

3.1.3 Farmland/Grazing Land

This section addresses potential impacts to farmland and grazing land, including land under Williamson Act contracts, that would result from construction of the HDC Project.

Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) (7 U.S.C. 4201-4209. and its regulations, 7 *Code of the Federal Regulations* [CFR] Part 658) require federal agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), to coordinate with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) if their activities may irreversibly convert farmland (i.e., directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use. For purposes of the FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires the review of projects that would convert Williamson Act contract land to nonagricultural uses. The main purposes of the Williamson Act are to preserve agricultural land and to encourage open space preservation and efficient urban growth. The Williamson Act provides incentives to landowners through reduced property taxes to discourage the early conversion of agricultural and open space lands to other uses.

The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315) established grazing districts and created the Department of Interior's Division of Grazing. This division later became the U.S. Grazing Service and, in 1946, the Grazing Service was merged with the General Land Office to become the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Taylor Grazing Act was intended to manage public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration and to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development. The Taylor Grazing Act was pre-empted by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), which was passed to establish policy for managing BLM-administered public lands. FLPMA authorized 10-year grazing permits. The Act also directed grazing advisory boards to guide BLM in developing allotment management plans.

Affected Environment

This section is summarized from the *Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project*, June 2014. The objectives of the Farmland Report are to describe existing farmlands and grazing lands within the proposed project vicinity, identify impacts on these resources, and recommend avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

Based on 2008 estimates prepared by the California Department of Conservation (DOC), there are approximately 1.17 million acres of farmland and 1.48 million acres of rangeland in the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) region. Based on the 2007 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture, Los Angeles County had 1,734 farms totaling 108,463 acres (average of 63 acres) in 2007. San Bernardino County had 1,405 farms totaling 514,234 acres (average of 366 acres) in 2007. Leading commodities for Los Angeles County are wooden

ornamentals, vegetables, and alfalfa, whereas leading commodities for San Bernardino County are milk, chicken, and cattle.

The California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) 2010 data shown in Tables 3.1.3-1 and 3.1.3-2 indicate the presence of 39,812 acres of Important Farmland⁴ in Los Angeles County and 22,761 acres in San Bernardino County. Most of the Important Farmland in Los Angeles County is concentrated in the Antelope Valley north of Palmdale and west of Lancaster in close proximity to the California Aqueduct. In San Bernardino County, Important Farmland is located along the Mojave River near and along SR-66 from Victorville heading north to Hinkley Valley/Barstow and farther east near Newberry Springs. The HDC alignment mostly traverses grazing land across rural areas in San Bernardino County.

Farmland maps covering project study area in Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties are provided in Figures 3.1.3-1 and 3.1.3-2, respectively.

Table 3.1.3-1 Los Angeles County Farmland Change by Land Use, 2008 to 2010

Land Use Category	Total Acreage Inventoried		Acres Lost (-)	Acres Gained (+)	Total Acreage Changed	Net Acreage Changed
	2008	2010				
Prime Farmland	32,406	30,876	2,422	892	3,314	-1,530
Farmland of Statewide Importance	1,228	952	286	10	296	-276
Unique Farmland	1,177	1,129	101	53	154	-48
Farmland of Local Importance	7,193	6,855	412	74	486	-338
<i>Important Farmland Subtotal</i>	<i>42,004</i>	<i>39,812</i>	<i>3,221</i>	<i>1,029</i>	<i>4,250</i>	<i>-2,192</i>
Grazing Land	229,474	231,475	1,048	3,049	4,097	2,001
<i>Agricultural Land Subtotal</i>	<i>271,478</i>	<i>271,287</i>	<i>4,269</i>	<i>4,078</i>	<i>8,347</i>	<i>-191</i>
Urban and Built-up Land	170,864	174,888	270	4,294	4,564	4,024
Other Land	678,251	674,568	4,550	867	5,417	-3,683
Water Area	3,468	3,318	150	0	150	-150
<i>Total Area Inventoried</i>	<i>1,124,061</i>	<i>1,124,061</i>	<i>9,239</i>	<i>9,239</i>	<i>18,478</i>	<i>0</i>

Source: Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project, 2014

⁴ Classified in FMMP as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance.

