

4.11. LAND USE AND PLANNING

This section includes the following discussion and analysis related to land use and planning: existing environmental setting and regulatory context; criteria and methodology for evaluating impacts; and the results of the impact assessment, including identification of potentially significant impacts and corresponding mitigation measures to avoid or substantially lessen such impacts to the extent feasible.

PEIR Scoping Comments

During the PEIR scoping process, the District received three letters containing comments regarding land use and planning (see PEIR Scoping Report in Appendix A of this document). These comments are summarized below:

Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations & Planning and Conservation League (PCL), et al.

(The letter submitted by the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations included PCL’s letter as an attachment, so these entities submitted the same comments regarding land use.)

The comment letters submitted by these entities stated that “the choice of Westlands Water District as lead agency raises questions, given their lack of authority over land use conversions from agricultural to municipal and industrial purposes.” The letters further comment that the “United States Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) should be notified of this proposed change in land use, and trigger a new water needs assessment for the district’s Central Valley Project (CVP) contract supply.”¹ These entities also commented that “[t]he potential for conversion of agricultural land to municipal and industrial use could conflict with local land use planning objectives.” The letters also commented “it is imperative that the surrounding counties with land use decision-making and the federal and state government agencies engage rigorously in the comment process to ensure a holistic understanding of the project’s impacts and the adoption of prudent mitigation strategies.”

¹ The comment letter does not accurately represent the purpose of, or triggering events for, a water needs assessment, which are set forth in Article 3(a)(1) of the District’s repayment contract with the United States for its CVP water supply, as follows:

“(a)(1) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this Contract, in the event the Secretary implements a program to retire land from irrigated agricultural production within the Contractor’s Service Area as a means of addressing drainage in the San Luis Unit, the Contracting Officer shall conduct a water needs assessment to determine whether the Contract Total will be reduced.”

A water needs assessment is required if the Secretary implements a program to retire land from irrigated agricultural production to address drainage, and is not triggered by either the objectives of, or the project activities anticipated in, the proposed VCIP. Implementation of the proposed VCIP would involve repurposing agricultural land in portions of the District on a long-term but temporary basis. The proposed VCIP provides for compatible agricultural uses such as sheep grazing in combination with project activities, and would establish requirements for decommissioning plans to remove project fixtures and equipment. The proposed VCIP also would establish requirements for financial assurances to ensure timely completion of the activities in the decommissioning plans. The existing agricultural character of the land would be retained during the operational life of VCIP projects, or upon cessation of project uses, would be suitable for agricultural uses.

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San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD)

SJVAPCD’s comment letter focused on the nexus between land use decisions and air quality. For example, SJVAPCD recommended “that development projects that result in a significant health risk” after applying all mitigation measures should “not be approved by the land use agency.” The letter also noted: “Future development projects may require an environmental review and air emissions mitigation. A project’s referral documents and environmental review documents provided to [SJVAPCD] should include a project summary, the land use designation, project size, air emissions quantification and impacts, and proximity to sensitive receptors and existing emission sources, and air emissions mitigation measures.”

[Potential impacts associated with land use conversions are addressed below in Section 4.11.3. *Environmental Impact Analysis* under Impact LU-2. Potential impacts associated with air quality in land use decision making are addressed in Section 4.3. *Air Quality* under Impacts AQ-1 through AQ-4. The District’s role as Lead Agency is addressed in Section 1.1.1. *Purpose of this EIR.*]

4.11.1. Environmental Setting

The VCIP Plan Area

The Plan Area encompasses approximately 535,000 acres in western Fresno County (County). Within the Plan Area, the VCIP would be implemented on approximately 136,000 acres identified as Development Focus Areas (DFAs), which include approximately 72,000 acres of District-owned land and approximately 64,000 acres of privately-owned lands. The predominant land use is agricultural production along with supporting infrastructure and commercial uses, small farming communities, and dispersed rural dwellings (see Figures 3.1-1 through 3.1-8 in Chapter 3. *Environmental Setting*). The main crops are tree crops such as almonds and pistachios, and row crops such as tomatoes, grapes, cotton, and wheat. The District conveys its Central Valley Project (CVP) contract water supply throughout the Plan Area by its extensive water distribution system which delivers imported water via the San Luis Canal / California Aqueduct. Other agricultural supporting infrastructure includes groundwater wells and mixing stations, storage sheds and shops, electrical power lines, and farm roads. For a detailed description of agriculture in the Plan Area, see Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources*.

The Plan Area includes numerous land uses that serve or are associated with agricultural production. These include several large agricultural processing facilities such as tomato processing plants, almond hulling plants, packing plants, cold storage facilities, and fertilizer manufacturing plants, as well as feed lots, and equipment and materials storage yards.

The Plan Area is served by an extensive roadway network which includes several state highways and county roads, all of which are in good condition and provide efficient transportation access throughout the Plan Area. The main transportation corridor through the Plan Area is Interstate 5 (I-5), which includes several clusters of highway commercial development, including restaurants and gas stations at the Panoche Road, West Jayne Avenue, and State Route (SR)-269 Interchanges, as well as hotels at the SR-198 interchange.

The Plan Area includes several unincorporated communities including Cantua Creek, Three Rocks/El Porvenir, Westside/O’Neill, and Five Points. These communities are primarily residential with limited commercial retail or service uses. The Plan Area includes two elementary schools at Cantua Creek and Westside. Otherwise, the

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Plan Area is sparsely settled with ranches, individual dwellings and clusters of dwellings (former farmworker housing) dispersed throughout the area.

Federal and state institutions and facilities in the Plan Area include: the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Mendota, the University of California West Side Research and Extension Center (WSREC) near Five Points, and a portion of Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore.

In addition to the California Aqueduct/San Luis Canal and I-5, other major regional infrastructure passes through the Plan Area. These include several high voltage transmission lines, two major regional electrical substations, as well as a number of smaller substations dispersed throughout the Plan Area. In addition, a major natural gas pipeline and a crude oil pipeline run parallel to I-5 through the Plan Area. The lone rail line in the Plan Area is the San Joaquin Valley Railroad line running southwest from the City of Fresno through the City of Huron and on to the Los Gatos Tomato Products Plant.

The Plan Area is also the site of several oil and gas fields which once included hundreds of production wells dispersed throughout the area. The oil and gas fields have been officially declared abandoned by the state, and almost all remaining wells have been plugged and abandoned. There is little or no surface evidence of these former wells, which were severed several feet below the ground surface, with the upper portion of the well pipe and surface structures removed.

The Plan Area also includes several large and medium-sized solar generating facilities, all of which were constructed over the past 10 years, mostly on lands previously acquired by the District for retirement from irrigated agriculture and repurposing. Twenty operating solar facilities currently occupy approximately 14,000 acres within the Plan Area, and an additional 11 pending and approved solar and energy storage projects will occupy about 17,200 acres in the Plan Area upon completion. These projects include supporting infrastructure such as on-site substations and gen-tie lines for interconnection to the nearest regional collection substations.

The landscape of the Plan Area has been highly altered by the introduction of agricultural cultivation over the past 100 years. There are a few remaining areas of natural and naturalizing vegetative cover. These include: the Pleasant Valley Ecological Preserve, which is partially located within the Plan Area near Coalinga, the Arroyo Pasajero Westside Detention Basin located north of Huron, and the Pilibos Wildlife Area located adjacent to the San Luis Canal north of N. Panoche Road. Some remaining natural vegetation occurs along the larger drainage courses such as Panoche and Cantua Creeks, and Arroyo Pasajero. Elsewhere, the vegetation on the farmlands of the Plan Area consists largely of landscape trees and shrub species planted around ranch complexes and individual dwellings.

Surrounding Land Uses

Outside the Plan Area boundaries, the adjacent and nearby lands to the north, east, and south are similar in character to the lands within the Plan Area, and consist predominantly of agricultural land in row crops, tree crops, and fallow fields along with widely dispersed rural dwellings and agriculture-related commercial uses. The lands to the west and southwest consist mainly of annual grasslands covering the foothills of the Diablo Range.

There are several incorporated cities in the Plan Area vicinity. These include the City of Huron, which is located within the Plan Area boundary but is not included in the VCIP's proposed DFAs. Other adjacent and nearby

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communities in Fresno County include the cities of Coalinga, Mendota, Firebaugh, and San Joaquin, and the unincorporated communities of Tranquillity and Helm. The hills near Coalinga include several major oil and gas fields, which are in decline but still have several wells in operation.

Nearby communities in Kings County to the south include the cities of Lemoore and Avenal, and the unincorporated communities of Kettleman City and Stratford. The adjacent areas of Kings County also include the major portion of NAS Lemoore, as well as the partially completed Westlands Solar Park and other solar facilities which occupy approximately 12,500 acres with another 6,000 acres approved for construction.

There are also several wildlife areas near and adjacent to the Plan Area. These include the Mendota State Wildlife Area, the Alkali Sink Ecological Reserve, and Alkali Sink Mitigation Bank, all of which are located south-east of Mendota and just outside the Plan Area. Other nearby wildlife areas include the Helm Wetlands Preserve located adjacent to the Plan Area near the community of Helm, the Five Points Wetlands Preserve located northeast of Five Points, the Pleasant Valley Ecological Preserve located partially within the Plan Area near Coalinga, and the Pilibos Wildlife Area located adjacent to the San Luis Canal north of N. Panoche Road.

