

3.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

This section of the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) describes the existing agricultural and forestry resources within the SCAG region, identifies the regulatory framework with respect to laws and regulations that affect agriculture and forestry resources, and analyzes the significance of the potential impacts to agricultural and forestry resources that could result from development of the Connect SoCal Plan (“Connect SoCal”; “Plan”). In addition, this PEIR provides regional-scale mitigation measures as well as project level mitigation measures to be considered by lead agencies for subsequent, site-specific environmental review to reduce identified impacts as appropriate and feasible.

3.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

3.2.1.1 Definitions

Types of farmlands, as well as other terms pertinent to the discussion of agricultural resources, are defined below.

Farmland: §21060.1(a) of CEQA (Public Resources Code §§21000-21177) delineates the consideration of agricultural land to include “prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, or unique farmland, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California,” and is herein collectively referred to as “Farmland.” The following are categories mapped by the CDC:¹

Prime Farmland: Farmland that has the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

Farmland of Statewide Importance: Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

Unique Farmland: Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as

¹ California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection. 2004. *A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program*. Available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Documents/fmmp_guide_2004.pdf, accessed October 25, 2018.

found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

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

Grazing Land: Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities. The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres.

Urban and Built-Up Land: Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least one unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately six structures to a 10-acre parcel. This land is used for residential, industrial, commercial, institutional, public administrative purposes, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.

Other Land: Land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low density rural developments; brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing; confined livestock, poultry or aquaculture facilities; strip mines and borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Vacant and non-agricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.

Forest: §12220(g) of CEQA defines forest land as "land that can support 10-percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions, and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits."

Timberland: Public Resources Code §4526 defines Timberland as "land, other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the board as experimental forest land, which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of a commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees."

Timberland Production Zone: California Government Code Section 51104(g) defines a Timberland Production Zone (TPZ) as "an area which has been zoned pursuant to Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses, as defined in subdivision (h). With respect to general plans of cities and counties, 'timberland preserve zone' means 'timberland production zone.'"

3.2.1.2 Existing Conditions

This section characterizes the baseline conditions for Important Farmland, agricultural use, Williamson Act contracts, forest land, and timberland, including Timberland Production zones.

Agricultural Lands

California ranked first among the 50 states in 2017 in terms of net farm income at \$17.7 billion.² Agricultural and related products are also one of California's largest exports to the rest of the world. The SCAG region maintains over 2.6 million acres of agricultural land, with over 100,000 parcels of land designated as farmland.³ For purposes of this analysis and in accordance with SB 375, "farmland" means farmland that is outside all existing city spheres of influence or city limits as of January 1, 2008, and is one of the following:

- Classified as Prime or Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance.
- Farmland classified by a local agency in its general plan that meets or exceeds the standards for Prime or Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance.⁴

Agricultural areas in the region provide benefits like flood control, groundwater recharge, energy production, and employment opportunities. The California Department of Conservation maps farmland throughout California under the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP).⁵ The FMMP emphasizes Important Farmland, which is comprised of four subcategories: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance, as defined above.

Table 3.2-1, SCAG Region by Land Use Category (2016)⁶ breaks down the acres of agricultural lands, urban and built up land, other land, and water area by county within the SCAG region. San Bernardino County contains the most agricultural land by far, with farms and grazing lands making up over 60 percent of total inventoried area. Riverside and Imperial counties also contain substantial amounts of agricultural land, with farm and/or grazing lands comprising approximately half of the total acreage in each county. Orange County and Los Angeles County have the least amount of agricultural lands in the

² Farm Bureau. 2018. *Reviewing State-Level 2017 Net Farm Income*. September. Available online at: <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/reviewing-state-level-2017-net-farm-income>, accessed March 19, 2019.

³ Department of Conservation. 2016. *Farmland Mitigation and Monitoring Program (FMMP)*. Available at: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/Index.aspx>, accessed October 25, 2018.

⁴ California Legislative Information. 2008. *Senate Bill No. 375*.

⁵ California Department of Conservation. *Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program*. Available online at: <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/>, accessed August 14, 2019.

⁶ 2016 data is the most recently available data for farmland mapping.

SCAG region, which is unsurprising as they contain the most Urban and Built-up Land in the region, in both total acreage and percent acreage relative to their total size.

**Table 3.2-1
SCAG Region by Land Use Category (2016)**

County	Land Use Category (Acres)						Total Area Inventoried
	Farmland	Grazing Land	Agricultural Land Subtotal	Urban and Built-up Land	Other Land	Water Area	
Imperial	528,471	0	528,471	37,413	461,892	749	1,028,525
Los Angeles	27,390	239,037	266,427	182,442	671,873	3,318	1,124,060
Orange	5,715	37,114	42,829	292,689	173,173	1,026	509,717
Riverside	419,835	110,203	530,038	334,445	1,017,635	62,361	1,944,479
San Bernardino	20,393	898,633	919,026	286,407	243,604	510	1,449,547
Ventura	118,508	197,859	316,367	105,966	129,688	3,938	555,959
Totals	1,120,312	1,482,826	2,603,158	1,239,362	2,697,865	71,902	6,612,287

Source: California Department of Conservation, *Farmland Mapping and Monitoring, 2016*.

Agricultural lands in the SCAG region represent a declining trend, with the exception of Ventura County that increased marginally from 2014-2016. The conversion of irrigated farmland to urban land^{7,8} is primarily due to urbanization. Non-irrigated and other land that was converted to urban land were primarily due to the construction of new homes, commercial and industrial buildings and groundwater recharge or water control ponds.⁹

Table 3.2-2, Important Farmland within the SCAG Region (2016),¹⁰ shows the breakdown of Important Farmland in the SCAG region. Nearly 17 percent of the area inventoried by the FMMP classifies as Important Farmland.

⁷ Urban Land includes residential, industrial, recreational, infrastructure and institutional uses.

⁸ Irrigated Farmland includes most irrigated crops grown in California. When combined with soil data, these farmed areas become the Important Farmland (IFL) categories of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance & Unique Farmland. Because of the nature of the IFL definitions, some irrigated uses, such as irrigated pastures or nurseries, may not be eligible for all three IFL categories.

⁹ Non-irrigated land uses include grazing areas, land used for dryland crop farming, and formerly irrigated land that has been left idle for three or more update cycles.

¹⁰ 2016 is the most recently available data as of August 2019

Table 3.2-2
Important Farmland within the SCAG Region (2016)

County	Farmland Designation (Acres)					
	Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Local Importance	Important Farmland Total	Percent of Total Area Inventoried
Imperial	190,205	297,272	2,070	38,924	528,471	51.4
Los Angeles	22,613	770	962	3,045	27,390	2.4
Orange	2,391	411	2,913	0	5,715	1.1
Riverside	117,484	43,757	32,565	226,029	419,835	21.6
San Bernardino	11,323	5,770	2,738	562	20,393	1.4
Ventura	40,976	32,992	28,950	15,590	118,508	21.3
Totals	384,992	380,972	70,198	284,150	1,120,312	100

Source: California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, 2016.

Notes:

(1) Figures are generated from the GIS data. Files dating from 1990-2016.

As shown above, in **Table 3.2-2**, Imperial County contains the most Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance, due to a favorable climate, productive soils, and irrigation water from the All-American Canal. The County produced approximately \$2.1 billion in agricultural crops and commodities in 2016. Major crops grown in Imperial County include vegetables, melons, and fruit and nut crops. Although Imperial County does not contain state-designated Important Grazing Land, cattle are the County's number one commodity, and livestock produced approximately \$400 million (19 percent) of the county's agricultural income in 2016.¹¹ **Figure 3.2-1, Farmland in the SCAG Region**, displays the regional distribution of Important Farmlands within the SCAG region.

As shown in **Table 3.2-3, SCAG Region Average Annual Acreage Change (1984-2016)**, the SCAG region lost an average of 9,148 acres of farmland per year of Important Farmland from 1984 to 2016.¹²

¹¹ Imperial County. 2017. *2016 Imperial County Agricultural Crop and Livestock Report*. Available online at: https://www.co.imperial.ca.us/ag/docs/spc/crop_reports/2016_Imperial_County_Crop_and_Livestock_Report.pdf, accessed October 25, 2018.

