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## Agriculture and Forestry Resources

This section describes existing agriculture and forestry resources within the treatable landscape, including identification of any Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, timberland, and forest land. The analysis includes a description of the existing environmental conditions including applicable regulatory requirements, the methods used for assessment, and the potential direct and indirect impacts of program implementation on agriculture and forestry resources.

No comments received on the Notice of Preparation were related to agriculture and forestry resources (see Appendix A).

### Environmental Setting

#### Farmland Classifications

##### California Wildlife Habitat Relation System Agricultural Designations

The California Wildlife Habitat Relation (WHR) system, managed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife, is a system that classifies vegetation types. WHR was developed to recognize and logically categorize major vegetative complexes at a scale sufficient to predict wildlife-habitat relationships. There are a total of 59 habitat types identified by the WHR system, including 10 agricultural land habitats (CDFW 2018). As discussed in Chapter 2, “Program Description,” of this PEIR, the treatable vegetation types were selected based on similar fire characteristics and include tree-dominated, shrub-dominated, and herb-dominated habitat types. The WHR agricultural habitat types were excluded from the treatable landscape, because their wildfire risks in agricultural lands are considered negligible by CAL FIRE.

##### Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Agricultural Classifications

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) prepares maps and statistical data for analyzing land use impacts on California’s agricultural resources. The FMMP categorizes agricultural production potential based on a combination of physical and chemical characteristics of the soil and climate that determine the degree of suitability of the land for crop production. FMMP updates the agricultural data and maps for each county every two years. The most recent update occurred in 2016. The farmland classifications under FMMP are as follows:

* Prime Farmland: land that has the best combination of features for the production of agricultural crops;
* Farmland of Statewide Importance: land other than Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical features for the production of agricultural crops but that has more limitations than Prime Farmland, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture;
* Unique Farmland: land of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state’s leading agricultural cash crops;
* Farmland of Local Importance: land of importance to the local agricultural economy; or
* Grazing Land: existing vegetation that is suitable for grazing.

Table 3.3-1 includes the approximate acreages of each farmland type located within the treatable landscape organized by County.

Table 3.3-1 Agricultural Land within the Treatable Landscape by County (acres)

| County | Prime Farmland | Farmland of Statewide Importance | Unique Farmland | Farmland of Local Importance | Grazing Land |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Alameda | 62 | 58 | 190 | 0 | 149,636 |
| Amador | 150 | 136 | 537 | 652 | 165,531 |
| Butte | 68 | 122 | 450 | 0 | 232,635 |
| Colusa | 198 | 167 | 75 | 110,720 | 994 |
| Contra Costa | 195 | 4 | 479 | 24,790 | 106,902 |
| El Dorado | 133 | 398 | 1,060 | 52,623 | 166,164 |
| Fresno | 115 | 32 | 260 | 2,504 | 361,659 |
| Glenn | 67 | 60 | 191 | 2,745 | 88,122 |
| Kern | 710 | 126 | 579 | 0 | 707,455 |
| Kings | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 30,089 |
| Lake | 58 | 11 | 1,115 | 0 | 142,763 |
| Los Angeles | 272 | 15 | 83 | 238 | 114,403 |
| Madera | 24 | 1 | 138 | 47 | 226,824 |
| Marin | 0 | 5 | 74 | 6,247 | 55,560 |
| Mendocino | 456 | 48 | 1,537 | 0 | 1,138,280 |
| Merced | 414 | 152 | 1,780 | 991 | 81,989 |
| Monterey | 725 | 253 | 1,145 | 0 | 467,331 |
| Modoc | 704 | 791 | 421 | 136,931 | 241,786 |
| Mariposa | 0.09 | 2 | 30 | 0 | 256,503 |
| Napa | 767 | 596 | 4,456 | 7,060 | 131,666 |
| Nevada | 86 | 288 | 130 | 3,866 | 114,204 |
| Orange | 15 | 11 | 108 | 0 | 25,611 |
| Placer | 126 | 347 | 197 | 48,780 | 6,129 |
| Riverside | 212 | 140 | 2,409 | 35,568 | 53,890 |
| Sacramento | 100 | 35 | 269 | 952 | 42,744 |
| Santa Barbara | 1,084 | 322 | 3,097 | 2,074 | 345,662 |
| San Bernardino | 95 | 45 | 99 | 11 | 119,789 |
| San Benito | 428 | 65 | 334 | 987 | 228,261 |
| Santa Clara | 85 | 4 | 197 | 837 | 223,765 |
| Santa Cruz | 191 | 86 | 426 | 72 | 13,383 |
| San Diego | 436 | 434 | 3,789 | 55,176 | 64,076 |
| Shasta | 952 | 183 | 53 | 1,318 | 318,141 |
| Siskiyou | 523 | 352 | 568 | 408,724 | 178,958 |
| San Joaquin | 393 | 2 | 3,563 | 4,677 | 53,937 |
| San Luis Obispo | 1,051 | 708 | 5,777 | 8,442 | 476,037 |
| San Mateo | 198 | 12 | 264 | 208 | 41,874 |
| Solano | 170 | 27 | 159 | 0 | 57,340 |
| Sonoma | 382 | 782 | 3,695 | 9,205 | 327,612 |
| Sierra Valley | 47 | 2 | 6 | 15,141 | 38,487 |
| Stanislaus | 1,202 | 341 | 11,090 | 1,300 | 163,625 |
| Tehama | 1,219 | 342 | 2,145 | 54,909 | 718,955 |
| Tulare | 299 | 365 | 372 | 26,172 | 305,620 |
| Ventura | 653 | 412 | 3,380 | 7,156 | 156,628 |
| Yolo | 281 | 308 | 1,241 | 1,518 | 89,683 |
| Yuba | 142 | 22 | 84 | 0 | 90,763 |
| ***Total*** | ***15,490*** | ***8,612*** | ***58,055*** | ***1,032,641*** | ***9,121,467*** |