4.11.2. Regulatory Context

Federal

Naval Air Station Lemoore Joint Land Use Study

The NAS Lemoore Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) involved a multi-agency effort managed by the Department of Defense (DOD) for cooperative land use planning between NAS Lemoore and adjacent communities to provide compatibility between future community growth and the training and operational missions of the military installation. The purpose of the JLUS is to protect the health and safety of the civilian communities relative to aircraft approach and departure routes, and to discourage incompatible development in high noise areas and accident potential zones. The JLUS includes mapping of clear zones, accident potential zones (APZs), and flight corridors where the resulting aircraft noise levels on the ground are incompatible with noise-sensitive land uses. The southeasternmost portion of the Plan Area is included in the Military Influence Area (MIA) of NAS Lemoore and is within the study area of the NAS Lemoore JLUS. Since DOD has no regulatory authority for local land use outside the boundaries of the NAS Lemoore, the JLUS includes planning recommendations for consideration by local jurisdictions.

The JLUS mapping indicates that the designated clear zones, which reflect approach and departure flight paths, extend no more than 3 miles from the NAS Lemoore base in any direction. The noise contour mapping prepared for the JLUS shows bands of noise contours exceeding 60 decibels community noise equivalent level (dB CNEL), which correspond closely to the flight corridors surrounding the airfield (JLUSPC 2011). The aircraft noise corridor is reflected in the Fresno County Zoning Map, which designates lands within an approximately 3-mile buffer zone from the naval installation, including the noise-impacted areas (exceeding 70 dB CNEL) south of the buffer zone, as “Exclusive Agriculture – 40 acre” (Fresno County 2025b). The intent of this zoning designation is to provide a safety buffer zone around the base by limiting and discouraging intensive agricultural and structure-based land uses that may pose increased risks due to the potential effects of night lighting on flight operations. The JLUS also identifies height obstruction limits near NAS Lemoore, with the limits in a given area depending on its location relative to landing approach zones. The areas north and south

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of the NAS Lemoore airfield are partially within Height Restriction Zones “D” and “G” which both have height limits for ground structures of 500 feet above the ground surface (JLUSPC 2011, p. 2-24).

The JLUS included land use recommendations that could be implemented at the local level. For both Fresno and Kings counties, the JLUS recommended the establishment of three “NASL Overlay District Zone” designations, with each zone corresponding to a different set of land use compatibility concerns. Overlay Zone I covers lands immediately adjacent to NASL on the east, west, and north. Overlay Zone II encompasses the 3-mile buffer zone plus surrounding areas where aircraft noise corridors exceed 70 dB CNEL. Overlay Zone III encompasses a broader area extending beyond Overlay Zone II by 1 to 5 miles. JLUS recommendations for both counties state that within Overlay Zone III, NASL requires notification and review of proposed development plans. Areas of concern include object height, bird/aircraft strike hazard, nighttime lighting, renewable energy sites, planning infrastructure improvements, and inter-governmental coordination (JLUSPC, p. 2-47 and p. 4-34). JLUS Recommendation 16 for Fresno County states: “Establish Minimum Technical Standards for Renewable Energy Facilities Located within NASL Overlay Zones I, II, and III (JLUSPC 2011, p. 2-51 and p. 4-34). This addresses the concern with “solar farms creating excessive glare from the reflection of the sun” (JLUSPC 2011, p. 2-9). The main concern is with concentrated solar power technologies which utilize lenses or mirrors on a large scale with their reflective characteristics and tall tower collectors. However, “if there is no central collection tower, the new solar panels can be made nonreflective and arrays could be installed to not cause any height or reflective issues. Prior to the development of solar arrays within flight-sensitive areas, the height and effect of these installations along with the distribution system proposed to transmit the power from the source (solar farm) should be carefully considered” (JLUSPC 2011, p. 2-12). The potential hazard to flight operations is addressed in Section 4.9. *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*.

Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR)

Part 77 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) – “Objects Affecting Navigable Airspace,” (CFR Title 14) establishes standards for determining obstructions to navigable airspace and the effects of such obstructions on the safe and efficient use of that airspace. The regulations require that the FAA be notified of proposed construction or alteration of objects – whether permanent, temporary, or of natural growth – if those objects would be of a height which exceeds the FAR Part 77 criteria. The height limits are defined in terms of imaginary surfaces in the airspace extending about two to three miles around airport runways and approximately 9.5 miles from the ends of runways having a precision instrument approach. The FAA must be notified of construction within 20,000 feet of an airfield. The FAA then evaluates structures to determine if a hazard to air navigation is present and can recommend marking, lighting, and flight communications. The FAA does not have authority over land use but can make recommendations to state and local agencies.

State

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act (Gov. Code, section 51200 et seq.), enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners to place lands within “Agricultural Preserves,” thus restricting use of those lands to agricultural-related open space, or compatible uses. The relevant provisions of the Williamson Act are discussed in detail in Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources*.

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Water Code Sections 37860-37861 (AB 2661)

AB 2661, enacted on September 25, 2024, and chaptered as Water Code sections 37860-37861, specifically authorizes the District to: (1) provide, generate, and deliver solar photovoltaic electricity, and construct, operate, and maintain any and all works, facilities, improvements, and property, or portions thereof, necessary or convenient for generating and delivering that electricity; (2) construct, operate, and maintain an energy storage system, as defined in section 2835 of the Public Utilities Code, and all works, facilities, improvements, and property, or portions thereof, necessary or convenient for the operation of an energy storage system, within the boundaries of the District; and (3) construct, operate, and maintain electrical transmission lines and all works, facilities, improvements, and property, or portions thereof, necessary or convenient for the conveyance of electricity within the boundaries of the District. As such, implementation of the proposed VCIP would be within the scope of the District's authorized governmental activities. The bill also requires that the District establish a community benefits agreement plan for the VCIP and related projects, with specific benefits to include but not limited to: job creation and training programs for local residents, use of local businesses and vendors, and financial contributions to community development projects and programs (Wat. Code, section 37860(b)-(d)). AB 2661 recognizes "the unique need of the Westlands Water District to support the development of solar electrical generation for the electrical grid and to facilitate the development of transmission capacity to help California reach its clean energy and climate goals."

Other State Regulatory Requirements and Programs

There are no other State of California land use regulatory requirements applicable to the VCIP or the Plan Area. The Plan Area is not located within the "Coastal Zone," and therefore is not subject to the California Coastal Act. Other state regulatory requirements or programs related to land use which may be applicable to the proposed VCIP are discussed under the corresponding environmental topic discussions in this PEIR. For example, the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act and Seismic Hazard Mapping Act are discussed in Section 4.7. *Geology, Soils, and Paleontology*; and the state Aeronautics Act is discussed in Section 4.9. *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*.

California Public Utilities Commission

Transmission projects that would be constructed by or for an investor-owned utility (IOU) such as Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) are subject to the sole permitting jurisdiction of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). Under CPUC General Order 131-D, Section XIV.B, "local jurisdictions acting pursuant to local authority are preempted from regulating electric power line projects, distribution lines, substations, or electric facilities constructed by public utilities subject to the Commission's jurisdiction. However, in locating such projects, the public utilities shall consult with local agencies regarding land use matters." (CPUC 2023b).

Fresno County

Fresno County General Plan (General Plan)

The Agriculture and Land Use Element of the General Plan describes land use designations and development standards for unincorporated land within the County, and sets out goals, policies, and programs related to land use. The General Plan land use designation for almost the entire VCIP Plan Area and all DFAs is "Agriculture," which provides for the production of crops and livestock, and for location of necessary agricultural commercial centers, agricultural processing facilities, and certain nonagricultural activities (Fresno County 2024b).

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The following General Plan Land Use policies are relevant to the proposed VCIP:

Agriculture and Land Use Element

A. Agriculture

Goal LU-A To promote the long-term conservation of productive and potentially productive agricultural lands and to accommodate agricultural-support services and agriculturally-related activities that support the viability of agriculture and further the County’s economic development goals.

Policy LU-A.1 Agricultural Land Conservation
The County shall maintain agriculturally-designated areas for agriculture use and shall direct urban growth away from valuable agricultural lands to cities, unincorporated communities, and other areas planned for such development where public facilities and infrastructure are available and can be provided consistent with the adopted General or Community Plan.

Policy LU-A.2 Agriculture-related Uses
The County shall allow by right in areas designated Agriculture activities related to the production of food and fiber and support uses incidental and secondary to the on-site agricultural operation.

Policy LU-A.3 Special Agricultural Uses
The County may allow by discretionary permit in areas designated Agriculture, special agricultural uses and agriculturally-related activities, including value-added processing facilities, and certain non-agricultural uses. Approval of these and similar uses in areas designated Agriculture shall be subject to the following criteria:²

- a. The use shall provide a needed service to the surrounding agricultural area which cannot be provided more efficiently within urban areas or which requires location in a non-urban area because of unusual site requirements or operational characteristics;
- b. The use should not be sited on productive agricultural lands if less productive land is available in the vicinity;
- c. The operational or physical characteristics of the use shall not have a detrimental impact on water resources or the use or management of surrounding properties within at least one-quarter (1/4) mile radius;
- d. A probable workforce should be located nearby or be readily available.