¹² California Department of Conservation, *Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program: County Data*. Historic land use data for all six counties in the SCAG region. 1984-present (2016). Available at: https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/county_info.aspx

Table 3.2-3
SCAG Region Average Annual Acreage Change (1984-2016)

County	1984 Important Farmland Acreage	2016 Important Farmland Acreage	1984-2016 Net Acreage Lost	1984-2016 Net Acreage Lost (percent)	Average Annual Acreage Lost
Imperial	562,132	528,471	33,661	6%	1,052
Los Angeles	60,877	27,390	33,487	55%	1,046
Orange	26,535	5,715	20,820	78%	651
Riverside	561,542	419,835	141,707	25%	4,428
San Bernardino	69,575	20,393	49,182	71%	1,537
Ventura	132,388	118,508	13,880	10%	434
Totals	1,413,049	1,120,312	292,737	21%	9,148

Source:

California Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program: County Data. Historic land use conversion data for all six counties in the SCAG region, 1984-present (2016). Available at: https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/county_info.aspx

Los Angeles County is the most urbanized county in the SCAG region and contains only 2.4 percent of Important Farmland. Despite this, the County reaped over \$135 million from agricultural commodities in 2017 (the most recent data available). Nursery products are the number one commodity in Los Angeles County, followed by vegetable crops, and field crops.¹³

Orange County was once a rural community that relied primarily on its agricultural economy that included oranges, apricots, and walnuts. Similar to Los Angeles County, Orange County has become heavily urbanized and now contains the lowest acreage of Important Farmland of any county in the SCAG region. Despite this, Orange County produced \$114 million from agricultural crops and commodities, the majority of which was generated by nursery crops, as well as tree fruit and berry crops.¹⁴

Riverside County contains the most Unique Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance within the region, due to its soil quality, moisture, and growing season that sustain high value crops. In 2016,

¹³ Los Angeles County. 2018. *2017 Los Angeles County Crop and Livestock Report*. Available online at: http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/acwm/1052741_2017FINALCROPREPORT.pdf, accessed July 29, 2019

¹⁴ Orange County. 2017. *Orange County 2016 Annual Crop Report*. Available online at: <http://www.ocagcomm.com/documents/2016OrangeCountyCropReport.pdf>, accessed March 19, 2019.

Riverside County grossed approximately \$1.3 billion from agricultural production, down 2 percent from 2015. Major crops in Riverside County include summer squash, okra, eggplant, and melon.¹⁵

San Bernardino, despite having the most agricultural land in the SCAG region, has almost the least amount of Important Farmland, second only to Orange County. This is due to the massive amount of Grazing Land that constitutes most of the agricultural land in San Bernardino County. In 2017, the County's gross value of agricultural production totaled approximately \$465 million. Milk is the number one commodity and the meat from cattle and calves is the number two commodity for the County.¹⁶

Ventura County has some of the most productive Prime and Unique Farmlands in the nation. Over 21 percent of inventoried land in the County is designated as Important Farmland and in 2016, the County generated \$2.1 billion from agricultural commodities. Strawberries and lemons are the top crops in the County, followed by nursery stock, celery, and raspberries.¹⁷

Forestry Resources

Forest lands within the SCAG region include the Angeles National Forest (Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties), San Bernardino National Forest (San Bernardino and Riverside counties), Los Padres National Forest (Los Angeles and Ventura County), and the Cleveland National Forest (Orange County and Riverside County), as well as forest lands within the open space zones of Imperial and Los Angeles counties (**Figure 3.2-2, Forest Lands in SCAG Region**).

Within the SCAG region, forests growing at higher elevations (approximately 3,000 feet and above) are dominated by conifers. Montane conifer forests are often comprised of white fir and sugar pine, while mountain juniper and lodgepole pine thrive on open slopes and flats, respectively. Interior and Canyon live oak is also found in areas of higher elevation, as are big cone-fir trees, and Coulter, ponderosa and Jeffrey pines. The San Bernardino Mountains maintain the highest elevation forests in the region, which are dominated by limber pine.

Forests and woodlands in lower elevations of the SCAG region are largely oak-dominated, supporting Engelmann and valley oak. Lower woodlands also consist of a mix of Coulter pine, canyon live oak, black

¹⁵ Riverside County. 2017. *Agricultural Production Report 2016*. Available online at: <https://www.rivcoawm.org/Portals/0/Publications/Crop-Reports-EntireCounty/2016-crop-report.pdf>, accessed March 19, 2019.

¹⁶ San Bernardino County. 2017. *Annual Crop Report 2016*. Available online at: <http://cms.sbcounty.gov/Portals/13/CropReports/2016CropReport.pdf>, accessed August 14, 2019.

¹⁷ Ventura County. 2016. *2016 Crop and Livestock Report*. Available online at: <http://vcportal.ventura.org/AgComm/docs/crop-reports/Ag%20Crop%20Report%202016%2001-08-18%20lr.pdf>, accessed March 19, 2019.

oak, ponderosa pine, and Jeffrey pine, as well as understory grasses and herbs, most of which are non-native. Coast live oak woodland forms along coastal slopes and is often found associated with California walnut. In the vicinity of Sierra Peak in Orange County is the Tecate cypress forest, which thrives on low-fertility soils. The fire-adapted conifer species is listed by the California Native Plant Society and the forest is considered a special-status natural community by the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB).¹⁸

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) recognizes valley oak woodland, Engelmann oak woodland, and California walnut woodland as sensitive woodland communities in the SCAG region. These communities as well as others have declined dramatically due to urban and agricultural development over the past 100 years. Wildfires have also negatively affected forests and woodlands, many of which can be attributed to humans. It is estimated that 4,150 human-caused fires have burned approximately 296,281 acres of Southern California between 2000 and 2017.¹⁹ Fire management and protection professionals now face longer fire seasons, bigger fires, and more acres burned on average each year, and more extreme fire behavior as climate change intensifies fire conditions.

Timberland

"Timberland" means privately or publicly owned land which is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses, and which is capable of growing an average annual volume of wood fiber of at least 15 cubic feet per acre. "Timber" means trees of any species maintained for eventual harvest for forest products purposes, whether planted or of natural growth, standing or down, on privately or publicly owned land, including Christmas trees, but does not mean nursery stock. Timber is permitted in the A-2 and A-3 agricultural zones in Imperial County, the Open Space zone in Los Angeles County with a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), and the Open Space Overlay in San Bernardino County with a CUP. Riverside County permits timberland production within the R-R (rural residential) zone and W-2 (controlled development areas) zone if a CUP has been obtained. Some counties designate areas of timberland as Timberland Preserves. These areas zoned as Timberland Production Zones (TPZs) are restricted in use to the production of timber for at least ten years. There is no TPZ land in the SCAG region.²⁰

¹⁸ SCAG. 2015. *2016 Regional Transportation Plan/ Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) Draft Program Environmental Impact Report*. December.

¹⁹ National Interagency Fire Center. 2017. *Fire Info*. Available online at: https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_human.html, accessed January 14, 2019.

²⁰ California Land Conservation Assistance Network. 2013. *Timberland Production Zones*. Available online at: <https://www.californialandcan.org/#regionMap>, accessed January 14, 2019.