**Table 3.1.3-2 San Bernardino County Farmland Change by Land Use,
2008 to 2010**

Land Use Category	Total Acreage Inventoried		Acres Lost (-)	Acres Gained (+)	Total Acreage Changed	Net Acreage Changed
	2008	2010				
Prime Farmland	14,090	12,848	1,652	410	2,062	-1,242
Farmland of Statewide Importance	6,747	6,242	546	41	587	-505
Unique Farmland	2,661	2,511	263	113	376	-150
Farmland of Local Importance	1,828	1,160	668	0	668	-668
<i>Important Farmland Subtotal</i>	<i>25,326</i>	<i>22,761</i>	<i>3,129</i>	<i>564</i>	<i>3,693</i>	<i>-2,565</i>
Grazing Land	901,666	902,590	2,121	3,045	5,166	924
<i>Agricultural Land Subtotal</i>	<i>926,992</i>	<i>925,351</i>	<i>5,250</i>	<i>3,609</i>	<i>8,859</i>	<i>-1,641</i>
Urban and Built-up Land	275,695	277,875	473	2,653	3,126	2,180
Other Land	246,413	245,813	1,796	1,196	2,992	-600
Water Area	449	510	0	61	61	61
<i>Total Area Inventoried</i>	<i>1,449,549</i>	<i>1,449,549</i>	<i>7,519</i>	<i>7,519</i>	<i>15,038</i>	<i>0</i>

Source: *Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project, 2014*

Between 2008 and 2010, both counties suffered from a net loss of Important Farmland at approximately 5.5 percent for Los Angeles County and 11.3 percent for San Bernardino County. Tables 3.1.3-1 and 3.1.3-2 indicate that the net acreage for each land use category had changed. During this period, population growth and associated urban development drove the loss of Important Farmland; however, losses also can occur if land is used for habitat conservation or confined animal facilities. Gains in Important Farmland can also occur, for example, when grazing land is converted to crop production.

No properties under consideration for the HDC right-of-way (ROW) acquisition are currently under a Williamson Act contract (agricultural preserve) based on information provided by the Los Angeles and San Bernardino county assessor's offices. Most of the Important Farmland within the HDC footprint is classified as vacant or residential. See Tables 3 and 4 of the *Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project* (June 2014) for information on individual agricultural properties potentially affected by the proposed project.