² As Policy LU-A.3 criteria ‘e’ through ‘h’ relate to the approval of commercial centers, value-added agricultural processing facilities, churches, schools and existing commercial uses, they are not applicable to the proposed VCIP.

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Policy LU-A.13 Agricultural Buffers

The County shall protect agricultural operations from conflicts with non-agricultural uses by requiring buffers between proposed non-agricultural uses and adjacent agricultural operations. Additionally, the County shall consider buffers between agricultural uses and proposed sensitive receptors when processing discretionary land use applications.

Policy LU-A.14 Agricultural Land Conversion Review

The County shall ensure that the review of discretionary permits includes an assessment of the conversion of productive agricultural land and that mitigation be required where appropriate.

Policy LU-A.15 Right-to-Farm Notice

The County shall generally condition discretionary permits for development within or adjacent to agricultural areas upon the recording of a Right-to-Farm Notice, which is an acknowledgment that residents in the area should be prepared to accept the inconveniences and discomfort associated with normal farming activities and that an established agricultural operation shall not be considered a nuisance due to changes in the surrounding area.

Policy LU-A.23 Farmland Conversion

For discretionary land use projects that are not directly related to or supportive of agricultural uses and which propose the permanent conversion of twenty acres or more of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance (as designated by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program) to nonagricultural uses, the County shall consider and adopt feasible measures including, but not limited to:

- Acquisition of conservation easements at a 1:1 ratio for lands lost to nonagricultural uses.
- Fee title of agricultural mitigation land that may be held by a third party or the County.
- In lieu fees paid to the County that may be used to acquire future mitigation property.
- Mitigation banks.

The County may exempt projects from agricultural mitigation requirements when it has been determined that conversion is occurring pursuant to a local groundwater sustainability plan, or the project is for housing which is predominately for persons of low or moderate income as defined in section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code. Further, the County may exempt discretionary land use projects from agricultural mitigation requirements if it finds that the loss of agricultural land caused by the proposed conversion is outweighed by specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the conversion, as contemplated by section 21081(b) of the Public Resources Code. (Fresno County 2024b)

Westside Freeway Corridor Policies

The General Plan includes specific policies governing development along the I-5 Corridor. These policies are intended to manage commercial development along the freeway corridor in order to preserve the scenic amenities along the freeway. Specific interchanges are designated for more or less intensive development or are limited to agricultural uses. All other lands within one mile of the freeway are restricted to agricultural uses (Fresno County 2024b).

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Fresno County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP)

The Fresno County ALUCP, prepared for the Fresno County Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) in 2023, is intended to protect and promote the safety and welfare of residents, businesses, and airport users near the public use airports and NAS Lemoore in Fresno County, while supporting the continued operation of these facilities. Specifically, the ALUCP seeks to: ensure that people and facilities are not concentrated in areas susceptible to aircraft accidents; protect the public from the adverse effects of airport noise; and ensure that no structures or activities encroach upon, or adversely affect, the use of navigable airspace. The ALUCP contains a land use compatibility plan for each of the nine public use airports in Fresno County, which forms the basis for the ALUC’s review of local agency land use actions for consistency with the land use compatibility policies and criteria of the ALUCP (Fresno COG 2023). (See Section 4.9. *Hazards and Hazardous Materials* for detailed discussion of the ALUCP.)

Fresno County Zoning Ordinance

As shown on the Fresno County Zoning Map, almost all VCIP Plan Area is zoned “AE” Exclusive Agricultural District, which is further divided into acreage-based designations. Most of the Plan Area is within the AE-20 zone where the minimum parcel size is 20 acres, while lands at the southern and western margins of the Plan Area are within the AE-40 zone where the minimum parcel size is 40 acres. The only non-agriculturally-zoned lands are in two unincorporated communities, including Cantua Creek, which has a small area zoned “R1- Single Family Residential” and a small area zoned “TP-Trailer Park Residential,” and Three Rocks (El Porvenir), which has a small area zoned “R1-Single Family Residential.” In addition, Three Rocks/El Porvenir and the unincorporated community of Westside have small areas zoned “AC-Agricultural Commercial Center” (Fresno County 2025b).

Under Fresno County Zoning Ordinance section 842.5.020.B, photovoltaic (PV) solar facility projects are permitted through the County’s Unclassified Conditional Use Permit (UCUP) process, specifically under section 842.5.020.B.14., which pertains to “[p]ower production, storage and generation facilities (includes utility-scale photovoltaic facilities subject to the County’s adopted Solar Facility Guidelines, wind farms and hydroelectric facilities subject to County jurisdiction), including without limitation any associated facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy” (Fresno County 2024a; Fresno County 2024j). On December 17, 2024, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors amended section 842.5.020.B to specifically include utility-scale PV storage facilities (i.e., battery energy storage systems (BESS)) among the listed land uses that require a UCUP. At this same time, Fresno County amended the definition of “Public utility facilities” under Article 7 of its Zoning Code as follows:

Fixed base structures and facilities for the collection, distribution, maintenance, provision, transmission, or disposal of gas, information, oil, power, storm and sanitary sewage, telecommunication, telephone cable services, and water by public utilities, and includes facilities for the generation or storage of electricity. . . . Notwithstanding the foregoing, “public utility facility” shall include, without limitation, facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy, owned or operated by a “local agency,” as defined in section 53090 of the Government Code, including such facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy which are proposed in connection to a project otherwise permitted under section 53091, subdivision (e) of the Government Code (Fresno County 2024j)

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Prior to this amendment, Fresno County typically treated BESS as sufficiently similar to utility-scale solar facilities, recognizing that energy storage provides a needed service by addressing limitations of the electrical grid and makes it more resilient to disturbances and peaks in energy demand. Thus, the subject amendment is consistent with the County’s practice of processing applications for BESS projects under its UCUP process subject to its Solar Facility Guidelines. For example, in October 2024, Fresno County approved the Key Energy Storage Project (CUP 3734), a stand-alone BESS project (Fresno Co. 2024d).

The VCIP infrastructure projects (gen-tie lines, substations, transmission lines) are also permitted in the AE zones under the category “Public Utility Facilities” if granted a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). Under Zoning Ordinance Article 7 (Definitions), this category is further defined as “Public Utilities Facilities, major” which include “[e]lectrical distribution and transmission substations and switching stations.” Following the Fresno County Board of Supervisor’s December 2024 amendments, electrical transmission lines are now expressly permitted in the AE Zone. However, as with BESS projects, the County has approved gen-tie lines for solar projects with UCUPs in the AE Zone prior to the December 2024 updates to the County’s Zoning Code (e.g., CUP 3650 – Jayne Avenue Gen-Tie; CUP 3555 Scarlet Solar Energy Project; CUP 3671 Luna Valley Solar Project)(Fresno County 2019b, 2021a, 2021b)).

In addition, Fresno County Zoning Ordinance section 804.1.030 – *Exemptions from Land Use Permit Requirements* – enumerates certain activities, uses of land, and/or structures that are exempt from the land use permit requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. These exempt activities and uses include “Governmental activities,” which are defined as: “*Any land use activities* conducted by a City, County, State or an agency of the State, or the Federal government on land owned or leased by the governmental agency (Zoning Ordinance Section 804.1.030 (B)(3) [italics added]). The exemption applies provided that “the activity or use is established and operated in compliance with applicable development standards” in the Zoning Ordinance, and that “permits and approvals required by other regulations,” if required, are obtained in compliance with the Zoning Ordinance (Zoning Ordinance Section 804.1.030 (A)(1 and 2))(Fresno County 2024a). As discussed above, the District would implement the proposed VCIP pursuant to its authorized governmental activities on up to 72,000 acres of District-owned lands.

Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines (Guidelines)

The Guidelines were adopted by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors on May 21, 2013, and revised on December 12, 2017. The Guidelines provide general guidelines and policies, as well as an outline for the process of evaluating solar facilities within Fresno County (Fresno County 2017c). Each of the solar facility guidelines and policies is briefly summarized below. (The full text of each Guideline is presented in Impact LU-2, along with a discussion of the potential consistency of VCIP projects with each Guideline.)

1. Submittal of information regarding the historical agricultural use of the project site.
2. Identification of the source of water for the project site.
3. Identification of the current status with respect to the Williamson Act.
4. Identification of soil types and mapping units applicable to the site.

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5. Description of measures planned to create a buffer between the proposed solar facility and adjacent agricultural operations.
6. Submittal of a Reclamation Plan detailing the measures to return the site to the agricultural capability.
7. Information on efforts to locate the proposed solar facility on non-agricultural lands and non-contracted parcels.
8. Submittal of a Pest Management Plan to manage weeds and pests that may impact adjacent areas.
9. Acknowledgement of the County's Right to Farm Ordinance.
10. Approved land use permit expires upon expiration of the solar lease.
11. Requirement to make all reasonable efforts to establish a point of sale in Fresno County for necessary equipment and materials.
12. Requirement to make reasonable efforts to hire locally.
13. Mitigate road damage caused by project construction deliveries to solar project and disclosure of the number of trips and the weight of anticipated shipments anticipated to the site.
14. Requirement to make reasonable efforts to purchase products and equipment from Fresno County manufacturing facilities and/or vendors.