3.2.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

3.2.2.1 Federal

United States Forest Service (USFS) National Forest Management Act of 1976

The USFS manages approximately 2.3 million acres of national forests in the SCAG region, which is subject to the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-588),²¹ a federal law that governs the administration of national forests. There are four national forests in the SCAG region, each of which is managed in accordance with a Forest Management Plan: the Angeles National Forest,²² San Bernardino National Forest,²³ Los Padres National Forest,²⁴ and Cleveland National Forest.²⁵

Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981 (FPPA)

Congress passed the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (Public Law 97-98)²⁶ containing the FPPA subtitle I of Title XV, Section 1539-1549. Pursuant to the FPPA of 1981 Sections 1539–1549, the Secretary of Agriculture is directed to establish and carry out a program to “minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses, and to the extent practicable, will be compatible with state, unit of local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland” (7 U.S. Code [USC] 4201–4209 & 7 USC 658).²⁷ Projects are subject to FPPA requirements if they may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use and are completed by a federal agency or with assistance from a federal agency. The purpose of the FPPA to minimize the impacts federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible

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- 21 U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry. *National Forest Management Act of 1976*. Available at: <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/National%20Forest%20Management%20Act%20Of%201976.pdf>, accessed August 14, 2019.
- 22 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. *Angeles National Forest: Planning*. Available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/angeles/landmanagement/planning>, Accessed November 2, 2018.
- 23 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. *San Bernardino National Forest: Planning*. Available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/sbnf/landmanagement/planning>, Accessed November 2, 2018.
- 24 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. *Los Padres National Forest: Planning*. Available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/lpnf/landmanagement/planning>, accessed November 2, 2018.
- 25 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. *Cleveland National Forest: Planning*. Available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/cleveland/landmanagement/planning>, accessed November 2, 2018.
- 26 United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry. *Agriculture and Food Act of 1981*. Available at: <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/97-98%20-%20Agriculture%20And%20Food%20Act%20Of%201981.pdf>, accessed August 14, 2018.
- 27 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. *Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)*. Available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/ca/home/?cid=nrcs144p2_063934, accessed November 2, 2018.

conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. It ensures that to the extent possible, federal programs are administered to be compatible with state, local units of government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland. Federal agencies are required to develop and review their policies and procedures to implement the FPPA every two years. The FPPA does not authorize the federal government to regulate the use of private or nonfederal land or, in any way, affect the property rights of owners. For the purpose of FPPA, farmland includes Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Land of Statewide or Local Importance. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. It can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land, but not water or urban built-up land.

Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program

The Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary easement purchase program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture.²⁸ Pursuant to Sections 1539-1549 of the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) of 1981 Sections, the Secretary of Agriculture is directed to establish and carry out a program to “minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses, and to the extent practicable, will be compatible with state, unit of local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland.” (7 USC 4201-4209 & 7 USC 658). The program provides matching funds to state, tribal, or local governments and nongovernmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements or other interests in land.

The FRPP is re-authorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill).²⁹ The NRCS manages the program. Technical Committee, awards funds to qualified entities to conduct their farmland protection programs. Although a minimum of 30 years is required for conservation easements, priority is given to applications with perpetual easements.

Federal Forest Legacy Program

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) (16 USC § 2103c)³⁰ was part of the 1990 Federal Farm Bill.³¹ The purpose of the FLP is to protect environmentally important forestland under private ownership from

²⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program*. Available at: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/null/?cid=nrcs141p2_018768, accessed August 14, 2019.

²⁹ Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ171/PLAW-107publ171.pdf>, accessed August 14, 2019.

³⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2017. *Forest Legacy Program Implementation Guidelines*. Available at: https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/15541-forest-service-legacy-program-508.pdf, accessed August 14, 2019.

conversion to non-forest uses, such as residential or commercial development. The FLP promotes the use of voluntary conservation easements on these properties. Landowners who wish to participate may sell or transfer particular rights, such as the right to develop the property or to allow public access, while retaining ownership of the property and the right to use it in any way consistent with the terms of the easement. The agency or organization holding the easement is responsible for managing the rights it acquires and for monitoring compliance by the landowner. Forest management activities, including timber harvesting, hunting, fishing, and hiking are encouraged, provided they are consistent with the program's purpose.

Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, or 2018 Farm Bill, which was signed on December 20, 2018 (and will remain in effect through 2023), builds upon and continues to implement many of the crucial programs that serve agricultural producers. The US Department of Agriculture is charged with implementing the bill, which reauthorized previous programs in the 2014 Farm Bill to serve producers now while they seek public input for future programs.³² The 2018 Farm Bill continued funding for major programs but did include some changes to Natural Resources Conservation Programs such as expanding support to producers who address significant natural resources concerns through adoption of conservation practices and activities.³³ All major conservation programs are continued, although some have been modified.

Federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance through contracts up to 10 years in length to farmers and ranchers who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. These contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. In addition, another purpose of EQIP is to help producers meet federal, State, Tribal and local environmental regulations.

³¹ Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/2830>, accessed August 14, 2019.

³² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers.gov, *2018 Farm Bill*. Available at: <https://www.farmers.gov/farmbill>, accessed June 12, 2019.

³³ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *What's New: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the 2018 Farm Bill*. Available at: https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/documents/NRCS-FarmBill2018_WhatsNew-19.pdf, accessed June 12, 2019.

3.2.2.2 State

The California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) of 1965 was enacted by the California State Legislature in 1965 to encourage the preservation of agricultural lands.³⁴ The California Department of Conservation administers the Williamson Act, for the conservation of farmland and other resource-oriented lands. The Williamson Act program permits property tax adjustments for landowners who contract with a city or county to keep their land in agricultural production or approved open space uses for at least 10 years. Lands covered by Williamson Act contracts are assessed on the basis of their agricultural value instead of their potential market value under nonagricultural uses. In return for the preferential tax rate, the landowner is required to contractually agree to not develop the land for a period of at least 10 years.³⁵

Williamson Act contracts are renewed annually for 10 years unless a party to the contract files for non-renewal.³⁶ The filing of a non-renewal application by a landowner ends the automatic annual extension of a contract and starts a nine-year phase-out of the contract. During the phase-out period, the land remains restricted to agricultural and open-space uses, but property taxes gradually return to levels associated with the market value of the land.³⁷ At the end of the nine-year non-renewal process, the contract expires, and the owner's uses of the land are restricted only by applicable local zoning.

The Williamson Act defines compatible use of contracted lands as any use determined by the county or city administering the preserve to be compatible with the agricultural, recreational, or open-space use of land within the preserve and subject to contract.³⁸ However, uses deemed compatible by a county or city government must be consistent with the principles of compatibility set forth in Government Code section 51231, 51238, or 51238.1.³⁹

³⁴ California Department of Conservation. 2019. *Williamson Act Program Overview*. Available online at: https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/wa/Pages/wa_overview.aspx, accessed August 14, 2019.

³⁵ California Department of Conservation. 2019. *Williamson Act Contracts*. Available at: <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/wa/Pages/contracts.aspx>, accessed August 14, 2019.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ California Department of Conservation. 2019. *Williamson Act Contract Removal*. Available at: https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/wa/Pages/removing_contracts.aspx, accessed August 14, 2019.

³⁸ Gov. Code, § 51201[e].

³⁹ California Legislative Information. *ARTICLE 1. General Provisions [51200-51207]*.

Within the SCAG region, Imperial, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties have land under a Williamson Act contract, although Santa Catalina Island is the only contracted area in Los Angeles County. Orange County no longer has any land under a Williamson Act contract.⁴⁰

Open Space Subvention Act

The Open Space Subvention Act (OSSA) of 1972 (Gov. Code, § 16140 *et seq.*) was enacted on January 1, 1972 to provide for the partial replacement of local property tax revenue foregone as a result of participation in the Williamson Act and other enforceable open space restriction programs. Participating local governments receive annual payment on the basis of the quantity (number of acres), quality (soil type and agricultural productivity), and, for Farmland Security Zone contracts, location (proximity to a city) of land enrolled under eligible, enforceable open space restrictions.⁴¹

The Right to Farm Act of 1981

The Right to Farm Act of 1981 (Civ. Code, § 3482.5) is designed to protect commercial agricultural operations from nuisance complaints that may arise when an agricultural operation is conducting business in a “manner consistent with proper and accepted customs.” The code specifies that established operations that have been in business for three or more years that were not nuisances at the time they began shall not be considered a nuisance as a result of new land use.⁴²

Farmland Security Zone Act

The Farmland Security Zone Act (California Government Code Sections 51296–51297.4) is similar to the Williamson Act and was passed by the California State Legislature in 1999 to ensure that long-term farmland preservation is part of public policy.⁴³ Farmland Security Zone Act contracts are sometimes referred to as “Super Williamson Act Contracts.” Under the provisions of this act, a landowner already under a Williamson Act contract can apply for Farmland Security Zone status by entering into a contract with the county. Farmland Security Zone classification automatically renews each year for an additional 20 years. In return for a further 35 percent reduction in the taxable value of land and growing improvements (in addition to Williamson Act tax benefits), the owner of the property promises not to

⁴⁰ California Department of Conservation (DOC). 2017. *Williamson Act Contract Land by County*. Available online at: <ftp://ftp.consrv.ca.gov/pub/dlrp/WA/>, accessed January 15, 2019.