Notes: Farmland data for Imperial County was not available.

Source: DOC 2016

##### Williamson Act Contract Lands Farmland Classifications

The California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) recognizes the importance of agricultural land and includes provisions to protect and ensure the orderly conversion of agricultural land. The Williamson Act allows a property owner to commit, via contract with the County, to not developing a subject property in exchange for a guarantee that the property will be taxed at agricultural values under minimum 10-year rolling term contracts. The contracts may be cancelled to allow a limited number of public uses, such as open space and natural resource conservation, and a cancellation fee may apply. The process for exiting the contracts involves nonrenewal, which takes place over a 9-year period. According to DOC 2016 Status Report, more than 14 million acres of land were enrolled under Williamson Act Contract throughout the state in 2015 (DOC 2016:39). The treatable landscape includes land enrolled under Williamson Act in each of the designated farmland categories. The farmland classifications under Williamson Act are as follows:

* Prime Agricultural Land: Land which is enrolled under California Land Conservation Act contract and meets any of the following criteria (as set forth under California Government Code Section 51201):
* qualifies for rating as class I or class II in the Natural Resources Conservation Service land use capability classifications;
* qualifies for rating 80 to 100 in the Storie Index Rating;
* supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and which has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture;
* planted with fruit or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes or crops which have a nonbearing period of less than five years and which will normally return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than two hundred dollars per acre;
* has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production and has an annual gross value of not less than two hundred dollars per acre for three of the previous five years.
* Non-Prime Agricultural Land: Land which is enrolled under California Land Conservation Act contract and does not meet any of the criteria for classification as Prime Agricultural Land. Non-Prime Land is defined as Open Space Land of Statewide Significance under the California Open Space Subvention Act. Most Non-Prime Land is in agricultural uses such as grazing or non-irrigated crops. Non-Prime Land may also include other open space uses which are compatible with agriculture and consistent with local general plans.
* Farmland Security Zone: Enrolled parcels containing either Prime or Non-Prime agricultural land restricted by a 20-year contract pursuant to Government Code Section 51296.
* Mixed Enrollment: Enrolled lands containing a combination of Prime, Non-Prime, Open Space Easement, or other contracted or enrolled lands not yet delineated by the county.
* Non-Renewal: Enrolled lands for which non-renewal has been filed pursuant to Government Code Section 51245. Upon the filing of non-renewal, the existing contract remains in effect for the balance of the period remaining on the contract. During the non-renewal process, the annual tax assessment gradually increases. At the end of the 9-year non-renewal period (or 19-year non-renewal period if FSZ), the contract expires, and the land is no longer restricted.

