3.1 Agriculture

3.1.1 Introduction

This section describes the regulatory and environmental setting for agricultural resources in the vicinity of the Project. It also describes the potential impacts on agricultural resources that would result from the operation and/or construction of the Project and mitigation measures that would reduce significant impacts where feasible and appropriate. Impacts related to forestry resources are not included in this section; they are discussed in Chapter 4, *Other CEQA-Required Analysis*. Cumulative impacts related to agriculture, in combination with planned, approved, and reasonably foreseeable projects, are discussed in Section 3.11, *Cumulative Impacts*.

3.1.2 Regulatory Setting

3.1.2.1 Federal Regulations

There are no federal regulations related to agriculture relevant to this analysis.

3.1.2.2 State Regulations

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (California Government Code Section 51200 et seq.), commonly known as the Williamson Act, provides a tax incentive for the voluntary enrollment of agriculture and open space lands in contracts between local government and landowners. The contract restricts the land to agricultural and open space uses and compatible uses defined in state law and local ordinances. Local government establishes an agricultural preserve defining the boundary in which a city or county will enter into contracts with landowners. Local governments calculate the property tax assessment based on the actual land use instead of the potential land value assuming full development.

Williamson Act contracts are for 10 years or longer. The contract automatically renews each year, maintaining a constant, 10-year contract, unless the landowner or local government files to initiate nonrenewal. Should that occur, the Williamson Act would terminate 9 years after the filing of a notice of nonrenewal. Only a landowner can petition for a contract cancellation. Tentative contract cancellations can be approved only after a local government approves, but the landowner pays the cancellation fee.

California has the following policies regarding public acquisition of and locating public improvements on lands in agricultural preserves and on lands under Williamson Act contracts (Government Code Sections 51290-51295):

- State policy is to avoid locating federal, state, or local public improvements and improvements of public utilities, and the acquisition of land, in agricultural preserves.
- State policy is to locate public improvements that are in agricultural preserves on land other than land under Williamson Act contracts.

- State policy is that any agency or entity proposing to locate such an improvement, in considering the relative costs of parcels of land and the development of improvements, give consideration to the value to the public of land, particularly prime agricultural land, in an agricultural preserve.

Since 1998, another option in the Williamson Act Program is a Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) contract. An FSZ is an area created in an agricultural preserve by a board of supervisors upon the request of a landowner or group of landowners. FSZ contracts offer landowners greater property tax reductions and have a minimum initial term of 20 years. Like Williamson Act contracts, FSZ contracts renew annually unless an owner files a notice of nonrenewal.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) is the only statewide land use inventory conducted on a regular basis. California Department of Conservation (DOC) administers the FMMP, under which it maintains an automated map and database system to record changes in agricultural land use. "Important Farmland" under the FMMP is listed by category, as described below. The categories are defined according to the United States Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria, as modified for California:

- **Prime Farmland**: Prime Farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical features to sustain long-term agricultural crop production. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply necessary to produce sustained high yields. Soil must meet the physical and chemical criteria determined by the National Resources Conservation Service (NCRS). Prime Farmland must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the 4 years prior to the FMMP's mapping date.

- **Farmland of Statewide Importance**: Farmland of Statewide Importance is similar to Prime Farmland but with minor differences, such as having greater slopes or soil with a lesser ability to store moisture. Farmland of Statewide Importance must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.

- **Unique Farmland**: Unique Farmland has lesser quality soil than Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Unique Farmland is used for producing the state's leading agricultural crops. These lands usually are irrigated but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards found in some climatic zones. Unique Farmland must have been used for crops at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.

- **Farmland of Local Importance**: Farmland of Local Importance is farmland that is important to the local agricultural community as determined by each county's board of supervisors and local advisory committees.

- **Grazing Land:** Grazing lands on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

- **Urban and Built-Up Land**: Urban and Built-Up Land is 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, construction, institutional, public administration, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf

courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.

- **Other Land:** Other Land is 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; vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; strip mines; borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than 40 acres.
- **Water:** Water describes perennial bodies of water with an extent of at least 40 acres.