⁴¹ CA Department of Conservation. *Open Space Subvention Act*. Available at: <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/wa/Pages/Open-Space-Subvention.aspx>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁴² California Civil Code § 3482.5, “The Right to Farm Act.” Available at: http://www.farmlandinfo.org/sites/default/files/California_RTF_Act_1.pdf, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁴³ California Department of Conservation. Accessed 02 November 2018. *Farmland Security Zones*. Available at: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/wa/Pages/Farmland-Security-Zones.aspx>, accessed November 2, 2018.

develop the property into non-agricultural uses. Currently, Ventura County is the only county in the SCAG region with lands designated as Farmland Security Zones.

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act (Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act) of 2000 (Gov. Code, § 56000 *et seq.*) established procedures for local government changes of organization, including city incorporations, annexations to a city or special district, and city and special district consolidations. This act requires that development or use of land for other than open space shall be guided away from existing prime agricultural lands in open space use toward areas containing nonprime agricultural lands, unless that action would not promote that planned, orderly, efficient development of an area.⁴⁴

California Farmland Conservancy Program Act

The California Farmland Conservancy Program Act of 2010 (Pub. Resources Code, § 10200 *et seq.*), also known as Sen. Bill No. 1142 (Stats. 2010, ch. 323) (SB 1142), established the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP), which provides grants for agricultural conservation easements.⁴⁵ An agricultural conservation easement aims to maintain agricultural land in active production by removing the development pressures from the land. Such an easement prohibits practices that would damage or interfere with the agricultural use of the land. Because the easement is a restriction on the deed of the property, the easement remains in effect even when the land changes ownership. Agricultural conservation easements are created specifically to support agriculture and prevent development on the subject parcels. While other benefits may accrue because the land is not developed (scenic and habitat values, for example), the primary use of the land is agricultural. Easements funded by the CFCP must be of a size and nature suitable for viable commercial agriculture.

The Forest Practice Act

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) enforces the laws that regulate logging on privately-owned lands in California. The Forest Practice Act was enacted in 1973 to ensure that logging is done in a manner that will preserve and protect fish, wildlife, forests and streams. CALFIRE reviews and approves plans for timber harvesting on private lands. In addition, through its

⁴⁴ California State Assembly. 2018. *Guide to the Cortese-Knox Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act*. Available online at: <https://calafco.org/sites/default/files/resources/CKH%20Guide%20Update%202018.pdf>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁴⁵ California Legislative Information. 2010. *Senate Bill No. 1142*.

responsibility for fighting wildland fires, the CDF plays a role in planning development in forested areas.⁴⁶

California Department of Conservation (CDC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP)

The FMMP was established in 1982 to assess the location, quality, and quantity of agricultural lands in the State of California and conversion of these lands over time.⁴⁷ The goal of the FMMP is to provide consistent and impartial data to decision makers for use in planning for the future of California's agricultural land resources.⁴⁸ The CDC applies the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil classifications to identify agricultural lands, and these agricultural designations are used in planning for the present and future of California's agricultural land resources. The CDC has a minimum mapping unit of 10 acres, with parcels that are smaller than 10 acres being absorbed into the surrounding classifications. The following are categories mapped by the CDC: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, Urban and Built Up Land, and Other Land.⁴⁹

California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP)

The CFCP seeks to encourage the long-term, private stewardship of agricultural lands through the voluntary use of agricultural conservation easements. The CFCP provides grant funding for projects which use and support agricultural conservation easements for protection of agricultural lands. The CFCP has funded more than 58,000 acres of easement projects in California, in more than a dozen counties between 1996 and 2016.^{50,51} CFCP has also funded a number of planning grants, including some

⁴⁶ California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. 2019. Available at: <https://www.fire.ca.gov/>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁴⁷ California Department of Conservation. *Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program – Program Overview*. Available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/Program_Overview.aspx, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection. 2004. *A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program*. Available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Documents/fmmp_guide_2004.pdf, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁵⁰ California Department of Conservation. *Project Profiles – CFCP Projects*. Available at: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/Pages/Project%20Profiles.aspx>, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁵¹ California Department of Conservation. *California Farmland Conservancy Program Easements Completed 1996-2016*. Available at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/Documents/stories/CFCP_CompletedEasementsMap_1996_2016.pdf, accessed November 2, 2018.

with regional or statewide value. CFCP did not award any new grants for planning and policy projects in the SCAG region between 1996 and 2016.⁵²

California Forest Legacy

Similar to the Federal Forest Legacy Program, the California Forest Legacy Act of 2007 (Pub. Resources Code, § 12220(G)) is a program of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to promote conservation easements in environmentally sensitive forest areas. Money to fund the Program is obtained from gifts, donations, federal grants and loans, other appropriate funding sources, and from the sale of bonds pursuant to Proposition 12, the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act (The Villaraigosa-Kelley Act) of 2000 (Pub. Resources Code, div. 5, ch. 1.692). This act defines “forest land” as “land that can support 10-percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits.”⁵³

3.2.2.3 Local

General Plans

The SCAG region spans six counties, each of which has a general plan containing policies related to protection of agriculture and typically forestry resources:

- **Imperial County:** Agricultural Element⁵⁴ (no policies for forestry resources)
- **Los Angeles County:** Chapter 9: Conservation and Natural Resources Element⁵⁵
- **Orange County:** Chapter VI. Resources Element⁵⁶
- **Riverside County:** Chapter 5: Multipurpose Open Space Element⁵⁷

⁵² California Department of Conservation. *Project Profiles – CFCP Projects*. Available at: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/Pages/Project%20Profiles.aspx>, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁵³ California Legislative Information. *ARTICLE 3. Definition [12220-12220.]*.

⁵⁴ Imperial County Planning and Development Services. [Adopted November 9, 1993] Revised October 6, 2015. *Imperial County General Plan: Agricultural Element*. Available at: <http://www.icpds.com/CMS/Media/Agricultural-Element-2015.pdf>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁵⁵ Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning. Adopted October 6, 2015. *Los Angeles County General Plan 2035*. Available at: http://planning.lacounty.gov/assets/upl/project/gp_final-general-plan.pdf, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁵⁶ Orange County Public Works Development Services. *General Plan: Chapter VI. Resources Element*. Available at: <http://ocplanning.net/civica3x/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid=40235>, accessed August 15, 2019.

- **San Bernardino County:** Chapter V. Conservation Element⁵⁸
- **Ventura County:** Resources Appendix⁵⁹

Additional plans and ordinances at the master plan level, city-level, and specific plan level may also apply within the SCAG region.

Zoning

City and county zoning codes provide the set of detailed requirements that implement general plan policies at the level of the individual parcel. Zoning codes present standards for different uses and identifies which uses are allowed in the various zoning districts of the jurisdiction, including zones for agricultural use and timberland production. Since 1971, state law has required the city or county zoning code to be consistent with the jurisdiction's general plan. The purpose of agricultural zoning is to protect farmland and farming activities from incompatible non-farm uses.

Land Conservation Trust

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by its stewardship of such land or easements. A land conservation trust is another type of organization devoted to protecting open space, agricultural lands, wildlife habitats, and natural resource lands. There are approximately 80 established trusts in California, 14 of which are located at least partially within the SCAG region.⁶⁰ Local and regional land trusts, organized as charitable organizations under federal tax laws, are directly involved in conserving land for its natural, recreational, scenic, historical, and productive values. Local governments and special districts, either on their own or working with land trusts and conservancies, can acquire fee title to agricultural and open space lands or purchase development rights to preserve rural and agricultural areas, watersheds, or critical habitat, or to create public parks and recreational areas.

⁵⁷ Riverside County Planning Department. December 8, 2015. *Riverside General Plan – Multipurpose Open Space Element*. Available at: https://planning.rctlma.org/Portals/14/genplan/general_plan_2016/elements/Ch05_MOSE_120815.pdf?ver=2016-04-01-100801-367, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁵⁸ County of San Bernardino Land Use Service Division. Amended 24 April 2014. *County of San Bernardino 2007 General Plan*. Available at: <http://www.sbcounty.gov/Uploads/lus/GeneralPlan/FINALGP.pdf>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁵⁹ County of Ventura Resource Management Agency, Planning Division. Amended 28 June 2011. *Ventura County General Plan: resources appendix*. Available at: <https://docs.vcrma.org/images/pdf/planning/plans/General-Plan-Resources-Appendix.pdf>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁶⁰ California Council of Land Trusts. 2019. *Map of CA Land Trusts*. Available at: <https://www.calandtrusts.org/map-ca-land-trusts/>, accessed January 23, 2019.