#### Forest and Timberland in california

California has approximately 33 million acres of forest. Federal agencies, including the US Forest Service, US Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service, own and manage 19 million acres (57 percent). State and local agencies including CAL FIRE, local open space, park and water districts and land trusts own approximately 990,000 acres (3 percent). The remaining 13 million acres (40 percent) is owned by private landowners, Native American tribes, or companies (UC ANR 2019). Of the 33 million acres of forest land within the state, approximately 6 million acres are located within the treatable landscape.

Timberland (forest that is available for and capable of growing a crop of trees for commercial purposes) within California, include approximately 9 million acres (55.5 percent) under federal ownership, 141,057 acres (0.8 percent) under state and local ownership, and 7 million acres (43.7 percent) under private ownership (CDFW 2018). Of the 9 million acres of timberland within the state, approximately 7 million acres are located within the treatable landscape. Non-commercial vegetation treatment may occur in timberland; however, the proposed CalVTP excludes commercial timber removal.

#### Exisiting Vegetation Treatments in the treatable landscape

Treatments currently occur within the treatable landscape, but generally do not occur in agricultural vegetation types because land designated for agricultural use is generally outside the SRA. As described in Chapter 1, “Introduction” and Section 2.3.1, “Past and Current Treatments,” vegetation treatment currently occurs around the state under several other wildfire risk reduction programs implemented by various federal, state, and local agencies. In 2017–2018, CAL FIRE treated approximately 33,000 acres in California using the same treatment activities as proposed under the CalVTP.

### Regulatory Setting

#### Federal

No federal laws or regulations related to agriculture and forestry resources are applicable to the project. The treatable landscape does not include federal land.

#### State

##### California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

Important Farmland in California is classified and mapped according to the DOC’s FMMP. Authority for the FMMP comes from Government Code Section 65570(b) and PRC Section 612. Government Code Section 65570(b) requires DOC to collect or acquire information on the amount of land converted to or from agricultural use for every mapped county and to report this information to the legislature. PRC Section 612 requires DOC to prepare, update, and maintain Important Farmland series maps and other soils and land capability information.

##### California Land Conservation Act of 1965

As discussed in Section 3.3.1, the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, or the Williamson Act, preserves agricultural and open space lands through property tax incentives and voluntary restrictive use contracts. Private landowners voluntarily restrict their land to agricultural and compatible open space uses under minimum 10-year rolling term contracts. In return, restricted parcels are assessed for property tax purposes at a rate consistent with their actual use rather than potential market value.

##### California Public Resources Code

Agricultural and forestry land within California are defined by the California Public Resources Code (PRC) as follows:

* Section 21060.1(a) defines “Agricultural land” as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, or unique farmland, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California.
* Section 21060.1(b) states the following: In those areas of the state where lands have not been surveyed for the classifications specified in subdivision (a), “agricultural land” means land that meets the requirements of “prime agricultural land” as defined in paragraph (1), (2), (3), or (4) of subdivision (c) of Section 51201 of the Government Code.
* 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 timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits.
* Section 4526 defines timberland as land, other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the board as experimental forest land, which 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.

##### Z’berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act

Although the proposed CalVTP excludes timber removal for commercial purposes, the Z’berh -Nejedly Forest Practice Act (Forest Practice Act) may be pertinent as it relates to identifying operating methods and procedures that seek to protect fish, wildlife, forests, and streams within timber harvesting areas where qualifying CalVTP treatments may also be implemented. The Forest Practice Act is intended to achieve “maximum sustained production of high-quality timber products…while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, regional economic vitality, employment and aesthetic enjoyment” (PRC Section 4513[b]). The regulations created by the Forest Practice Act define factors such as the: size and location of harvest areas, include measures to prevent unreasonable damage to residual trees, and address the protection of riparian areas, water courses and lakes, wildlife, and habitat areas.