Figure 3.1.3-1 Study Area Farmland Map In Los Angeles County

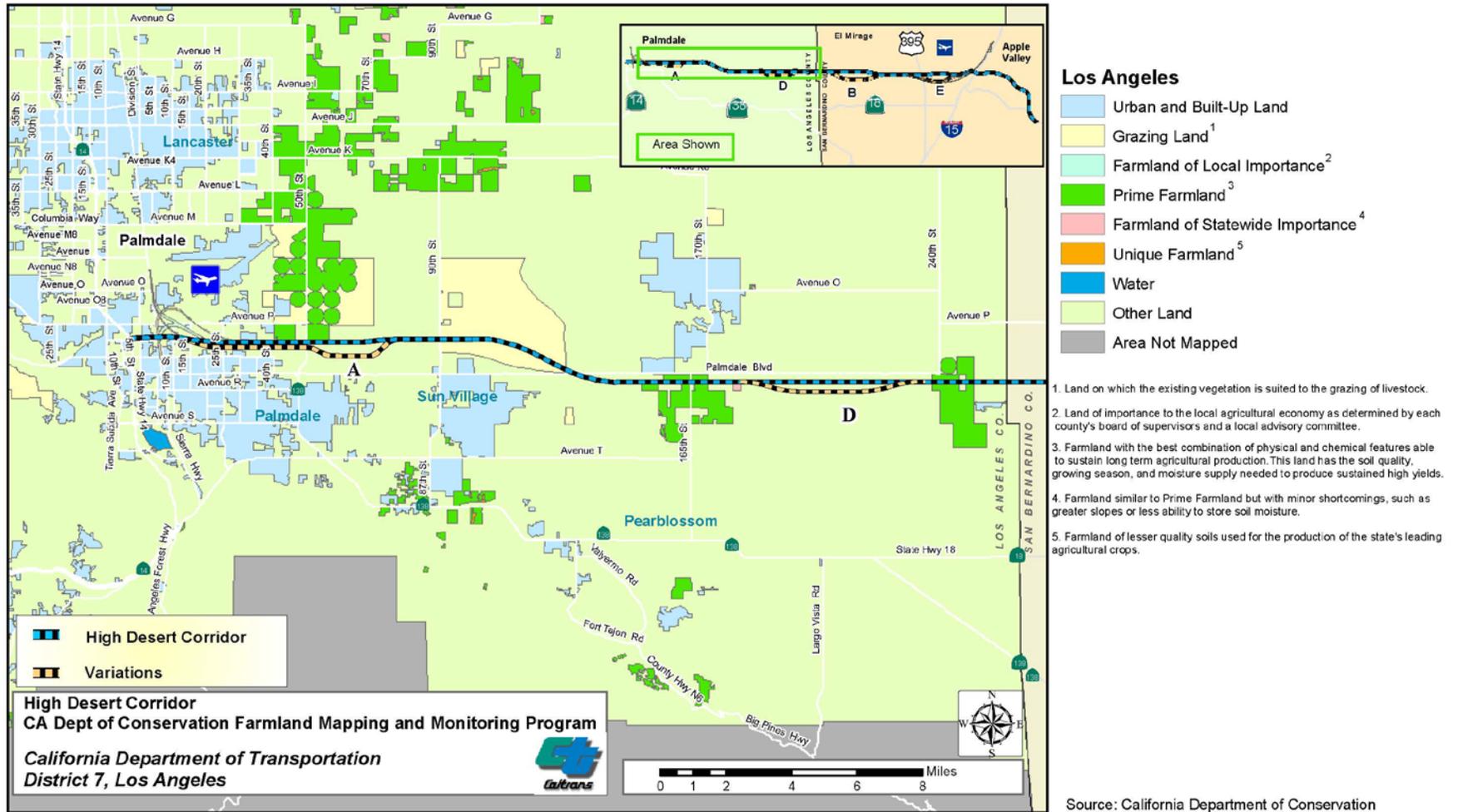
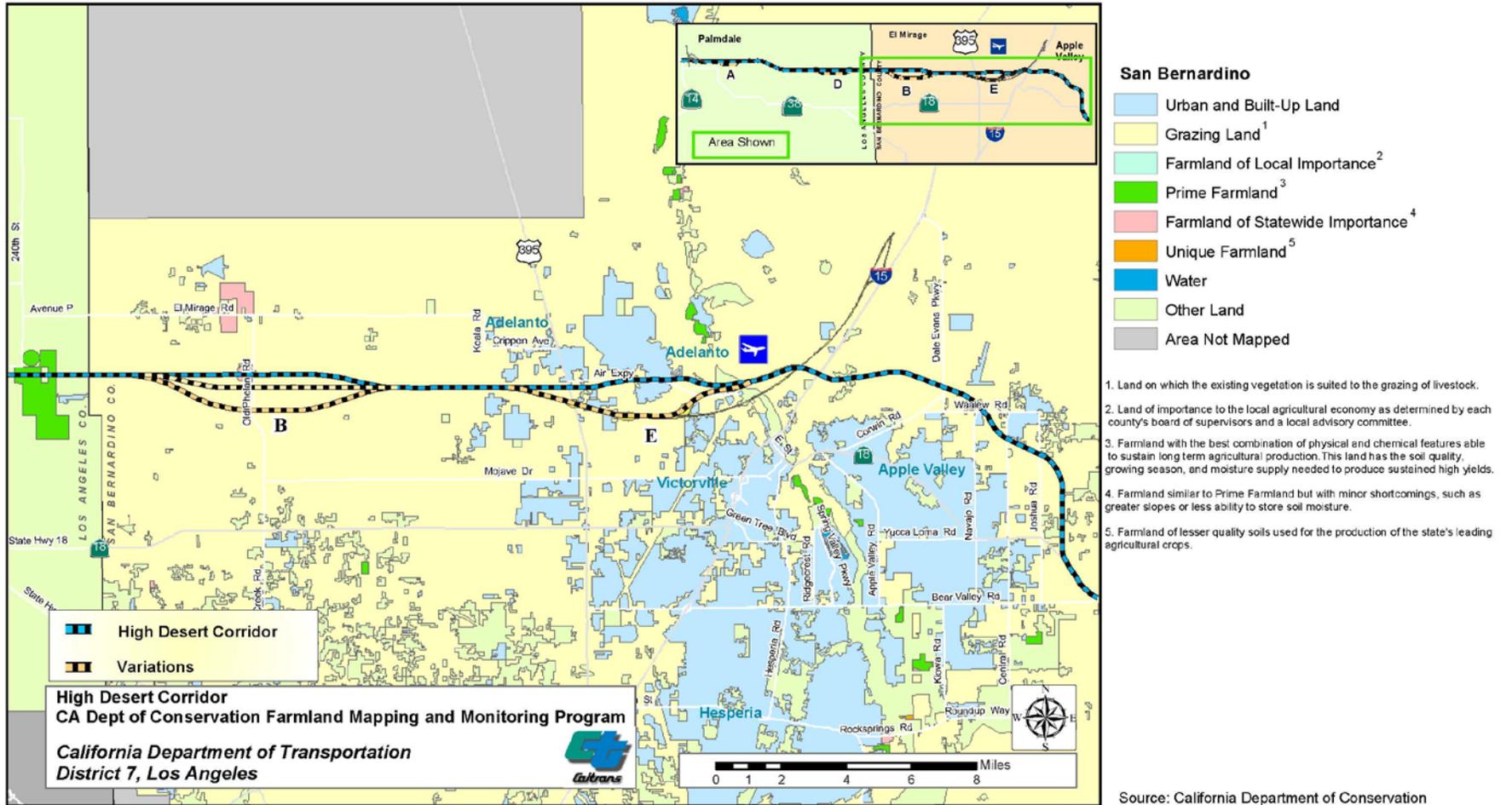