The first three categories (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland) are considered Important Farmland and also meet the definition of Farmland land under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Section 21060.1. While CEQA does not define Farmland of Local Importance as Important Farmland or require impacts on this farmland type to be analyzed, the analysis in this environmental document considers Farmland of Local Importance to be Important Farmland, consistent with the FMMP categorization. This analysis follows the definitions under the FMMP to provide a more conservative analysis.

California Farmland Conservancy Program Act

This act provides a mechanism for DOC to establish agricultural conservation easements on farmland. Agricultural conservation easement, or easement, means an interest in land, less than fee simple, which represents the right to prevent the development or improvement of the land for any purpose other than agricultural production. The easement is granted for the California Farmland Conservancy Program by the owner of a fee simple interest in land to a local government, nonprofit organization, resource conservation district, or to a regional park or open-space district or regional park or open-space authority that has the conservation of farmland among its stated purposes or as expressed in the entity's locally adopted policies. It shall be granted in perpetuity as the equivalent of covenants running with the land. The landowner may make a request to DOC that the easement be reviewed for possible termination 25 or more years from the date of sale of the agricultural conservation easement.

Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008

Senate Bill (SB) 375, the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 (provides a new planning process to coordinate community development and land use planning with regional transportation plans (RTPs) in an effort to reduce sprawling land use patterns and dependence on private vehicles, and thereby reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with vehicle miles traveled. SB 375 is one major tool being used to meet the goals in Assembly Bill 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act. Under SB 375, California Air Resources Board (ARB) sets GHG emission reduction targets for 2020 and 2035 for the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the state. The 2035 target for the Madera County Transportation Commission is a 12.7% reduction in per capita GHG emissions (Air Resources Board, 2018). Each MPO must then prepare a sustainable communities strategy as part of its RTP that meets the GHG emission reduction targets set by ARB. If the RTP cannot meet the targets, then the MPO must adopt a separate alternative planning strategy instead of the sustainable communities strategy. The alternative planning strategy is adopted separately from the RTP and does not need to reflect the fiscal constraints that otherwise apply to the transportation investments identified in the RTP.

Urban sprawl is one of the greatest pressures on agricultural land conversion to urban uses. One of the objectives of the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 is to help curb urban sprawl and keep agricultural lands in agricultural use.

3.1.2.3 Regional and Local Regulations

Madera County General Plan

The Madera County General Plan (Madera County, 1995) contains policies to guide future development in the unincorporated areas of Madera County. The Madera County General Plan goals and policies related to agriculture are outlined below.

Land Use Element

Goal 1.A: To promote the wise, efficient, and environmentally sensitive use of Madera County land to meet the present and future needs of Madera County residents and businesses.

Policy 1.A.4.: The County shall encourage infill development and development contiguous to existing cities and unincorporated communities to minimize premature conversion of agricultural land and other open space lands.

Goal1.J: To foster cooperative planning and to address regional concerns on a regional basis.

Policy 1.J.3: The County shall coordinate its policies regarding conversion of agricultural lands with the County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) and the cities of Madera and Chowchilla.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Element

Goal 5.A: To designate adequate agricultural land and promote development of agricultural uses to support the continued viability of Madera County's agricultural economy.

Policy 5.A.1: The County shall maintain agriculturally designated areas for agricultural uses and direct urban uses to designated new growth areas, existing communities, and/or cities.

Policy 5.A.2: The County shall discourage the conversion of prime agricultural land to urban uses unless an immediate and clear need can be demonstrated that indicates a lack of land for non-agricultural uses.

Policy 5.A.3: The County shall seek to ensure that new development and public works projects do not encourage further expansion of urban uses into designated agricultural areas.

Policy 5.A.5: The County shall allow the conversion of existing agricultural land to urban uses only within designated urban and rural residential areas, new growth areas, and within city spheres of influence where designated for urban development on the General Plan Land Use Diagram.