Fresno County Right-to-Farm Ordinance

Fresno County Ordinance Code section 17.72.075(A) requires the recordation of right-to-farm notice for certain activities within 300 feet of an AE Zone District. The notice, which is required to be recorded with the Fresno County Recorder, is to be recorded in substantially the following form (Fresno County 2024i):

FRESNO COUNTY RIGHT-TO-FARM NOTICE

It is the declared policy of Fresno County to preserve, protect, and encourage development of its agricultural land and industries for the production of food and other agricultural products. Residents of property in or near agricultural districts should be prepared to accept the inconveniences and discomfort associated with normal farm activities. Consistent with this policy, California Civil Code 3482.5 (right-to-farm law) provides that an agricultural pursuit, as defined, maintained for commercial uses shall not become a nuisance due to a changed condition in a locality after such agricultural pursuit has been in operation for three years.

Pursuant to the Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines, the project proponent for each individual solar/BESS project would be required to record such a notice prior to the County's issuance of permits for the project.

Westlands Water District

The District's Rules and Regulations include several provisions regarding water supply for farmlands that are repurposed for a modified use such as solar generation facilities.

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Rules and Regulations – Article 2 – Surface Water Allocation - Appendix A

This section of the District’s Rules and Regulations applies to CVP contractual and legal entitlements and provides for the “temporary, albeit long-term, modification” of “Eligible Cropland” (i.e., eligible to receive surface water deliveries) to a non-irrigable use (e.g., solar generation facility) if a conditional use permit is obtained for such use, and the term of the land use is limited by the permitting agency and by a lease or easement on the land, and that upon cessation of such use, the facility will be decommissioned and returned to a condition suitable for agricultural use, as guaranteed through the posting of a performance bond or other financial assurance (WWD 2023a). These provisions allow for the privately owned DFA lands to retain their eligibility for CVP allocation subject to the condition that the subject lands will remain suitable for agricultural use after the solar and related facilities are removed from the lands.

Rules and Regulations – Article 1 – Groundwater Allocation

Subject to annual groundwater allocations as determined by the District under the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), and other conditions set forth in Article 1, landowners may transfer groundwater to other Eligible Land within the District. Thus, most VCIP solar and energy storage projects would be eligible for groundwater supplies, except for those projects located on reconveyed District land. In 2030 and subsequent years, the annual groundwater allocation will be limited to 0.6 acre-feet per acre per year on privately owned lands, which reflects the long-term sustainable yield within the Westside Subbasin (2024a).

AB 2661 – VCIP

As described under “State” above, AB 2661 authorizes the District to construct, operate, and maintain solar generation facilities, energy storage systems, and electrical transmission lines within its boundaries. The bill requires the District to establish a community benefits agreement plan for the Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan and related projects (Water Code sections 37860-37861). Pursuant to Bill 2661, the District is considering the proposed VCIP as the policy and planning framework for incremental repurposing and management of drainage-impaired and other private and District-owned lands within the District’s boundaries through proposals by GSCE to develop clean energy generation, storage, transmission, and other ancillary and supportive uses.

4.11.3. Environmental Impact Analysis**METHODOLOGY**

This section analyzes the potential for implementation of the proposed VCIP to result in significant impacts on the physical environment related to land use and planning, based on a review of applicable general plans, airport land use plans, zoning ordinances and maps, development guidelines, and other relevant documents. The proposed VCIP Energy Resource and Infrastructure Plans were considered in the context of existing land uses in the Plan Area and evaluated for consistency with applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations.

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SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Based on Appendix G of the state CEQA Guidelines, implementation of the VCIP would be considered to result in a potentially significant impact related to land use and planning impact if it would:

- a. Physically divide an established community.
- b. Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.

4.11.3.1. DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

Impact LU-1. Physically Divide an Established Community

Implementation of the VCIP Energy Resource and Infrastructure Plans would not physically divide an established community. (No Impact)

Four incorporated cities and one military base are located adjacent to the Plan Area, and several unincorporated communities are located within the Plan Area (see Figures 3.1-1 through 3.1-8 in Chapter 3. *Environmental Setting*). The adjacent cities include Mendota, Huron, Coalinga, and Avenal. Regarding Mendota, the nearest DFAs and transmission corridor would be located on rural land west of the City's urban limits. The City of Huron is not within the Plan Area but is surrounded by it, although no VCIP energy or infrastructure projects are contemplated in the vicinity of Huron. The City of Avenal's northern municipal boundary is adjacent to the Plan Area although its urbanized area is located several miles to the south across the Kettleman Hills. The western-most portion of NAS Lemoore is within the Plan Area, although the built-up portions of the base, including the base housing, are located 2.5 miles east of the Plan Area in Kings County. Therefore, VCIP implementation would not physically divide the incorporated cities in the vicinity of the Plan Area.

Several unincorporated communities in the Plan Area could have DFAs or portions of the planned connecting transmission corridor located nearby. The community of Cantua Creek could have potential solar/BESS projects located within DFAs to the west, north, east, and southeast of the residential community and Cantua Elementary School. No transmission corridors or collector substations are planned in the vicinity, although a project gen-tie line would likely run north-south along S. Stanislaus Avenue approximately 0.25 miles west of the residential community. Thus, there are no VCIP elements that would physically divide the Cantua Creek community.

The community of Three Rocks/El Porvenir would have potential solar/BESS projects located in the southeast quadrant of SR-33/W. Clarkson Avenue on the opposite side of SR-33 from the community. There would be no other VCIP elements in the vicinity. Therefore, VCIP implementation would not physically divide the community of Three Rocks/El Porvenir.

The community of Five Points would have no VCIP facilities located within or adjacent to the community, although a DFA and a collector substation would be located one mile to the west, and the connecting transmission corridor would run north-south approximately 0.6 miles west of the community. Therefore, VCIP implementation would not physically divide the community of Five Points.

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The community of Westside/O’Neill would have no VCIP facilities located within or adjacent to the community, with the nearest DFA located 1.5 miles south. The connecting transmission corridor would run north-south approximately 1.4 miles east of the community. Therefore, VCIP implementation would not physically divide the community of Westside.

Several other smaller clusters of rural housing located within the Plan Area are named places, but may not constitute rural communities as defined. These places include Giffen Cantua Ranch, Pilibos Ranch, and Calflax/WSREC. In all three cases, the nearest DFAs would be 0.3 to 1.0 miles away. At Calflax, the connecting transmission corridor would run east-west approximately 500 feet north of the residential community at the WSREC. Therefore, VCIP implementation would not physically divide these places.

In summary, implementation of the VCIP Energy Resource and Infrastructure Plans would not divide any established communities within or near the Plan Area, including incorporated cities, unincorporated communities, and other named places with clusters of rural dwellings. Therefore, VCIP implementation would have *no impact* in this regard.

Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.

Impact LU-2. Conflict with any Adopted Land Use Plan, Policy, or Regulation

The VCIP Energy Resource and Infrastructure Plans are consistent with all applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect; therefore, implementation of the proposed VCIP would not conflict with such land use plans, policies, or regulations. (No Impact).

Fresno County General Plan

The Fresno County General Plan (General Plan) land use designation applicable to the entire VCIP Plan Area is “Agriculture.” The general types of land uses allowed by right on lands under the Agriculture designation are enumerated in General Plan Table LU-1 which states: “[t]his designation provides for the production of crops and livestock, and for location of necessary agriculture commercial centers, agricultural processing facilities, and certain nonagricultural activities” (Fresno County 2024b). Rather than being allowed by right (i.e., subject to non-discretionary or ministerial approvals), the County allows the development of solar generating and storage facilities through a discretionary conditional use permit approval process. Consistent with the Fresno County General Plan, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors has adopted zoning ordinances and guidelines that allow the development of these facilities on agricultural lands in the County.

The Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines were originally adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2013 and updated in 2017. The preamble to the Guidelines states:

The need to accommodate new renewable energy technology must be balanced with the need to protect important farmlands and minimize impacts to existing agricultural operations. The land use process for evaluating solar facilities should rely on general guidelines and policies rather than specific {00080664.1}

standards, which may not be flexible enough to accommodate the evolving technology (Fresno County 2017b).

Applicants for proposed solar projects are required to address each of the Guidelines and submit an analysis of project consistency with the Guidelines with the CUP applications for their solar projects. The County's Solar Facility Guidelines are addressed further, later in this section.

The consistency of VCIP implementation with the General Plan's relevant Land Use Goals and Policies is discussed below.

Goal LU-A: To promote the long-term conservation of productive and potentially productive agricultural lands and to accommodate agricultural support services and agriculturally related activities that support the viability of agriculture and further the County's economic development goals.

Consistent. In furtherance of Goal LU-A, a fundamental purpose of the proposed VCIP is to constructively address the chronic shortage of surface water deliveries by promoting temporary repurposing of farmland to facilitate the redirection of scarce surface water and groundwater allocations to other productive agricultural land within the District. As described in Section 4.2 *Agriculture and Forestry Resources*, the proposed DFAs are designed to enhance the productivity within the overall farming units within the District. This proposed management decision to authorize long-term but temporary repurposing of these lands is driven by the increasing quantity of fallowed acreage due to constrained irrigation water supplies. The District's Rules and Regulations provide that agricultural lands modified to a non-irrigable use (temporary but long term) retain their eligibility for water supply, subject to specified conditions. These conditions include a requirement that the subject lands either retain their existing agricultural character during the operational life of the project or, upon cessation of project uses, the project will be decommissioned and the land will be returned to a condition suitable for agricultural uses. The agricultural soils would undergo minimal disturbance by the solar uses and would be restored to a condition suitable for farming upon decommissioning. Thus, the VCIP facilities would represent temporary repurposing of farmland, and would not result in its permanent conversion of non-agricultural use.