Figure 3.1.3-2 Study Area Farmland Map In San Bernardino County



Source: California Department of Conservation

Under the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan of 1980, as amended by the West Mojave Plan of 2006, sheep grazing is permitted on BLM lands under the FLPMA on the Stoddard Mountain Allotment (Middle Unit). The Middle Stoddard Unit is bordered by I-15 on the east, National Trails Highway on the west, Victorville on the south, and Lenwood on the north. The current available grazing area in the Middle Stoddard unit is 16,899 acres.

Environmental Consequences

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not result in any impacts to Important Farmland or land under a Williamson Act contract.

Build Alternatives

All alternatives would require acquisition of land for the proposed HDC ROW. It would directly impact farmland by converting approximately 252 acres of Important Farmland and 2,965 acres of Grazing Land to nonagricultural use, which could be a potentially significant impact. Methods applied to evaluate impacts under NEPA and CEQA are described in the *Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project* (June 2014). They include reviewing available FMMP spatial data for Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties (2010) to identify Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) and Grazing Land. The county assessor’s office and California Department of Conservation (DOC) provided spatial data for agricultural lands protected under Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) contracts. LandVision™ from Digital Map Products, a land acquisition software solution, provided land use designations for the parcels. Together, with online maps and site visits, this information provided the basis for calculating land use changes.

Farmland

Freeway/Expressway and Freeway/Tollway Alternatives

Table 3.1.3-3 summarizes the HDC Project’s direct impacts to Important Farmlands in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties.

Table 3.1.3-3 Important Farmland Impacts (FMMP 2010)

County	Total Mapped Farmland	HDC Direct Farmland Impact	Percentage
Los Angeles	39,812 acres	239 acres	0.59
San Bernardino	22,761 acres	17 Acres	0.08

Source: *Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project, 2014.*

East of Lancaster and near the Palmdale Regional Airport, the HDC alignment would pass adjacent to approximately 15,000 acres of irrigated alfalfa and onion fields without any direct impacts. Proceeding to the east, the HDC base alignment would result in the following farmland impacts to 30 parcels:

- **Littlerock Wash to 95th Street:** The HDC would impact a total of 96 acres out of 496 acres of grazing land from 15 parcels. No active farming operation would be impacted, and no parcels would be severed.
- **Big Rock Wash to 180th Street:** The HDC would impact a total of 124 acres of Important Farmland out of 470 acres from 11 parcels. One nursery operation, comprised of 4 contiguous parcels, would be impacted. In addition, 2 parcels would be severed. The remaining severed properties would likely continue to be farmed, but the nursery operation could be significantly impacted with parcels located on both sides of the future HDC alignment.
- **235th Street to 255th Street:** The HDC would impact a total of 111.4 acres of Important Farmland out of 720 acres from 3 parcels. Title for all 3 parcels, which are being actively farmed, is held by the same owner. The HDC would bisect the largest of the 3 parcels, potentially impacting the remainder of the parcel due to its current circular irrigation patterns, which may have to be modified to parallel lines. Although this impact would be substantial, it could potentially be lessened if the owner would be willing to purchase and farm adjacent vacant property(ies).
- **El Mirage Road intersection with Sheep Creek Road:** The HDC main alignment would require the acquisition of about 57.5 acres and bisect the recently acquired Meadowbrook dairy farm property into 2 parcels (70 acres and 30 acres out of 158 acres). Within the 57.5-acre proposed acquisition area is about 17 acres of Unique Farmland. The severed and remaining 2 parcels include another 57 acres of Unique Farmland. Variation B, as described in Section 2.3.2, would shift the alignment to the south and avoid bisecting this parcel.

In summary, the extent of ROW required for each individual parcel ranges from 0.6 acre to 79.6 acres. Partial or full acquisition of 18 parcels, each 5 acres or less, would be required. The remaining 12 parcels affected by partial or full acquisition would be 10 acres or larger.

Of the 30 parcels, 4 parcels would be severed, thus possibly rendering the remainder of these parcels as economically unprofitable for productive agriculture production, including 1 nursery operation shown in Figure 3.1.3-3. In addition, in some of these cases, farmland irrigation might have to be modified from circular irrigation patterns to parallel lines.

Variation B

Variation B of the Project shifts the alignment to the base alignment to the south by 500 feet or more (to minimize impacts to buildings and fixed structures). This alignment would minimize impacts to the dairy farm operations—especially when combined with the purchase of a replacement land bordering the dairy farm immediately from the north.

Variation D

Variation D, as shown in Figure 2-1, was originally designed to dip slightly south of the main alignment between 150th Street East and 230th Street East, but was later shifted to between 180th Street East and 230th Street East to minimize impacts to

farmland. This modification reduced the net impact by about 58 acres of prime farmland and avoided severing one farmland parcel diagonally.

Freeway/Expressway and Freeway/Tollway with HSR Alternatives

Under these alternatives, there would be no additional impacts to farmland as to those discussed under the Freeway/Expressway Alternative and Freeway/Tollway Alternative.

**Figure 3.1.3-3 Potentially Affected Nursery Operation
in Los Angeles County**



Source: *Farmland Report for the High Desert Corridor Project, 2014.*

Grazing Land

Freeway/Expressway and Freeway/Tollway Alternatives

The HDC base alignment would pass through approximately 215 acres of designated grazing land in Los Angeles County and 2,100 acres in San Bernardino County. Most of the alignment in San Bernardino County would traverse FMMP-classified “grazing land”. However, due to availability of abundant grazing land, impact from the project’s contribution to the incremental loss of grazing land is not considered substantial.

The proposed HSR alignment would traverse a designated sheep grazing area in the Stoddard Valley ephemeral sheep allotment (Middle Unit), about 1 mile west from I-15. The area of sheep grazing land to be affected is estimated at about 650 acres, which would include 250 acres required for the new tracks and station ROW. The remainder 400 acres is an area locked between the proposed rail tracks and I-15. The HDC impact to designated grazing land is estimated at about 0.1 percent of grazing land in Los Angeles County and about 0.3 percent in San Bernardino. These small

percentage totals are not considered substantial. Because the impact to the Middle Stoddard Unit is below 25 animal unit month (AUM), grazing impact is not considered substantial.