Regional Conservation Plans

Local agencies throughout the region have worked together to form Regional Conservation Plans (RCPs). These plans recognize that important habitats do not routinely line up with jurisdictional borders, so designation of conservation lands can span multiple jurisdictions. Additionally, RCPs efficiently address mitigation mandates from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by anticipating transportation projects and “banking” potentially threatened endangered-species habitats. The following are adopted major conservation plans made up of multiple jurisdictions within SCAG’s boundaries; The Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), the Western Riverside MSHCP, the Orange County Transportation Authority Measure M2 Natural Communities Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP), and the Orange County Central Coastal NCCP/HCP.

The following RCPs are in the planning phase, although conservation and restoration efforts for most of them are well underway; City of Rancho Palos Verdes NCCP/HCP, Imperial Irrigation District NCCP/HCP, Town of Apple Valley MSHCP/NCCP, and the San Bernardino County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS).

Local Agency Formation Commissions

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) is the agency that has the responsibility to create orderly local government boundaries, with the goal of encouraging “planned, well-ordered, efficient urban development patterns,” the preservation of open-space lands, and the discouragement of urban sprawl. While LAFCO has no direct land use authority, its actions determine which local government will be responsible for planning new areas. LAFCO addresses a wide range of boundary actions, including creation of spheres of influence for cities, adjustments to boundaries of special districts, annexations, incorporations, detachments of areas from cities, and dissolution of cities.

Mitigation Bank or Conservation Bank

A conservation or mitigation bank is privately or publicly owned land managed for its natural resource values. In exchange for permanently protecting, managing, and monitoring the land, the bank sponsor is allowed to sell or transfer habitat credits to permittees who need to satisfy legal requirements and compensate for the environmental impacts of developmental projects.

A privately-owned conservation or mitigation bank is a free-market enterprise that:

- Offers landowners economic incentives to protect natural resources; Saves permittees time and money by providing them with the certainty of pre-approved compensation lands;

- Consolidates small, fragmented wetland mitigation projects into large contiguous sites that have much higher wildlife habitat values;
- Provides for long-term protection and management of habitat.

A publicly owned conservation or mitigation bank:

- Offers the sponsoring public agency advance mitigation for large projects or multiple years of operations and maintenance.⁶¹

3.2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

3.2.3.1 Thresholds of Significance

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland.⁶² In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

For the purposes of this PEIR, SCAG has determined that adoption and/or implementation of Connect SoCal could result in significant adverse impacts to agricultural and forestry resources, if the Plan would result in any of the following:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to nonagricultural use;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;

⁶¹ See e.g., Bunn, David; Lubell, Mark; Johnson, Christine. 2013. *Reforms could boost conservation banking by landowners*. Available at: <http://calag.ucanr.edu/Archive/?article=ca.v067n02p86>, accessed August 15, 2019.

⁶² California Department of Conservation. 2019. *Land Evaluation & Site Assessment (LESA) Model*. Available at: https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/Pages/qh_lesa.aspx, accessed August 15, 2019.

- Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)),⁶³ timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526),⁶⁴ or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g));⁶⁵
- Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use;
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

3.2.3.2 Methodology

The methodology for determining the significance of agricultural, timberland, and forest impacts compares the existing conditions to conditions in 2045 with the Connect SoCal Plan, as required by *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15126.2(a). The known agricultural, timberland, and forest resources located within the region were evaluated using the criteria set forth by the California Department of Conservation and the *State CEQA Guidelines*. The analysis was limited to state-recognized agricultural, timberland, and forest resources. In general, the potential to impact agricultural, timber, and forest resources varies by the development area type (or location of transportation improvement).

Impacts are assessed in terms of changes to both land use and transportation infrastructure using data from the six counties within the SCAG region and SCAG forecasts related to projected population, housing, and employment growth. The methodology for determining the significance of these impacts applies the significance criteria above to the future (2045) land use pattern and transportation network. The development of new transportation facilities may affect agricultural, timber and forest resources, through both direct and indirect effects, including traversing agricultural, timberland, and forest lands. SCAG used a 500-foot buffer for transportation projects and land use development to represent where impacts could occur with respect to mapped resources such as agricultural lands.

The mitigation measures in the PEIR are divided into two categories: SCAG mitigation and project-level mitigation measures. SCAG mitigation measures shall be implemented by SCAG over the lifetime of the Plan. For projects proposing to streamline environmental review pursuant to SB 375, SB 743, or SB 226 (as described in **Section 1.0, Introduction**), or for projects otherwise tiering off this PEIR, the project-level mitigation measures described below (or comparable measures) can and should be considered and implemented by Lead Agencies and Project Sponsors during the subsequent, project- or site-specific

⁶³ California Legislative Information. *Article 3. Definitions [12220-12220].*

⁶⁴ California Legislative Information. *Article 2. Definitions [4521-4529.5].*

⁶⁵ California Legislative Information. *Article 1. General Provisions [51100-51104].*

environmental reviews for transportation and development projects as applicable and feasible. However, SCAG cannot require implementing agencies to adopt mitigation, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the implementing agency to determine and adopt project-specific mitigation.

3.2.3.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact AG-1 Potential for the Plan to convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to nonagricultural use.

Significant and Unavoidable Impacts - Mitigation Required.

Implementation of transportation projects as well as growth anticipated under the Plan would have the potential to convert the following to non-agricultural use: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance. Farmland may be located within 500-feet of the transportation projects and anticipated land use development in the Plan, which would result in the conversion of lands and constitute a significant impact (**Table 3.2-4, Estimated Maximum Direct Potential Loss of Important Agricultural Land**). Based on this scenario, approximately 15,903 acres, or 0.06 percent, of combined existing Important Farmland and Grazing Land would be directly converted to non-agricultural use as a result of the transportation projects and strategies included in the Plan.

Implementation of the transportation projects and strategies considered in the Connect SoCal Plan could result in long-term impacts to farmland by adding transportation projects to parts of the region in use as agricultural lands or through development on agricultural lands, which are interspersed throughout urban areas and are also located in less developed portions of the counties. Where there would be new transportation facilities constructed outside of the region's urbanized areas, undisturbed/vacant land could be utilized for transportation purposes. Transportation projects that are most likely to result in significant impacts to agricultural lands include highway expansion, highway widening projects, and potential connectors. Other transportation projects such as roadway improvements, toll road improvements and connections, grade separated facilities for busways, goods movement roadway facilities, high speed rail and commuter rail projects, and regional express lane network improvements in areas that currently serve as agricultural could also result in significant impacts, requiring mitigation measures.

**Table 3.2-4
Estimated Maximum Direct Potential Loss of Important Agricultural Land**

County	Important Farmland (Acres)				Subtotal of Important Farmland (Acres)	Grazing Land (Acres)	Total Important Agricultural Land (Acres)	Percent Potentially Lost by County
	Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Local Importance				
Imperial	262	202	0	102	566	0	566	0.02%
Los Angeles	78	69	4	110	260	3,390	3,650	0.14%
Orange	74	20	7	0	101	0	101	0.02%
Riverside	638	692	202	3,520	5,052	814	5,866	0.13%
San Bernardino	9	4	54	0	67	4,874	4,941	0.04%
Ventura	156	202	18	77	454	326	779	0.07%
Totals	1,217	1,189	285	3,809	6,499	9,404	15,903	0.06%

Source: California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, 2016

The Plan includes policies and strategies to help protect natural and farmlands and reduce overall land consumption. The Plan includes policies such as encouraging regional conservation planning, improving natural corridor connectivity, and expanding data sharing among agencies. The Plan also promotes a more compact growth pattern, which would help preserve agricultural lands. While the Plan includes the land use strategies that would focus new growth in the region's urbanized areas (primarily HQTAs), development anticipated to accommodate population growth could result in the consumption of agricultural lands, which would constitute a significant impact requiring mitigation measures.

