land Management Plan Strategy LG-1 (shown in Section 5.2 above),
17 which is intended to maintain livestock grazing areas, because it would develop an area that
18 has been used for animal grazing; however, although portions of the Project site may have
19 been used for livestock grazing in the past, currently there does not appear to be any grazing
20 activity. Furthermore, the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Project
21 would not discourage future agricultural uses within the area, as grazing and farming could
22 occur around the SVC without it conflicting with agricultural operations. The underground
23 transmission line would have no land use conflicts as it would be placed under an existing
24 roadway.

25 ***Local Plans, Policies, and Regulations***

26 As described in the “Regulatory Setting” above, the CPUC has exclusive jurisdiction over the
27 siting and design of electric transmission facilities, and therefore is not subject to local land
28 use plans, policies, or regulations; however, local plans are considered in this draft
29 environmental impact report (DEIR) pursuant to G.O. 131-D. The Proposed Project would
30 appear to conflict with the County of San Diego General Plan Goal LU-2 and Policies LU-5.3,
31 LU-7.1, and COS-6.2 (shown in Section 5.2 above), and the goals and policies in the Alpine
32 Community Plan, which relate to preservation of the County’s rural character and rural lands.
33 As described in Chapter 13, *Land Use and Planning*, however, the Proposed Project would be
34 permissible under the County’s zoning ordinance, which is designed to implement the
35 General Plan. While the Project site is zoned for agricultural use (A72), minor and major
36 impact utilities are allowable in the A72 zoning district with issuance of a minor or major use
37 permit. For further information on land use and planning regulatory setting and impacts, see
38 Chapter 13, *Land Use and Planning*.

1 ***Williamson Act Contract***

2 The Proposed Project is not located in any areas that are under a Williamson Act contract.
3 Therefore, there would be no conflicts with Williamson Act contracts, and no impact would
4 occur.

5 **Impact AGR-3: Conversion of Forest Land to Non-Forest Land, or Conflict**
6 **with Existing Zoning, Cause Rezoning of, Forest Land, Timberland, or**
7 **Timberland Zoned Timberland Production (No Impact)**

8 The Proposed Project is not located in any areas zoned for forest land, timberland, or
9 timberland zoned for Timberland Production. Therefore, no impact would occur.