Another objective of the VCIP is to locate potential solar projects on farmland that has been fallowed or removed from irrigated agriculture. This would reduce pressure to develop renewable energy on more productive agricultural land elsewhere in the County. The 72,000 acres of District-owned land identified in the contemplated DFAs have been retired from irrigated agriculture. Much of the other lands included within the proposed DFAs have been designated by the District as priority land for retirement due to physical impairments such as perched groundwater, high salinity, prone to subsidence, and generally low fertility which renders the land less suitable for most crops and results in low yields.

In sum, the proposed VCIP is consistent with Goal LU-A and is designed to support the viability of agriculture within the District's service area and further the County's economic development goals.

Policy LU-A.1: Agricultural Land Conservation. The County shall maintain agriculturally-designated areas for agriculture use and shall direct urban growth away from valuable agricultural lands to cities, unincorporated communities, and other areas planned for such development where public facilities and infrastructure are available and can be provided consistent with the adopted General or Community Plan. {00080664.1}

Consistent. The VCIP does not include commercial or residential land uses which are generally associated with urban growth. In addition, clean energy development does not require urban infrastructure such as permanent roads, sewers and urban water systems. Renewable energy projects such as PV solar facilities are designed to be temporary and are required to be decommissioned at the end of their useful lives and with the soil to be reclaimed to a farmable condition. For each VCIP solar and BESS project, a Vegetation and Soil Management Plan (VSMP) would be required as specified in Mitigation Measure AG-1, “Protection of Long-Term Agricultural Land Capability.” The preparation and implementation of the VSMP throughout the operational life of the solar/BESS facilities would ensure that onsite vegetation would be installed and maintained in a manner that would maintain soil health during the time the land is repurposed. (For further detail, see discussion under Policy LU-A.23 below.)

Policy LU-A.3: Special Agricultural Uses. The County may allow by discretionary permit in areas designated Agriculture, special agricultural uses and agriculturally-related activities, including value-added processing facilities, and certain non-agricultural uses. Approval of these and similar uses in areas designated Agriculture shall be subject to the following criteria:

- a. The use shall provide a needed service to the surrounding agricultural area which cannot be provided more efficiently within urban areas or which requires location in a non-urban area because of unusual site requirements or operational characteristics;
- b. The use should not be sited on productive agricultural lands if less productive land is available in the vicinity;
- c. The operational or physical characteristics of the use shall not have a detrimental impact on water resources or the use or management of surrounding properties within at least one-quarter (1/4) mile radius;
- d. A probable workforce should be located nearby or be readily available;

Consistent: This policy mainly applies to agriculture-related uses, and sets forth criteria for permitting such uses in areas designated Agriculture. The approval of proposed VCIP solar facilities would not be subject to these criteria but would be subject to the solar-specific criteria contained in the County’s Solar Facility Guidelines. Nevertheless, the VCIP would satisfy the relevant criteria. First, the proposed VCIP facilities would provide needed service to the surrounding agricultural farming units by (1) facilitating the redirection of scarce surface water and groundwater allocations to other productive land within the District; and (2) facilitating SGMA implementation. These environmental benefits provided by the VCIP to sustain the overall farming units (1) cannot be provided within urban areas, because this would not facilitate the redirection of scarce surface water or groundwater allocations to other productive agricultural land; (2) require location within the Plan Area where the District conveys its CVP contract water supply and implements groundwater sustainability management actions pursuant to the GSP; and (3) would most effectively be provided through the DFAs because the majority of the proposed DFA lands are designed to utilize lands which have been fallowed or removed from irrigated agriculture.

Second, the majority of the proposed DFA lands would consist of farmland that has been fallowed or removed from irrigated agriculture due to lack of surface water and groundwater supply to promote farming on other productive lands within the overall farming units. Third, as demonstrated in Section 4.10. *Hydrology and Water Quality* and Section 4.17. *Utilities and Service Systems*, the VCIP would not have a detrimental impact on water resources. In fact, it would result in environmental benefits related to water supply and facilitate SGMA implementation. Fourth, a probable workforce for the

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proposed VCIP is located nearby and would be readily available. In addition, the County's Solar Facility Guidelines require a reasonable effort to hire locally, which is also a project objective of the VCIP.

Policy LU-A.13: Agricultural Buffers. The County shall protect agricultural operations from conflicts with nonagricultural uses by requiring buffers between proposed non-agricultural uses and adjacent agricultural operations. Additionally, the County shall consider buffers between agricultural uses and proposed sensitive receptors when processing discretionary land use applications.

Consistent. As required by Fresno County, VCIP implementation would include minimum setbacks of 50 feet from neighboring agricultural lands. As specified in MM AES-1 in this PEIR, VCIP implementation would also include minimum setbacks of 50 feet from neighboring residential properties.

Policy LU-A.14: Agricultural Land Conversion Review. The County shall ensure that the review of discretionary permits includes an assessment of the conversion of productive agricultural land and that mitigation be required where appropriate.

Consistent. VCIP implementation would involve the temporary repurposing of farmland, the majority of which is subject to irrigation water constraints. The solar use of these farmlands would be limited in duration and would not impair the future productivity of the repurposed lands as the proposed VCIP projects would be decommissioned upon the end of their useful life and the land reclaimed. Therefore, the farmlands would not be subject to permanent conversion to non-agricultural uses, and mitigation would be required where appropriate. (See Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources* for a full discussion.)

Policy LU-A.15: Right-to-Farm Notice. The County shall generally condition discretionary permits for development within or adjacent to agricultural areas upon the recording of a Right-to-Farm Notice, which is an acknowledgment that residents in the area should be prepared to accept the inconveniences and discomfort associated with normal farming activities and that an established agricultural operation shall not be considered a nuisance due to changes in the surrounding area.

Consistent. All VCIP projects would record a Right-to-Farm Notice as required.

Policy LU-A.23: Farmland Conversion. For discretionary land use projects that are not directly related to or supportive of agricultural uses and which propose the permanent conversion of twenty acres or more of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance (as designated by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program) to nonagricultural uses, the County shall consider and adopt feasible measures including, but not limited to:

- Acquisition of conservation easements at a 1:1 ratio for lands lost to nonagricultural uses.
- Fee title of agricultural mitigation land that may be held by a third party or the County.
- In lieu fees paid to the County that may be used to acquire future mitigation property.
- Mitigation banks.

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The County may exempt projects from agricultural mitigation requirements when it has been determined that conversion is occurring pursuant to a local groundwater sustainability plan, or the project is for housing which is predominately for persons of low or moderate income as defined in section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code. Further, the County may exempt discretionary land use projects from agricultural mitigation requirements if it finds that the loss of agricultural land caused by the proposed conversion is outweighed by specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the conversion, as contemplated by section 21081(b) of the Public Resources Code (Fresno County 2024b).

Consistent. VCIP implementation would involve the temporary, albeit long-term, repurposing of farmland subject to general irrigation water constraints. The solar use of these farmlands would be limited in duration and would not be expected to impair the future productivity of the repurposed lands as the proposed VCIP projects would be decommissioned at the end of their useful life and the land reclaimed. This is discussed in further detail below and in Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources*. In total, implementation of the entire VCIP would result in the permanent conversion of 60 acres of Farmland associated with the construction of Substation 5.

Background

The total land area subject to potential long-term temporary repurposing under the VCIP is approximately 136,000 acres. Of this total, approximately 69,000 acres are currently mapped as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland) by the FMMP, of which approximately 5,000 acres is District-owned land. The remaining 67,000 acres is mapped as Non-Farmland, almost all of which consists of District-owned land.

Temporary, Albeit Long-Term Repurposing of Farmland

The repurposing of agricultural land for solar and related uses for a limited period of time would not be expected to result in the permanent or temporary loss of farmland. Restrictions on availability of irrigation water supply have necessitated the fallowing of an average of 189,640 acres of land in the District over the last ten years (2015-2024). Thus, under baseline conditions it is not feasible to irrigate all Farmland within the Plan Area each year, with substantially more fallowed within the District than the total DFAs (136,000 acres in DFAs compared to 189,640 acres fallowed). The restrictions on water supply are expected to worsen over the short term as limitations on groundwater pumping take full effect under SGMA. The District's water supply objectives for the VCIP are to enable the effective implementation of the GSP while maintaining the viability of agricultural operations by providing for temporary modification of agricultural lands. The VCIP is intended to address the chronic shortage of CVP contract water and other non-CVP water deliveries by promoting repurposing of farmland to facilitate the redirection of scarce allocations of this water to other productive land within the District. Under Article 1 and Article 2, Appendix A of the District's Rules and Regulations, the surface and groundwater allocations applicable to the modified agricultural lands are permitted to be transferred to the portions of the farming units to be retained in agricultural production, thereby enhancing the productivity and viability of the larger farming units. Allowing the transfer of water from modified lands to other productive agricultural lands would help reduce overall fallowing acreage and minimize the amount of land that would be economically unproductive in the absence of the VCIP.