Mitigation Measures

SCAG Mitigation Measures

SMM AG-1: SCAG shall host a Natural & Farm Lands Conservation Working Group which will provide a forum for stakeholders to share best practices and develop recommendations for natural and agricultural land conservation throughout the region, including the development of a Natural Lands Conservation Strategy for the Connect SoCal Plan.

SMM AG-2: SCAG shall expand on the Natural Resource Inventory Database and Conservation Framework & Assessment by incorporating strategic mapping layers to build the database and further refine the priority conservation areas by (1) further investing in

mapping and farmland data tracking and (2) working with County Transportation Commissions (CTCs) and SCAG's subregions to support their county-level efforts at data building. SCAG shall encourage CTCs to develop advanced mitigation programs or include them in future transportation measures by (1) funding pilot programs that encourage advance mitigation including data and replicable processes, (2) participating in state-level efforts that would support regional advanced mitigation planning in the SCAG region, and (3) supporting the inclusion of advance mitigation programs at county level transportation measures.

SMM AG-3: SCAG shall align with funding opportunities and pilot programs to begin implementation of conservation strategies through (1) seeking planning funds, such as cap and trade auction proceeds that could help prepare for local action on acquisition and restoration, (2) supporting CTCs and other partners, and (3) continuing policy alignment with the State Wildlife Action Plan 2015 Update and its implementation.

SMM AG-4: SCAG shall provide incentives to jurisdictions that cooperate across county lines to protect and restore natural habitat corridors, especially where corridors cross county boundaries, as detailed in the Natural & Farm Lands Appendix strategies of Connect SoCal. SCAG will work with stakeholders to identify incentives and leverage resources that help protect habitat corridors.

Project Level Mitigation Measures

PMM AG-1: In accordance with provisions of sections 15091(a)(2) and 15126.4(a)(1)(B) of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, a Lead Agency for a project can and should consider mitigation measures to address potential adverse effects on agricultural resources, as applicable and feasible. Such measures may include the following or other comparable measures identified by the Lead Agency:

- a) Require project sponsors to mitigate for loss of farmland by providing permanent protection of in-kind farmland in the form of easements, fees, or elimination of development rights/potential.
- b) Project relocation or corridor realignment to avoid Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local or Statewide Importance.
- c) Maintain and expand agricultural land protections such as urban growth boundaries.

- d) Provide for mitigation fees to support a mitigation bank⁶⁶ that invests in farmer education, agricultural infrastructure, water supply, marketing, etc. that enhance the commercial viability of retained agricultural lands.
- e) Minimize severance and fragmentation of agricultural land by constructing underpasses and overpasses at reasonable intervals to provide property access.
- f) Use berms, buffer zones, setbacks, and fencing to reduce conflicts between new development and farming uses and protect the functions of farmland.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

As previously discussed, regulations and policies would reduce each of the impacts but given the regional scale of the analysis in this PEIR, it is not possible to determine if all impacts would be fully mitigated by existing regulations and policies. Therefore, this PEIR identifies project-level mitigation measures consistent with applicable regulations and policies designed to reduce impacts. Lead Agencies may choose to include project-level mitigation measures in environmental documents as they determine to be appropriate and feasible. However, because of the regional nature of the analysis and lack of project-specific detail, including project components and locations, and SCAG's lack of authority to impose project-level mitigation measures, this PEIR finds impacts related to conversion of farmlands could be significant and unavoidable even with implementation of mitigation.

Impact AG-2 Potential for the Plan to conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

Significant and Unavoidable- Mitigation Required.

Implementation of the transportation projects and growth anticipated under the Plan would have the potential to conflict with land managed pursuant to Williamson Act contracts constituting a significant impact. Prime Agricultural Land in Riverside County, Mixed Enrollment Agricultural Land in Ventura County, and Non-Renewal land in Imperial and Riverside counties under a Williamson Act contract are located within the 500-foot construction radius of the transportation projects in the Plan. Thus, there is a potential for the Plan to result in significant impacts to lands managed under Williamson Act contracts.

Implementation of the transportation projects included in the Plan could also directly affect existing zoning for agricultural use. Land zoned for agricultural use within Imperial, Orange, Riverside, San

⁶⁶ The California Department of Fish and Wildlife provides a definition for conservation or mitigation banks on their website (please see <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Banking>).

Bernardino, and Ventura Counties is located within 500 feet of projects in the Plan. While the land use strategies in the Plan are intended to encourage growth in urbanized areas, some growth would occur in areas that would potentially conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or Williamson Act contracts which constitutes a significant impact requiring mitigation measures.

Mitigation Measures

SCAG Mitigation Measures

See SMM AG-1 through SMM AG-4.

Project Level Mitigation Measures

See PMM AG-1.

PMM AG-2: Project level mitigation measures can and should be considered by Lead Agencies as applicable and feasible. Measures to reduce substantial adverse effects on Williamson Act contracts to the maximum extent practicable, as determined appropriate by each Lead Agency, may include the following, or other comparable measures:

- a) Project relocation or corridor realignment to avoid lands in Williamson Act contracts.
- b) Establish conservation easements consistent with the recommendations of the Department of Conservation, or 20-year Farmland Security Zone contracts (Government Code Section 51296 et seq.), 10-year Williamson Act contracts (Government Code Section 51200 et seq.), or use of other conservation tools available from the California Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

As previously discussed, regulations and policies would reduce impacts but given the regional scale of the analysis in this PEIR, it is not possible to determine if all impacts would be fully mitigated by existing regulations and policies. Therefore, this PEIR identifies project-level mitigation measures consistent with applicable regulations and policies designed to reduce impacts. Lead Agencies may choose to include project-level mitigation measures in environmental documents as they determine to be appropriate and feasible. However, because of the regional nature of the analysis and lack of project-specific detail, including project locations, and SCAG's lack of authority to impose project-level mitigation measures,

this PEIR finds impacts related to conflicts with existing agricultural zoning and Williamson Act contract lands could be significant and unavoidable even with implementation of mitigation..

Impact AG-3 Potential for the Plan to conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g)).

Significant and Unavoidable – Mitigation Required.

Implementation of the transportation projects and anticipated growth under the Plan has the potential to conflict with existing zoning for forest land, timberland, or timberland zoned Timberland Production. Within the SCAG region, forest industries are permitted in open space zones in Imperial County and Ventura County, while national forest lands are protected from future development. Two of the transportation projects included in the Plan would cross through the SCAG region’s national forests. Although there are very few existing trees along the I-15 freeway within the San Bernardino National Forest (predominantly characterized by shrubland adjacent to the freeway, with trees in riparian areas), roadway widening associated with HOV lanes has the potential to affect existing lands zoned as forest land. Similarly, the preferred alignment for HSR is currently expected to be along the SR 14 and would continue underground through Angeles National Forest, preserving the wilderness and the forest at ground surface along the route.⁶⁷ However, it is possible the alignments could change or that in areas where projects intersect with forest lands impacts could occur. These projects would likely require a Forest Management Plan amendment regarding the preservation of scenic integrity objectives which would reduce potential impacts, however, impacts may not be reduced to below a level of significance. Therefore, impacts related to forest land are considered significant requiring consideration of mitigation measures.

The harvesting of timberland is only permitted in two agricultural zones in Imperial County, in the open space zone in Los Angeles County only if a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) has been obtained, in the rural residential zone and controlled development areas in Riverside County only if a CUP has been obtained, in the open space zone in San Bernardino County, and only Christmas tree farms are permitted in the Timberland Preserve zone in Ventura County. Although implementation of the transportation projects considered in the Plan could result in long-term impacts to land zoned for timberland use, timberland harvesting does not currently occur in the SCAG region. Therefore, the Plan would result in no impact to

⁶⁷ Vartabedian, Ralph, Sept 19, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-high-speed-rail-palmdale-burbank-20180919-story.html>

timberland. Furthermore, there would also be no impact to Timberland Production Zones, as none have been established in the six-county SCAG region. As described above, impacts to forestry would be significant and unavoidable. Mitigation measures are required.

Mitigation Measures

SCAG Mitigation Measures

See SMM AG-1 through SMM AG-2.