##### Timberland Productivity Act

Although the proposed CalVTP excludes timber removal for commercial purposes, the Timberland Productivity Act may be pertinent as it relates to compatible uses, such as management for watershed or habitat purposes. The Timberland Productivity Act represents the Legislature’s declared intent “to fully realize the productive potential of the forest resources and timberlands of the state.” The Act imposes mandatory restrictions on parcels zoned as timberland production. Such parcels “shall be zoned so as to restrict their use to growing and harvesting timber and to compatible uses.” (Gov. Code, Section 51115.) In exchange, property owners are required to pay property taxes on the land based solely on its value for timber harvest, and not for its development potential, as is the case with qualifying agricultural and open space lands under the Williamson Act (discussed above). Government Code Section 51104(g) of the defines “timberland production zone” as an area which has been zoned pursuant to Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses. Compatible uses are defined under Section 51104(h) and include management for watershed; management for habitat or hunting and fishing; access roads and staging areas for timber harvesting; gas, electric, water, or communication transmission facilities; grazing; or a residence or other structure necessary for timber management.

##### Z’berg-Warren-Keen-Collier Forest Taxation Reform Act

Although the proposed CalVTP excludes timber removal for commercial purposes, timberland zoning may be pertinent as it relates to avoidance of land use conflicts. According to the Z’Berg-Warren-Keene-Collier Forest Taxation Reform Act (California Government Code - Sections 51110-51119.5: Article 2), enacted in 1976, counties must provide for the zoning of land used for growing and harvesting timber as Timberland Production Zones (TPZs). TPZs were established to preserve and protect timberland from conversion to other uses and avoid land use conflicts.

#### Local

When state agencies, including CAL FIRE, are conducting governmental activities under the authority of state law or the state Constitution, in this case, treatments implemented under the proposed CalVTP, they are exempt from local government plans, policies, and ordinances (unless a constitutional provision or statute directs otherwise). Nonetheless, CAL FIRE voluntarily seeks to operate consistently with local governance to the extent feasible. Given its statewide extent and the possible number of local and regional responsible agencies, this PEIR does not identify potentially applicable local government plans, policies, and ordinances. Types of local regulations relevant to agriculture and forestry include City and County General Plans, zoning ordinances, and policies adopted to protect agriculture and forestry resources. This PEIR assumes that any vegetation treatments proposed by local or regional agencies under the CalVTP would be consistent with local plans, policies, and ordinances, as required by SPR AD-3.

### Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

#### ANALYSIS Methodology

The analysis of environmental impacts on agriculture and forestry focuses on the potential for conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses, conversion of forest land to non-forest uses, and conflicts with policies and regulations intended to protect farmland and forest land. Significance determinations account for the influence of relevant SPRs, which are incorporated into treatment design.

#### Thresholds of Significance

Thresholds of significance are based on Appendix G of the 2019 State CEQA Guidelines. A treatment implemented under the proposed CalVTP would result in a significant impact on agricultural and forest (including timber) resources if it 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;
* conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in 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));
* result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to a non-forest use;
* 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.

#### Issues Not Evaluated Further

Implementation of the CalVTP would consist of vegetation treatment activities that would modify portions of the treatable landscape to reduce wildfire risk. As discussed in Section 2.4 of Chapter 2, “Project Description,” agricultural land is excluded from the treatable landscape because wildfire risks within agricultural lands are considered negligible. Therefore, CAL FIRE, or other project proponent, would not implement treatment activities on land classified as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, and this issue is not evaluated further.