Freeway/Expressway and Freeway/Tollway with HSR Alternatives

With the HDC build alternatives that include HSR, the remaining acreage available for grazing at the Stoddard Valley ephemeral sheep allotment (Middle Unit) would be reduced to 16,249 acres – a reduction of 3.8 percent. An average of 1 band of sheep per year (i.e., 500 to 1,000 ewe-lamb pairs with average size of 800 ewe-lamb pairs) is anticipated to graze when sheep grazing is authorized for this allotment, which amounts to about 160 AUM (amount of forage cattle consumes in one month). The carrying capacity could be estimated by dividing 16,899 acres by 160 AUM, which amounts to about 105 acres per 5 ewe-lamb pairs. A reduction of 650 acres of available acreage could potentially reduce the sheep number by about 30 ewe-lamb pairs (i.e., 6 AUM). Because the impact to the Middle Stoddard Unit is below 25 AUM, grazing impact is not considered substantial.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

As described in Section 3.1.4.2, Relocation and Property Acquisition, adequate compensation will be provided for property acquisitions, including relocation assistance for residents and businesses as required by the law. Caltrans' ROW agents will work with affected property owners to address issues of concern and negotiate a compensation of their property's fair market value and any temporary loss of production due to the project.

The following avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures are proposed to address potential impacts to farm and grazing land resources:

- AG-1:** Design and implement the project in a manner that avoids and minimizes ROW requirement impacts, as follows:
- The HDC will be aligned to follow property lines, wherever possible.
 - If feasible, utility relocations shall occur within the ROW acquired for the proposed highway rather than on farmland adjacent to the highway.
 - In cases where farming is unlikely to continue, the small remainder parcels are to be identified as a farmland conversion, and Caltrans will acquire these property remainders and offer them to adjacent farmland property owners.
 - Farmland owners along either side of the HDC near 165th Street shall be advised to consider the purchase of each other's property to consolidate properties along the same side of the HDC.
- AG-2:** Caltrans will enter into an agreement with the DOC California Farmland Conservancy Program to preserve farmland by placing long-term farmland protection tools on Important Farmland or cause the conversion of Grazing Land into Important Farmland. Caltrans will fund the California Farmland Conservancy Program's work to identify suitable agricultural land for mitigation of impacts to farmland and to fund the purchase of agricultural conservation easements from willing

sellers. The performance standards for this measure are to preserve Important Farmland in an amount commensurate with the quantity and quality of the converted farmlands, within the same agricultural regions as the impacts occur, at a replacement ratio of not less than 2:1.

Caltrans and the California Farmland Conservancy Program will develop selection criteria to guide the pursuit and purchase of conservation easements. These will include, but are not limited to, provisions to ensure that the easements will conform to the requirements of Public Resources Code Section 10252 and to prioritize the acquisition of willing seller easements on lands that are adjacent to other protected agricultural lands or that would support the establishment of greenbelts and urban separators.

- AG-3:** Impacts to about 2,965 acres of Grazing Land will be mitigated by placing a conservation easement over open space at a replacement ratio of not less than 1:1 in areas where it could meet multiple natural resource conservation objectives including, but not limited to, wetland protection, wildlife habitat conservation, and scenic open-space preservation.
- AG-4:** Caltrans will fund a research project targeting farmland restoration and reclamation and soil removal and storage. The budget for this activity will be determined at the final design phase of the project after public input is provided.
- AG-5:** Within a 100-foot buffer area from future property lines with farmland, disturbed surface areas will be stabilized utilizing native vegetation and soils clear of invasive plant species. Soil amendments, if used, must comply with the requirements in the California Food and Agricultural Codes. Soil amendment must not contain paint, petroleum products, pesticides or any other chemical residues harmful to animal life or plant growth. The construction contract will include provisions to protect against the spread of invasive species. Also see Mitigation BIN-1 to BIN-10 for provisions to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- AG-6:** Infill material to be used in the project shall not be obtained from borrow sites comprised of prime farmland. When selecting sites for wetland mitigation or infiltration basins, the HDC Project will avoid prime farmland to the extent possible. To the extent feasible, infiltration basin sites will also serve wetland mitigation and borrow material purposes to reduce impacts to prime farmland and improve farmland conservation efforts.