Policy 5.A.6: The County shall encourage continued and, where possible, increased agricultural activities on lands designated for agricultural uses.

Policy 5.A.9: The County shall encourage infill development in urban areas as an alternative to expanding urban boundaries into agriculturally designated areas.

Policy 5.A.13: The County shall require development within or adjacent to designated agricultural areas to incorporate design, construction, and maintenance techniques that protect agricultural and minimize conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses.

Policy 5.A.14: The County shall continue to enforce the provisions of its Right-to-Farm Ordinance and the existing state nuisance law.

Madera County Code of Ordinances

Title 6. Animals and Agriculture. Madera County adopted a right-to-farm ordinance in 1989 (Chapter 6.28 of the Madera County Code of Ordinances). Madera County recognizes that where nonagricultural land uses extend into agricultural areas or exist side-by-side, agricultural operations become the subject of nuisance complaints. As a result, some agricultural operations are forced to cease or curtail operations, others are discouraged from making investments in farm improvements, and efficient agricultural production is generally discouraged due to burdensome litigation against farmers. It is the intent of Madera County to conserve, protect, and encourage the development, improvement, and continued viability of its agricultural land and industries for the long-term production of food and other agricultural products, and for the economic well-being of Madera County's residents. The right-to-farm policies are as follows:

1. No agricultural activity, operation or facility, or appurtenances thereof, conducted or maintained for commercial purposes, and in a manner consistent with proper and accepted customs and standards, as established and followed by similar agricultural operations in the same locality, shall be or become a nuisance, private or public, due to any changed condition in or about the locality, after the same has been in operation for more than 1 year if it was not a nuisance at the time it began.

2. This section shall not invalidate any provision contained in Health and Safety Code, Fish and Game Code, Food and Agricultural Code, or Division 7 (commencing with Section 13000) of the Water Code of the State of California, if the agricultural activity, operation or facility, or appurtenances thereof, constitutes a nuisance, public or private, as specifically defined or described in any such provision.

3. This section is not to be construed so as to modify or abridge the state law set out in the California Civil Code relative to nuisances, but rather it is only to be utilized in the interpretation and enforcement of the provisions of county ordinances and regulations.

Title 18. Zoning. The Madera County Zoning Ordinance designates agricultural zones to preserve, develop, and grow agriculture in the county. It also includes dairy operations' standards and regulatory standards that identify procedures and management practices for implementation that provide pollution protection for surface and groundwater resources.

3.1.3 Environmental Setting

3.1.3.1 Regional Agriculture

The Project is located in Madera County. According to the Madera County Assessor's Office, as of 2021, agricultural parcels comprise approximately 13% of total parcels in the county and make up 29% of assessed parcel value (Madera County Assessor, 2021). Further, according to the Madera County Department of Agriculture 2023 Annual Crop and Livestock Report, harvested acreage

makes up approximately 53% of the total county acreage, and the top 10 agricultural commodities in the county are almonds, milk, pistachios, grapes, cattle and calves, pollination, mandarins and tangerines, replacement heifers, processed tomatoes, and figs. In 2023, the gross value of all agriculture production in the county was approximately $1.8 billion (Madera County Department of Agriculture, 2023). **Table 3.1-1** provides the total acreage of agricultural land classifications within Madera County, as defined above in section 3.1.2.2.

Table 3.1-1: Total Agricultural Land by Type in Madera County

Type of Agricultural Land (Map Symbol)	Acres
Important Farmland	
Prime Farmland (P)	98,295.41
Farmland of Statewide Importance (S)	84,975.69
Unique Farmland (U)	183,597.59
Subtotal	*366,868.69*
Other Land Covers	
Grazing Land (G)	381,027.74
Nonagricultural or Natural Vegetation (nv)	21,511.99
Vacant or Disturbed Land (V)	11,314.88
Urban and Built-Up Land (D)	29,756.87
Subtotal	*443,611.48*
Total	**810,489.17**

Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

3.1.3.2 Agriculture in Project Footprint

This section describes the environmental setting related to agricultural resources for the Project.