The temporary repurposing of agricultural land under the VCIP, alongside the transfer of water from modified lands to other productive agricultural lands would create an orderly framework for significant

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fallowing that has and will continue to occur. The VCIP's coordinated approach would minimize the amount of land that would be economically unproductive in the absence of the VCIP. Rather than the proximate cause of fallowing, the proposed VCIP is an adaptive approach that would contribute to the solution of how to manage reduced water supply reliability and the substantial amount of fallowing that must occur in any given year. In sum, the District's objective is to maintain the viability of the overall farming units through temporary repurposing of farmland, which would be subject to long-term fallowing in any event. For these reasons, implementation of the VCIP would ultimately be environmentally beneficial and protect agricultural resources within the Plan Area.

Limited Duration of Repurposing of Farmland

The solar and energy storage use of the DFA lands would be limited by the predicted useful life (and lease/easement terms) of these facilities, which is anticipated to be 35 years. Upon decommissioning, the lands would be restored to pre-project conditions through implementation of a County-approved Reclamation Plan, which would be guaranteed by the posting of performance bonds or other forms of financial surety. The conditional use permits issued by the County for solar and energy storage projects would be temporary and would expire upon termination of the solar lease, with the termination date to be specified in the Reclamation Plan. This reflects the County's objective that the solar and energy storage uses will be temporary, albeit long term, in nature.

The long-term temporary duration of the solar use is also reflected in the type of land transactions that would be required with participating landowners in the VCIP. Instead of having the solar developers purchase privately owned land in fee simple, the DFA lands would be subject to leases or long-term easements for solar use, for a term of 35 years, with the explicit provision that these leases/easements would be extinguished upon decommissioning of the solar facilities, with all land rights reverting to the underlying landowner. Modification of these agricultural lands for solar and related facilities represents a management decision for certain agricultural lands within the overall farming unit(s). The farming unit remains intact because the management or fallowing decision enhances the productivity of the overall ongoing agricultural use.

Recognition that the solar and energy storage facilities would be temporary, albeit long-term, in nature is further reflected in the District's Rules and Regulations which provide that privately owned agricultural lands modified to a non-irrigable use may retain their eligibility for water supply (i.e., for onsite use and/or for transfer to other agricultural lands in the District) subject to specified conditions, including a requirement that the subject lands either retain their existing agricultural character during the operational life of the project or, upon cessation of project uses will be returned to a condition suitable for agricultural use. Such water transfers are not permitted unless projects proposed on the privately owned modified lands are subject to use permits with a defined expiration date, and have approved Decommissioning Plans backed by financial assurances. Thus both the District and the County have established mechanisms and measures to ensure that the temporary repurposing of agricultural lands would not significantly compromise their long-term productive agricultural capability.

Preservation of Agricultural Capability of Farmlands during Temporary Repurposing

An objective of the proposed VCIP is also to ensure financing of decommissioning and site reclamation at the end of each project's life to restore each site to conditions suitable for agricultural use. This

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objective would enable the entire farming units to return to agricultural production in the future. As such, it is imperative that the physical properties of the soils on the temporarily repurposed lands are preserved to conserve the agricultural capability of those lands. Construction of the solar and energy storage facilities would involve minimal grading, with 90 percent of each project site occupied by elevated solar arrays and the ground beneath maintained in vegetative cover. The risk of soil contamination during construction and operation of solar and energy storage facilities would be minimized through implementation of the hazardous materials provisions of the required Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPPs) and Hazardous Materials Business Plans (HMMPs). For each VCIP solar and BESS project, a Vegetation and Soil Management Plan (VSMP) would be required as specified in Mitigation Measure AG-1. Protection of Long-Term Agricultural Land Capability. The preparation and implementation of the VSMP throughout the operational life of the solar/BESS facilities would ensure that onsite vegetation would be installed and maintained in a manner that would maintain soil health for the life of the facilities. Also, implementation of approved Pest Management Plans during operation and maintenance of the facilities would prevent the emergence and spread of weeds while minimizing the use of herbicides and pesticides. Decommissioning would involve the removal of all structural elements of the facilities, including concrete pads and foundations, and surface material for internal driveways. The required implementation of SWPPPs during decommissioning would minimize the risk of soil contamination during that final project phase. After the structural elements of a facility have been removed, the limited areas subject to excavation for foundations would be refilled with native soils, and areas subject to compaction for internal driveways would be mixed and loosened. The entire site would be tilled to restore the pre-project agricultural soil texture and density. Overall, these lands would be managed to maintain their agricultural capability and to prevent their permanent conversion to non-agricultural use.

Conclusion

In sum, the temporary (though long-term) repurposing of Farmland for VCIP solar and energy storage facilities would not be expected to adversely affect any of the physical and environmental characteristics of the project sites that qualify them for mapping as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland under CDOC's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. While the temporary repurposing of Farmland contribute to the temporary remapping of these lands by FMMP to a Non-Farmland, once these lands are returned to agricultural use upon decommissioning and reclamation, these lands would be remapped as Farmlands by FMMP.³ The solar and energy storage projects would have a finite life of 35 years and would not alter the physical and chemical properties of the agricultural soils. Further, they would be subject to requirements ensuring that the existing physical character of the soil would be retained during the operational life of the project. Upon cessation of project uses, the land would be restored to a condition suitable for agricultural uses. As such, these facilities would not affect the long-term suitability of their sites for agricultural uses. Therefore, implementation of the proposed VCIP would not result in the permanent conversion of "Farmland" to non-agricultural uses. This is discussed in further detail in Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources.*

³ Under existing conditions, it is not feasible to irrigate and cultivate all farmland. Background effects such as SGMA implementation and climate change are expected to exacerbate the existing chronic shortage of surface water supply and further reduce water supply reliability. Therefore, to the extent any farmland is remapped due to extended fallowing, these existing conditions and known trends suggest this fallowing would likely occur without implementation of the VCIP. {00080664.1}

In addition, the solar and related uses of the repurposed lands would provide for the effective stewardship of their agricultural capability during the interim period when the lands are put to alternative productive use. In particular, a Vegetation and Soil Management Plan (VSMP) would be required for each solar/BESS project as specified in Mitigation Measure AG-1, “Protection of Long-Term Agricultural Land Capability.” The preparation and implementation of the VSMP throughout the operational life of the solar/BESS facilities would ensure that onsite vegetation would be installed and maintained in a manner that would maintain soil health for the life of the facilities. As such, while the repurposed lands would temporarily be taken out of agricultural production, the lands would be managed to maintain their agricultural capability and to prevent their permanent conversion to non-agricultural use.

While the implementation of VCIP solar and related projects would result in the temporary use of farmland for the production of renewable energy, it would also fulfill the basic objectives of the District and the farming community of effectively implementing the GSP while managing the land to preserve its long-term agricultural capability. Therefore, the temporary repurposing of the farmland would ensure its long-term conservation for the future resumption of agricultural production, and the temporary solar land use would preserve the agricultural capability of the soil. Thus, while the repurposing of the land would temporarily remove it from agricultural production, it would not commit the land to permanent conversion to non-agricultural uses. In fact, the VCIP would accomplish the opposite by committing the land to be preserved for future resumption of agricultural use.

Applicability of Fresno County’s Agricultural Mitigation Exemption

Under General Plan Land Use Policy LU-A.23 “the County may exempt projects from agricultural mitigation requirements when it has been determined that conversion is occurring pursuant to a local groundwater sustainability plan.” Policy LU-A.23 further provides that “the County may exempt discretionary land use projects from agricultural mitigation requirements if it finds that the loss of agricultural land caused by the proposed conversion is outweighed by specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the conversion, as contemplated by section 21081(b) of the Public Resources Code.” This policy recognizes that potential impacts to agricultural lands should be balanced against the substantial benefits associated with promoting groundwater sustainability pursuant to a GSP and any other potentially overriding benefits associated with a project. As discussed in further detail in Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources*, application of the exemption is a policy matter to be determined at the project level and cannot be assessed in this PEIR.

Other General Plan policies applicable to implementation of the proposed VCIP are contained in General Plan elements related to Resource Conservation, Open Space, Circulation, Health and Safety, Noise, and Air Quality. These General Plan policies are enumerated in the sections of this PEIR where those environmental topics are addressed, including Section 4.2. *Agriculture & Forestry*, Section 4.3. *Air Quality*, Section 4.4. *Biological Resources*, Section 4.9. *Hazards & Hazardous Materials*, Section 4.13. *Noise*, and Section 4.15. *Public Services*. The County’s project-level review will also evaluate individual VCIP projects evaluated for consistency with applicable General Plan policies.

Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines

Applicants for proposed solar/BESS projects in Agriculture-designated areas are subject to the Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines and are required to submit an analysis of project consistency with the Guidelines with {00080664.1}

the CUP applications for their solar projects. Each of the Solar Facility Guidelines and policies is briefly summarized below, along with a discussion of the potential for VCIP projects to be consistent with each Guideline.