As stated above, wildfire risks within agricultural lands are considered negligible by CAL FIRE and agricultural vegetations types as designated by the California Wildlife Habitat Relationship (CWHR) system as are generally excluded from the treatable landscape. It is not expected that treatments would occur on land under active agricultural production (as wildfire risk is negligible). However, as discussed in Section 3.3.1, “Environmental Setting,” the treatable landscape includes land enrolled under Williamson Act in each of the designated farmland categories and may encompass areas zoned as agriculture despite not being identified as an agricultural land type by CWHR and these designations do not necessarily indicate whether the land is under agricultural production. In these cases, if a treatment is implemented on land zoned as agriculture or under a Williamson act contract, the treatment would occur to existing vegetation and would not change the land use. Therefore, conflicts with zoning or Williamson Act contracts are not evaluated further. Also, because there would be no change in land use there would be no conversion of agriculture to a non-agricultural use and this issue is not evaluated further.

The treatable landscape is divided into three fuel types that exhibit similar fire behavior characteristics: grass, shrub, and tree. Within these primary fuel types, the tree fuel type encompasses approximately 40 percent of the SRA and is the largest of the three types. Treatment activities that could occur within tree fuel type include prescribed burning mechanical treatment, manual treatment, prescribed herbivory, and herbicide application. As discussed in Section 3.3.1, “Environmental Setting,” the treatable landscape includes 6 million acres of forest land and 7 million acres of timberland. CAL FIRE, or other project proponent, could implement treatment activities on land zoned for forest land and/or timberland located within the SRA, which are under CAL FIRE’s jurisdiction. However, the proposed CalVTP does not include actions that would remove trees for commercial purposes. Additionally, treatment activities would maintain the current use of the land and would not require rezoning of forest land or timberland to another use. In addition, implementation of treatment activities would not involve development that would conflict with existing zoning for forest land or timberland. Therefore, implementation of the proposed CalVTP would not conflict with existing zoning for forest land or timberland, and this issue is not evaluated further.

#### Impact Analysis

Impact AG-1: Directly Result in the Loss of Forest Land or Conversion of Forest Land to a Non-Forest Use or Involve Other Changes in the Existing Environment Which, Due to Their Location or Nature, Could Result in Conversion of Forest Land to Non-Forest Use

The WUI fuel reduction, ecological restoration and ~~non-~~shaded fuel break treatment types would inherently retain some vegetation within treatment areas. Establishing a non-shaded fuel break would require complete removal of vegetation within the limited area of the fuel break. Untreated vegetation surrounding the fuel break within forest land would remain intact. Although, treatment activities would alter forest land through vegetation removal, the area would generally support 10 percent of native tree cover thereby maintaining consistency with the definition of forest land as defined by PRC Section 12220(g). Treatment activities under the CalVTP would not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to a non-forest use. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Treatment activities would modify portions of the treatable landscape to reduce wildfire risk. As previously discussed, appropriate areas within which to implement vegetation treatments were identified using the CWHR system and divided into three fuel types: grass, shrub, and tree. Within these primary fuel types, the tree fuel type encompasses approximately 40 percent of the SRA and is the largest of the three groups. The tree fuel type encompasses forest land as defined by PRC Section 12220(g) and considered in this analysis. Pursuant to, PRC Section 12220(g). forest land is defined as land that can support 10 percent native tree cover of any species under natural conditions. Treatment activities that could occur within the tree fuel type include prescribed burning, mechanical treatment, manual treatment, prescribed herbivory, and herbicide application. As discussed in Section 3.3.1, “Environmental Setting,” the treatable landscape includes 6 million acres of forest land. Implementation of treatment activities within forest land would involve vegetation removal, such as trees, shrubs, and undergrowth. The WUI fuel reduction, ecological restoration and ~~non-~~shaded fuel break treatment types would inherently retain some vegetation within treatment areas. Establishing a non-shaded fuel break would require complete removal of vegetation within the limited area of the fuel break (typically up to 300 feet wide but in some cases wider) to achieve the strategic and functional objectives of the fuel break. Untreated vegetation surrounding the fuel break within forest land would remain intact. Although, treatment activities would alter forest land through vegetation removal, the area would generally support 10 percent of native tree cover thereby maintaining consistency with the definition of forest land as defined by PRC Section 12220(g). Therefore, implementation of the CalVTP would not directly result in the loss of forest land or convert forest land to a non-forest use or involve other changes in the existing environment that could result in conversion of forest land to non-forest use. This impact would be **less than significant**.

##### Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.