The Project Location shown in **Figure 3.1-1** includes agricultural areas previously cleared in the 2021 adopted IS/MND for Phase 1 (Relocated Station for San Joaquins) and Phase 2 (Partial Build-Out of the Madera HSR Station). Specifically, Phase 2 cleared the eastern half of the Madera HSR Station, including station siding track, a single side-platform located immediately east of the HSR mainline tracks, a new station building, and expanded parking. Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis, only agricultural areas within the current Project Footprint, e.g., west side of the track, are evaluated, as shown on **Figures 3.1-2, 3.1-3, 3.1-4**, and **3.1-5**.

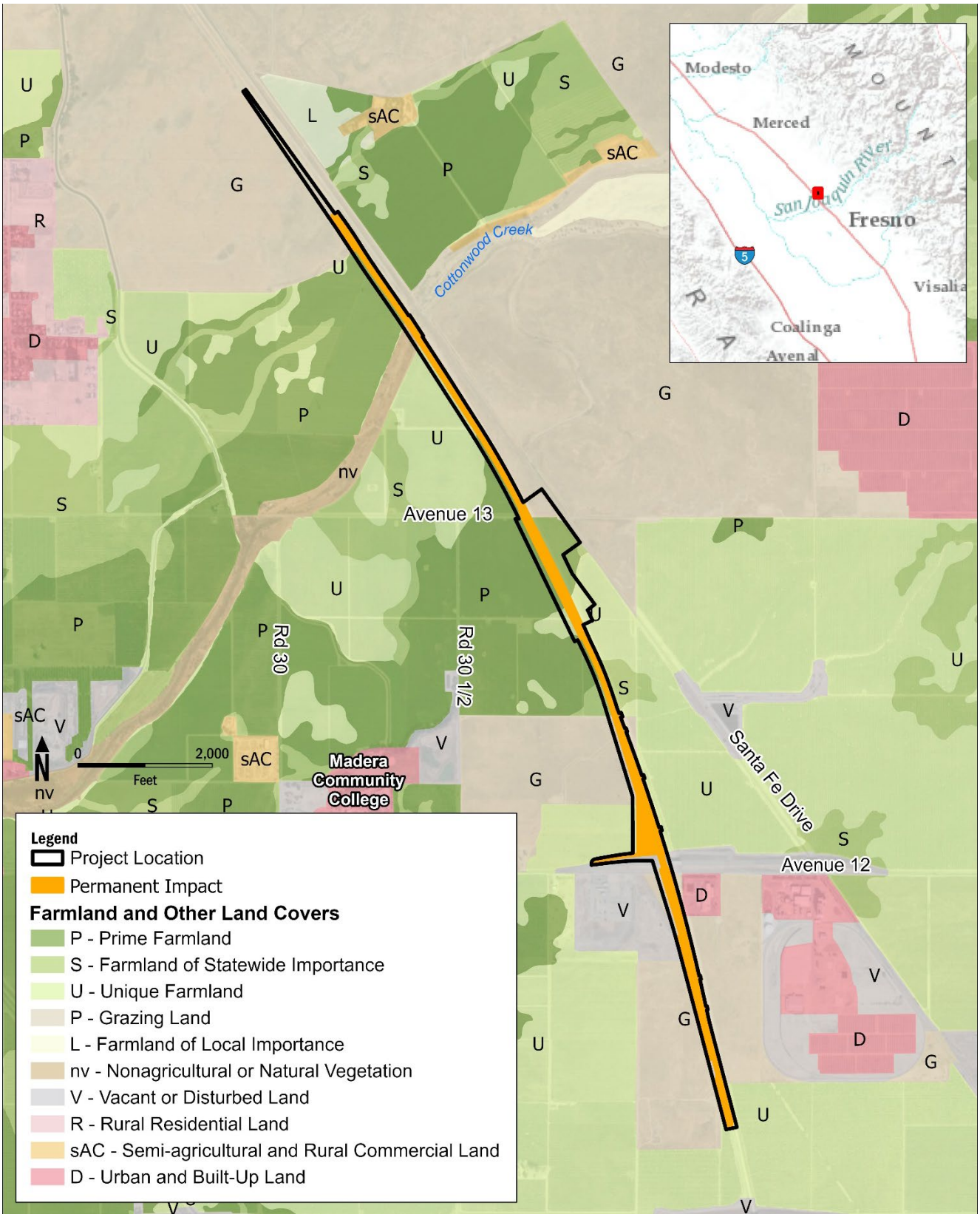
Table 3.1-2 provides the total acreage of permanently impacted agricultural land types in the Project Footprint.