1. Information shall be submitted regarding the historical agricultural operational/usage of the parcel, including specific crop type and crop yield, for the last ten years (if no agricultural operation in the last ten years, specify when land was last in agricultural use).

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would submit historical information on the agricultural operation on each proposed project parcel as part of the application for the land use permit for the proposed project.

2. Information shall be submitted that identifies the source of water for the subject parcel (surface water from irrigation district, individual well(s), conjunctive system). If the source of water is via district delivery, the applicant shall submit information documenting the allocations received from the irrigation district and the actual disposition of the water (i.e. utilized on-site or moved to other locations) for the last ten years. If an individual well system is used, provide production capacity of each well, water quality data and data regarding the existing water table depth.

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would submit current and historical information on the source and usage of agricultural water for each proposed project parcel as part of the application for the land use permit for the proposed project.

3. Identify the current status of the parcel (Williamson Act Contract, Conservation Easement, retired land, etc.), the purpose of any easement and limitations of the parcel. The applicant shall submit a Title Report or Lot Book Guarantee for verification.

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would submit detailed property information on each proposed project parcel, including status of any Williamson Act contracts, easements, and other limitations, as part of the application for the land use permit for the proposed project.

4. Identify (with supporting data) the current soil type and mapping units of the parcel pursuant to the standards of the California State Department of Conservation and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would submit detailed soil information, with supporting data and documentation, on each proposed project parcel as part of the application for the land use permit for the proposed project.

5. List all proposed measures and improvements intended to create a buffer between the proposed solar facility and adjacent agricultural operations (detailed information must be shown on Site Plan) and provide factual/technical data supporting the effectiveness of said proposed buffering measures.

Consistent: As part of the land use permit application submittal for each VCIP project, the project proponent would submit site plans for the proposed project which show the proposed buffers from adjacent agricultural operations, along with supporting data and analysis supporting the effectiveness of the proposed buffering measures.

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6. Provide a Reclamation Plan detailing the lease life, timeline for removal of the improvements and specific measures to return the site to the agricultural capability prior to installation of solar improvements. If the project is approved, adequate financial security to the satisfaction of the County shall be submitted to ensure site reclamation.

Consistent: As part of the land use permit application submittal for each VCIP project, each project proponent would submit a Reclamation Plan prepared in accordance with the County's "Guidelines for Preparing a Solar Electrical Generation Facility Reclamation Plan." Prior to issuance of grading and building permits for project construction, an Engineering Cost Estimate for implementation of the plan would be submitted to the County for review and approval. Upon approval, the project proponent would submit financial assurance to ensure implementation of the Reclamation Plan upon decommissioning of the solar facility.

7. Provide information documenting efforts to locate the proposed solar facility on non-agricultural lands and non-contracted parcels and detailed information explaining why the subject site was selected.

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would submit detailed information explaining and documenting efforts to locate the proposed project on non-agricultural lands and non-contracted lands and detailed information explaining why the proposed project site was selected, as part of the application for the land use permit for the proposed project.

8. Develop and submit a project site Pest Management Plan to identify methods and frequency to manage weeds, insects, disease and vertebrate pests that may impact adjacent sites.

Consistent: As part of the application for the land use permit for the proposed project, the project proponent would submit a Pest Management Plan (PMP) that includes prescriptive pest management measures to be implemented prior to site development and during operation of the proposed project.

9. The applicant must acknowledge the County's Right to Farm Ordinance and shall be required to record a Right to Farm Notice prior to issuance of any permits. This shall be included as a recommended Condition of Approval of the land use entitlement.

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would record a Right-to-Farm Notice prior to the issuance of grading and building permits for the proposed project.

10. Note: The life of the approved land use permit will expire upon expiration of the initial life of the solar lease. If the solar lease is to be extended, approval of new land use permit will need to be obtained.

Consistent: The Reclamation Plan submitted by each project proponent would specify the lease life and termination date of the lease.

11. If the project is approved, the applicant shall make all reasonable efforts to establish a point of sale in Fresno County for equipment and construction related items necessary for the project.

Consistent: It is a project objective of the VCIP that materials be procured locally, and for materials that are not locally available, that procurement of materials sourced from outside the area be procured through a local point of sale. Under Water Code section 37861 (AB 2661 – 2024), the District is required to establish a community benefits agreement plan that includes use of local businesses and

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vendors. Each VCIP project proponent would be required to use local businesses and vendors under the VCIP community benefits plan.

12. If the project is approved, the applicant shall make all reasonable efforts to conduct local recruitment efforts and/or coordinate with employment agencies in an attempt to hire from the local workforce.

Consistent: It is a project objective of VCIP that construction and operational workers for VCIP projects and facilities be recruited locally. Under Water Code section 37861 (AB 2661 – 2024), the District is required to establish a community benefits agreement plan that includes job creation and training programs for local residents. Each VCIP project proponent would be required to participate in job creation and training programs for local residents under the VCIP community benefits plan.

13. In addition to disclosing the number of trips in the required Operational Statement, the applicant shall disclose the weight of the shipments anticipated to the site. If the project is approved, pursuant to the CEQA analysis and based on existing road conditions and the weight/frequency of shipments to the site, the applicant shall mitigate impacts to County roads.

Consistent: Each VCIP project proponent would submit an Operational Statement with the land use application that includes estimates of all vehicular trips generated by project construction, including commute trips by construction workers, and haul trips for materials and equipment to be utilized in project construction. This would include a breakdown of estimated truck deliveries during construction, by truck weight class. The Traffic Impact Study to be prepared for each proposed VCIP project would utilize the information on truck weight class to evaluate impacts to and identify mitigation measures for the pavement on roadways used by the construction delivery trucks.

14. If the project is approved, the applicant shall make all reasonable efforts to purchase products and equipment from local (Fresno County) manufacturing facilities and/or vendors.

Consistent: It is a project objective of the VCIP that materials be procured locally. Under Water Code section 37861 (AB 2661 – 2024), the District is required to establish a community benefits agreement plan that includes use of local businesses and vendors. Each VCIP project proponent would be required to use local businesses and vendors under the VCIP community benefits plan.

Compliance with most of the above guidelines involves submitting site-specific information, which is highly variable depending on the circumstances of each proposed project (e.g., Guidelines 1-4, historical use, water source, Williamson Act status, soil types, respectively). Guidelines 5, 7, and 13 involve analytical responses based on conditions unique to each project (i.e., agricultural buffers, site selection factors, and roadway impacts, respectively). It is expected that individual project proponents would submit the required information at the project-specific stage. The remaining items mainly relate to policies and requirements applicable to all projects (e.g., Guidelines 6, 8-12, 14, Reclamation Plan, Pest Management Plan, Right-to-Farm Notice, use permit expiration, point-of-sale, local purchasing, and hiring, respectively). As shown in the above consistency discussions for each Guideline, it is expected that VCIP solar/BESS projects would meet all the applicable land use permit criteria and would comply with the applicable policies and requirements of the guidelines.

As discussed above, Water Code section 37861 requires the District to establish a community benefits agreement plan for the VCIP. The community benefits plan must outline specific benefits, including job creation and training programs for local residents and the use of local businesses and vendors. Consequently, {00080664.1}

if the VCIP is approved, its community benefits plan will ensure that reasonable efforts are made to establish a point of sale in Fresno County, hire locally, and to purchase necessary materials from local vendors.

In summary, the VCIP solar/BESS projects would need to be found to be consistent with the applicable General Plan designations and policies to receive project approval from the County. At this plan level of analysis, it is concluded that VCIP solar projects would be found to be consistent with Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines for conditional use permits for solar projects.

Zoning

As shown on the Fresno County Zoning Map, most of the Plan Area is zoned “Exclusive Agricultural, 20-acre minimum parcel size (AE-20).” The western portions of the Plan Area along I-5 and the southeastern portions of the Plan Area near NAS Lemoore are zoned “Exclusive Agricultural, 40-acre minimum parcel size (AE-40).” The only areas with non-agricultural zoning are in the unincorporated communities of Cantua Creek, Three Rocks (El Porvenir), and Five Points. Portions of Three Rocks/El Porvenir, Five Points, and Westside are zoned AC - Agricultural Commercial Center (Fresno County 2025b). Under Fresno County Zoning Ordinance section 842.5.020.B., PV solar and BESS facility projects are permitted through the UCUP process pursuant to section 842.5.020.B.14, which pertains to “[p]ower production, storage and generation facilities (includes utility-scale photovoltaic facilities subject to the County’s adopted Solar Facility Guidelines, wind farms and hydroelectric facilities subject to County jurisdiction), including without limitation any associated facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy” (Fresno County 2024j). All potential VCIP PV generation and BESS facilities would be consistent with the County’s Zoning Code.

The VCIP infrastructure projects (gen-tie lines, substations, transmission lines) would be permitted in the AE zones under the category “Public Utility Facilities” which are potentially subject to the granting of a Conditional Use Permit. Under Zoning Ordinance Article 7, the definition of “Public utility facilities” includes “[f]ixed base structures for the collection, distribution, maintenance, transmission . . . and includes facilities for generation or storage of electricity . . . ‘public utility facility’ shall include, without limitation, facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy, owned or operated by a ‘local agency,’ as defined in section 53090 of the Government Code.” Additionally, “Public utility facilities, major” include “[e]lectrical distribution and transmission substations and switching stations” (Fresno County 2024j). All potential VCIP infrastructure is permitted in the County’s Agricultural zones and would therefore be consistent with the County’s Zoning Code.