Project Level Mitigation Measures

PMM AG-3: Project level mitigation measures can and should be considered by Lead Agencies as applicable and feasible. Measures to reduce substantial adverse effects, through the conversion of Farmland to maximum extent practicable, as determined appropriate by each Lead Agency, may include the following, or other comparable measures:

- a) Minimize construction related impacts to agricultural and forestry resources by locating materials and stationary equipment in such a way as to prevent conflict with agriculture and forestry resources.

Impact AG-4 Potential for the Plan to result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

Significant and Unavoidable - Mitigation Required.

Implementation of transportation projects and anticipated growth under the Plan would result in significant impacts with regards to the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. Forestry resources within the SCAG region are primarily concentrated in the four national forests in the SCAG region, which are protected from future development. However, small patches of forest land and sensitive woodland communities near the wildland-urban interface are not protected. Despite land use strategies included in the Plan aim to concentrate future development in the region's urbanized areas, existing suburban town centers, and walkable, mixed-use communities (primarily the HQTAs), some of the new transportation facilities would inevitably be constructed outside of such areas. Additionally, development associated with new urban uses could also be located on forest land, resulting in the conversion of small patches of forest land to non-forest use.

Transportation projects that are most likely to result in minor impacts to forest lands include highway expansion, highway widening projects, and potential connectors. Other transportation projects such as

roadway improvements, toll road improvements and connections, grade separated facilities for busways, goods movement roadway facilities, high speed rail and commuter rail projects, and high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) / high-occupancy toll (HOT) connectors in areas that are currently forest land could also result in minor impacts. As mentioned in AG-3 above, two projects in the Plan have the potential to result in the conversion of forestry resources. As such, impacts related to forestry would be significant and mitigation measures are required. As described above, impacts to forestry would be significant and unavoidable. Mitigation measures are required.

Mitigation Measures

SCAG Mitigation Measures

See SMM AG-1 through SMM AG-2.

Project Level Mitigation Measures

See PMM AG-3.

Impact AG-5 Potential for the Plan to involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

Significant and Unavoidable Impact – Mitigation Required.

Implementation of transportation projects and anticipated growth under the Plan would result in significant impacts with regards to the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

Although the Plan would include the land use strategies that focus new anticipated development in the region's urbanized areas, some new development is anticipated to occur in agricultural areas on forest land outside the national forests (where forest land is protected from future development), and/or near the wildland-urban interface. As described under Impact AG-1, the Plan would potentially directly impact up to 0.06 percent of combined existing Important Farmland and Grazing Land in the SCAG region based on a 500 foot buffer, which could indirectly result in the conversion of additional farmland or forest land as a result of increased development due to transit and/or passenger rail projects included in the Plan. Furthermore, implementation of the Plan would result in the conversion of approximately 6,499 acres of Important Farmland (15,903 acres of total agricultural lands). Lands that remain agricultural but located adjacent to urban uses, may feel pressure to develop, as nearby land values increase or as nuisances from urban development spread to agricultural lands. In addition, urban uses,

especially newly urbanized areas, can lead to pressure on adjacent farms to change their farming practices (to reduce noise, decrease spraying of fertilizers and pesticides, etc.).

Forestry resources are concentrated in the four national forests in the SCAG region, which are protected from future development. However, as discussed in Connect SoCal, climate change associated with greenhouse gas emissions would be expected to contribute to the loss of agricultural and forest land caused by increased drought conditions and wildfires.⁶⁸ As climate change studies suggest that Southern California will continue to experience more extreme weather scenarios, including longer and hotter heat waves that would increase the threat of wildfire in parts of the SCAG region already prone to wildfires, forested areas in the region are expected to experience greater threats from wildfires as conditions grow drier and hotter.⁶⁹ Agricultural areas in Southern California are “moderately” vulnerable to climate change (i.e., loss of winter chill hours, increased invasive pests, changes to plant and pest interactions, and increased plant and animal diseases in agriculture have the potential to result in the loss of agricultural land).⁷⁰ As described in **Section 3.8, Greenhouse Gases Emissions**, the proposed project could result in a significant impact with respect to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and GHGs are considered a primary cause of global climate change. However, the relationship between development in any given region or country and measurable changes in forest land is not possible to determine and is therefore considered too speculative to be analyzed any further in this environmental document.

As previously mentioned, implementation of the Plan would convert a total of 15,903 acres from agricultural land to urban land use. A range of local conservation plans, habitat conservation agencies and state/federal park designated areas provide protection for a significant amount of natural and farm land in the SCAG region. However, a substantial amount of land on the urban and suburban fringe is vulnerable to development if not within the boundaries of protected lands and face additional development pressure as adjacent lands are converted. Therefore, transportation projects and development projects anticipated to occur under Connect SoCal could have the potential to cause other changes in the existing environment that could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use, constituting a significant impact requiring the consideration of mitigation measures.

⁶⁸ SCAG. 2019. *Natural & Farm Lands Conservation Technical Report*.

⁶⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2018. *Global Warming of 1.5° Celsius Climate Change Summary Report for Policymakers*. Available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2018/07/SR15_SPM_version_stand_alone_LR.pdf, accessed May 14, 2019.

⁷⁰ California Department of Food and Agriculture. 2018. *Agriculture and Climate Change Adaptation*. Available at: <https://www.climatechange.ca.gov/adaptation/agriculture.html>, accessed May 14, 2019.

Mitigation Measures

SCAG Mitigation Measures

See SMM AG-1 through SMM AG-2 and SMM-GHG-1 through SMM-GHG-5.

Project Level Mitigation Measures

See PMM AG-2 through PMM AG-3 and PMM GHG-2.

PMM AG-4: Project level mitigation measures can and should be considered by Lead Agencies as applicable and feasible. Measures to reduce substantial adverse effects, through the conversion of Farmland, to the maximum extent practicable, as determined appropriate by each Lead Agency, may include the following, or other comparable measures:

- a) Design proposed projects to minimize, to the greatest extent feasible, the loss of the highest valued agricultural land.
- b) Redesign project features to minimize fragmenting or isolating Farmland. Where a project involves acquiring land or easements, ensure that the remaining non-project area is of a size sufficient to allow economically viable farming operations. The project proponents shall be responsible for acquiring easements, making lot line adjustments, and merging affected land parcels into units suitable for continued commercial agricultural management.
- c) Reconnect utilities or infrastructure that serve agricultural uses if these are disturbed by project construction. If a project temporarily or permanently cuts off roadway access or removes utility lines, irrigation features, or other infrastructure, the project proponents shall be responsible for restoring access as necessary to ensure that economically viable farming operations are not interrupted.

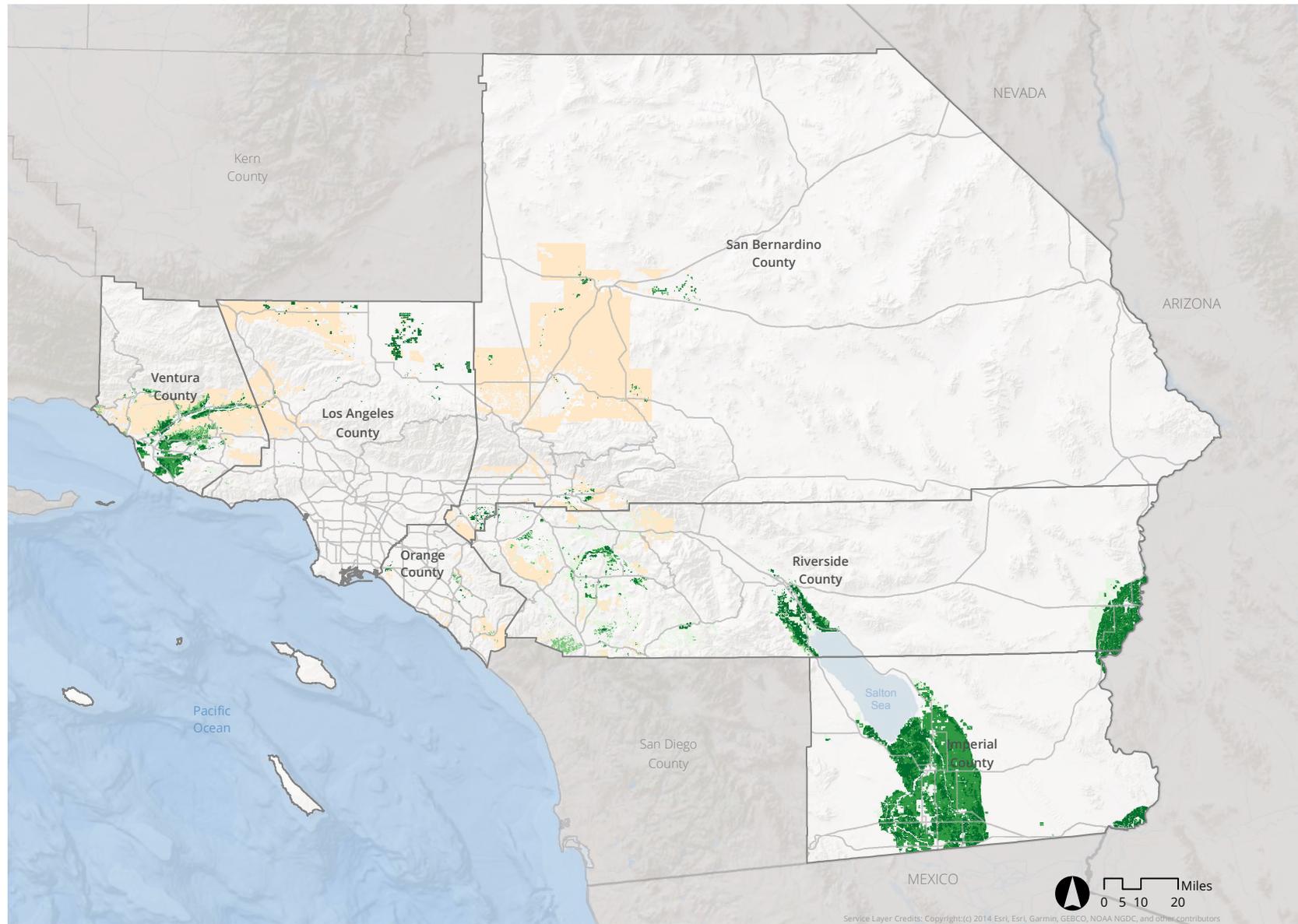
PMM AG-5: Project level mitigation measures can and should be considered by Lead Agencies as applicable and feasible. Measures to reduce substantial adverse effects, through the conversion of Farmland, to the maximum extent practicable, as determined appropriate by each Lead Agency, may include the following, or other comparable measures:

- a) Manage project operations to minimize the introduction of invasive species or weeds that may affect agricultural production on adjacent agricultural land.

Where a project has the potential to introduce sensitive species or habitats or have other spill-over effects on nearby agricultural lands, the project proponents shall be responsible for acquiring easements on nearby agricultural land and/or financially compensating for indirect effects on nearby agricultural land. Easements (e.g., flowage easements) shall be required for temporary or intermittent interruption in farming activities (e.g., because of seasonal flooding or groundwater seepage). Acquisition or compensation would be required for permanent or significant loss of economically viable operations.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

As discussed above, regulations and policies would reduce impacts but given the regional scale of the analysis in this PEIR, it is not possible to determine if all impacts would be fully mitigated by existing regulations and policies. Therefore, this PEIR identifies project-level mitigation measures consistent with applicable regulations and policies designed to reduce impacts. Lead Agencies may choose to include project-level mitigation measures in environmental documents as they determine to be appropriate and feasible. However, because of the regional nature of the analysis and lack of project-specific detail, including project locations, and SCAG's lack of authority to impose project-level mitigation measures, this PEIR finds impacts related to conversion of farmland or forest land could be significant and unavoidable even with implementation of mitigation.

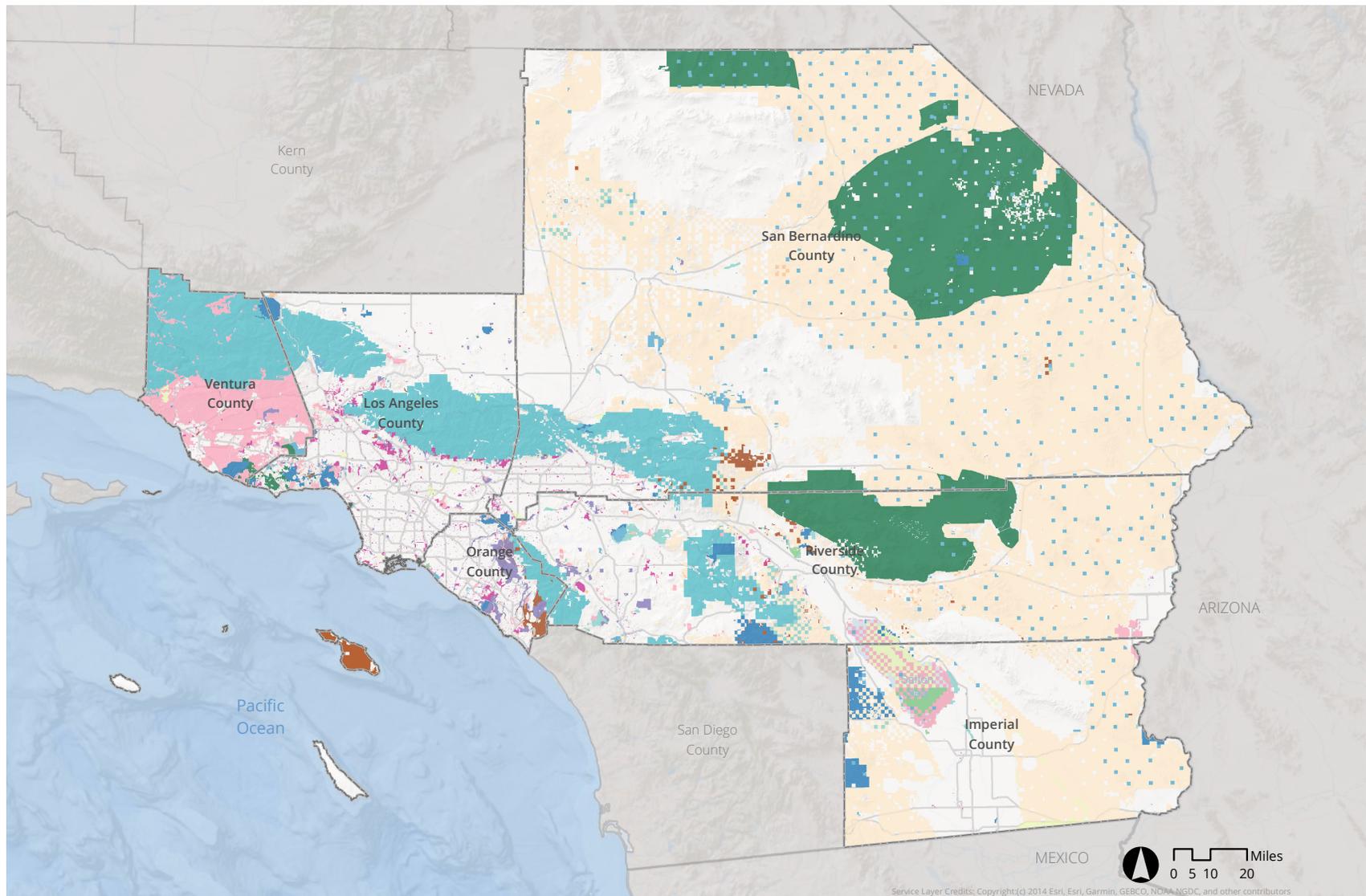


Prime Farmland
 Farmland of Statewide Importance
 Unique Farmland
 Farmland of Local Importance
 Grazing Land

SOURCE: SCAG, CA Department of Conservation, 2019

FIGURE 3.2-1

Farmland in the SCAG Region



- | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------|-------------------------------|
| US Forest Service | US Fish and Wildlife Service | California Department of Parks and Recreation | County | Non Governmental Organization |
| US Bureau of Land Management | US Military/Defense | California Department of Fish and Wildlife | City | Private |
| National Park Service | Other Federal | Other State | Special District | Conservation Easement |

SOURCE: SCAG, California Protected Areas Database, 2017; California Conservation Easement Database, 2016

FIGURE 3.2-2

Forest Lands in the SCAG Region

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