As discussed in Section 4.11.2. *Regulatory Context*, Fresno County Zoning Ordinance section 804.1.030 – *Exemptions from Land Use Permit Requirements* – states that the land use permit requirements of the Zoning Ordinance do not apply to “Governmental activities,” which are defined as “[a]ny land use activities conducted by a City, County, State or an agency of the State, or the Federal government on land owned or leased by the governmental agency (Zoning Ordinance Section 804.1.030 (B)(3)). The exemption applies provided that “the activity or use is established and operated in compliance with applicable development standards” in the Zoning Ordinance, and that “permits and approvals required by other regulations,” if required, are obtained in compliance with the Zoning Ordinance (Zoning Ordinance Section 804.1.030 (A)(1 and 2))(Fresno County 2024a). The District would implement the proposed VCIP pursuant to its authorized governmental activities. Therefore, if the VCIP implements the proposed VCIP on lands owned or leased by the District, then any facilities constructed (e.g., solar/BESS facilities, and infrastructure such as substations, transmission lines and gen-tie lines) would be exempt from the Zoning Ordinance’s land use permit requirements provided the County’s general requirements for exemption set forth in section 804.1.030(A) are satisfied.

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It is expected that County review of proposed VCIP projects, as required by the Zoning Ordinance, would ensure that any other applicable zoning standards would be adhered to and that appropriate conditions of approval would be required and implemented. As such, the development of VCIP projects would be consistent with the Fresno County Zoning Ordinance, and thus would have *no impact* with respect to zoning consistency.

Fresno County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP)

The ALUCP contains a land use compatibility plan for each of the nine public use airports in Fresno County, which forms the basis for the ALUC's review of local agency land use actions for consistency with the land use compatibility policies and criteria of the ALUCP (Fresno COG 2023). There are four public use airports within or adjacent to the Plan Area. These include the Robert William Johnston Municipal Airport in Mendota, the New Coalinga Municipal Airport, the Harris Ranch Airport, and the Firebaugh Airport. Although the Plan Area includes portions of the Airport Influence Areas (AIAs) of all four airports, none of the VCIP DFAs or infrastructure elements would be within any of the airport AIAs. Therefore, implementation of proposed VCIP projects would not conflict with the Fresno County ALUCP. (See also Section 4.9. *Hazards and Hazardous Materials* for detailed discussion of the ALUCP.)

NAS Lemoore Joint Land Use Study

The military airfield at NAS Lemoore is in Kings County adjacent to the southeastern boundary of the Plan Area. The nearby portions of the Plan Area are included in the MIA of NAS Lemoore, and are within the study area of the NAS Lemoore JLUS. The JLUS has no jurisdictional effect on the VCIP, but includes relevant information regarding potential safety hazards posed by NAS Lemoore operations upon the potential VCIP projects. The nearest VCIP DFAs would be located 0.7 to 2.0 miles west and southwest of the NAS Lemoore airfield. The height restriction zones for flight operations at the airfield extend west about 8.0 miles from the airfield to SR-269. Most of the DFAs that would be located east of SR-269 are within the height restrictions zones (JLUSPC 2011). The restrictions on land use within this zone are discussed below.

A small portion of the Plan Area is within the mapped accident potential zone for NAS Lemoore. The NAS Lemoore flight approach/departure zones also extend into the nearby portions of the Plan Area in Fresno County. The height restriction zones extend farther out from the base and have height limits as regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Specifically, portions of the Plan Area within the height restriction zones have height limits ranging from 150 feet nearest NAS Lemoore, with height limits increasing to 500 feet at a point approximately 3 miles west of the airfield, and this 500-foot height limit extends west another 5 miles to just beyond SR-269 (JLUSPC 2011). The tallest structures within the Plan Area would consist of structural elements associated with the electrical substations that would be as high as 140 feet, which would fall within the height restrictions applicable to the nearest DFAs. However, any gen-tie poles that might be installed in this area would be subject to height restrictions as low as 150 feet at locations nearest to NAS Lemoore, with height limits increasing to 500 feet at a point approximately 3 miles west of the airfield. A 10-mile segment of the VCIP connecting transmission corridor runs along the east side of SR-269, within the 500-foot height limit area for NAS Lemoore. The nearest VCIP substation (No. 5) would be located approximately 0.5 mile west of (outside) the outer height restriction area. Thus, all structural elements would readily comply with the height limits for physical obstructions within the applicable NAS Lemoore height restriction zones. Nevertheless, all VCIP projects in the vicinity of NAS Lemoore would be required to comply with FAA notification requirements with respect to compatibility of the vertical structures planned within those projects

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with airport operations. With respect to land use intensity, the JLUS states that renewable energy projects and related structures are normally compatible without restrictions (JLUSPC 2011, p. 4-31).

In summary, implementation of the VCIP Energy Resource and Infrastructure Plans would be consistent with applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations, and thus would have *no impact* with regard to consistency with adopted plans, policies, and regulations.

Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.

4.11.3.2. TRANSMISSION CORRIDORS OUTSIDE THE VCIP

The transmission corridors for delivery of solar generation from potential VCIP projects to urban electricity markets in northern and southern California have been identified at a conceptual level in this PEIR to allow a general discussion of environmental impacts associated with transmission line development in these corridors for informational purposes. The delivery transmission lines would pass through the unincorporated areas of ten counties to the north, west and south of the Plan Area. In each of these counties, the transmission lines would mainly traverse lands designated for agricultural uses in the respective general plans and zoning ordinances. In some counties, the corridors would pass through lands designated for rural residential, open space, or other uses. Depending on the county, the zoning ordinances allow utility facilities in all zoning districts either as permitted uses, conditionally permitted uses subject to Planning Commission approval, or permitted subject to administrative approval or Planning Commission review (Alameda Co. 2025a, 2025b; Fresno Co. 2024a, 2025b; Kern County 2009, 2025a, 2025b; Kings County 2010a, 2025a, 2025b; LA County 2015, 2025a, 2025b; Merced Co. 2013, 2025a, 2025b; Monterey Co. 2007, 2010a, 2025e; San Benito Co. 2015b, 2025a, 2025b; San Joaquin Co. 2025a, 2025b; Stanislaus Co. 2023, 2025; Lancaster 2025; Palmdale 1992, 2021, 2025). Therefore, the delivery transmission lines outside the Plan Area would not conflict with adopted plans, policies, or regulations, and there would be *no impact* in this regard.

4.11.3.3. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The methodology for conducting the cumulative impact analysis is described in Section 4.1. *Cumulative Impacts*. The analysis considers whether the impacts of two or more past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects, including the proposed VCIP, would combine to result in a cumulatively significant impact.

As discussed under Impact LU-1, the VCIP energy and infrastructure projects would not physically divide any established communities within the Plan Area. Most of the cumulative projects would be constructed in rural areas away from existing incorporated or unincorporated communities. Some cumulative projects would be constructed in urban areas, such as the residential, commercial, and industrial projects in the City of Lemoore. These urban projects would mainly be infill projects within existing urban development, or would be developed at the outer edges of the urban area, and would not divide the community. Therefore, there would be *no cumulative impact* regarding potential physical division of established communities.

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As discussed under Impact LU-2, implementation of the VCIP energy and infrastructure projects would not conflict with existing plans, policies, and regulations. Most of the other cumulative projects in Fresno County are permitted uses or conditionally permitted uses on lands designated for agricultural use in the County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The solar/BESS projects are permitted in the agricultural designation and zone subject to the County's Solar Facility Guidelines. The pistachio plants, highway commercial projects, and utilities substations (e.g., Manning Substation) are permitted uses in the agricultural designations of the County's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The residential, commercial, and industrial projects planned for the City of Lemoore urban area are all consistent with their respective general plan and zoning designations.

The consistency of the cumulative projects with Fresno County General Plan Land Use Policy LU-A.23, Farmland Conversion warrants additional discussion. This policy requires mitigation in the form of conservation easements for conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use. The cumulative impacts with regard to Farmland conversion are discussed in detail in Section 4.2. *Agriculture and Forestry Resources*, subsection 4.2.3.3. *Cumulative Impacts*. That discussion concludes that while a small portion of cumulative projects are located on Farmland, the solar or BESS projects that are located on Farmlands would be subject to the Fresno County Solar Facility Guidelines. The applicable Guidelines requirements for Soil Reclamation and Financial Assurances for decommissioning would ensure that those sites would be restored to a condition suitable for the resumption of agricultural production upon termination of the solar and BESS uses, and that the Farmland on those sites would not be converted to non-agricultural uses. The discussion also concludes that the relatively small portion of solar and non-solar cumulative projects located on Farmland may implement mitigation measures for Farmland conversion in the form of conservation easements as required by GP Policy LU-A.23. While the impact of Farmland conversion would not be fully mitigated, these projects would not conflict with this Farmland conversion policy.

Therefore, none of the cumulative projects would conflict with applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations. As such, there would be *no cumulative impact* in terms of land use plans, policies, and regulations.

In summary, there would be *no cumulative impact* regarding land use effects associated with implementation of the VCIP Energy Resource and Infrastructure Plans.

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