Table 3.1-2: Project Footprint - Important Farmland and Other Land Covers

Type of Agricultural Land (Map Symbol)	Acres
Important Farmland	
Prime Farmland (P)	7.39
Farmland of Statewide Importance (S)	1.54
Unique Farmland (U)	13.53
Subtotal	*22.46*
Other Land Covers	
Grazing Land (G)	17.74
Nonagricultural or Natural Vegetation (nv)	0.86
Vacant or Disturbed Land (V)	1.27
Urban and Built-Up Land (D)	0.04
Subtotal	*19.91*
Total	**42.37**

Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

Figure 3.1-1: Farmland and Other Land Covers



Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

3.1.4 Impact Analysis

3.1.4.1 Methods for Analysis

The evaluation of impacts on agricultural farmland resources is a requirement of CEQA. The potential Project impacts to agricultural resources were evaluated on a qualitative and quantitative basis. Quantitative impacts were assessed using geographic information system (GIS) tools to calculate the agricultural acreage in the Project Footprint. Qualitative impacts were assessed by reviewing planning policies and zoning codes related to agriculture and agricultural activities within the County. The agricultural resources analysis is based on information from a number of sources, including the DOC, Madera County Department of Agriculture, and Madera County Planning Division.

3.1.4.2 Thresholds of Significance

The CEQA Guidelines Appendix G (14 California Code Regulations. 15000 et seq.) identifies significance criteria to be considered for determining whether a project could have significant impacts on agricultural resources.

An impact would be considered significant if construction or operation of the Project would have any of the following consequences:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Important Farmland[1]), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Willamson Act contract; or
- 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.

3.1.4.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Project Construction

Impact AG-1	Construction of the Project would convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use.
Level of Impact	**Significant and Unavoidable with Mitigation Incorporated**

Figure 3.1-1 shows the agricultural lands within and adjacent to the Project Location. As noted in Section 3.1.3.2, areas east of the track were analyzed in previous environmental documents. As such, for the purpose of this analysis, only agricultural areas within the current Project Footprint, e.g., west side of the track, are evaluated. Given the linear extent of the Project, to better visualize the Project components in relation to agricultural land and provide more thorough analysis, the entire Project extent was divided into a series of maps that show project components on an agricultural

[1] FMMP defines Important Farmland as including the categories of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance.

land base layer. These areas are represented on **Figures 3.1-2, 3.1-3, 3.1-4**, and **3.1-5**. Further, **Table 3.1-3** describes the agricultural acres that would be permanently impacted (converted to non-agricultural use) by various project components, e.g., trackwork, platform and pedestrian bridge, Avenue 12 grade separation, etc. For the purpose of this analysis, each project component identified in **Table 3.1-3** includes trackwork; the category Trackwork is all track that was not part of the other project components.

Construction of the Project would require the temporary and permanent use of agricultural land. Land that has been identified for temporary use would be leased from the landowner (through a temporary agricultural conservation easement) and temporarily removed from agricultural use for the duration of construction. Portions of some agricultural parcels would be permanently converted to non-agricultural use.

As shown in **Table 3.1-3**, a total of 22.46 acres of Important Farmland within the Project Footprint would be permanently impacted by construction of the Project. Although construction activities are generally considered temporary impacts, construction of the Project components described in Chapter 2, Project Description such as the station platform, west side track, culverts, and bridge, would result in the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use and would have a potentially significant impact on agricultural land uses.

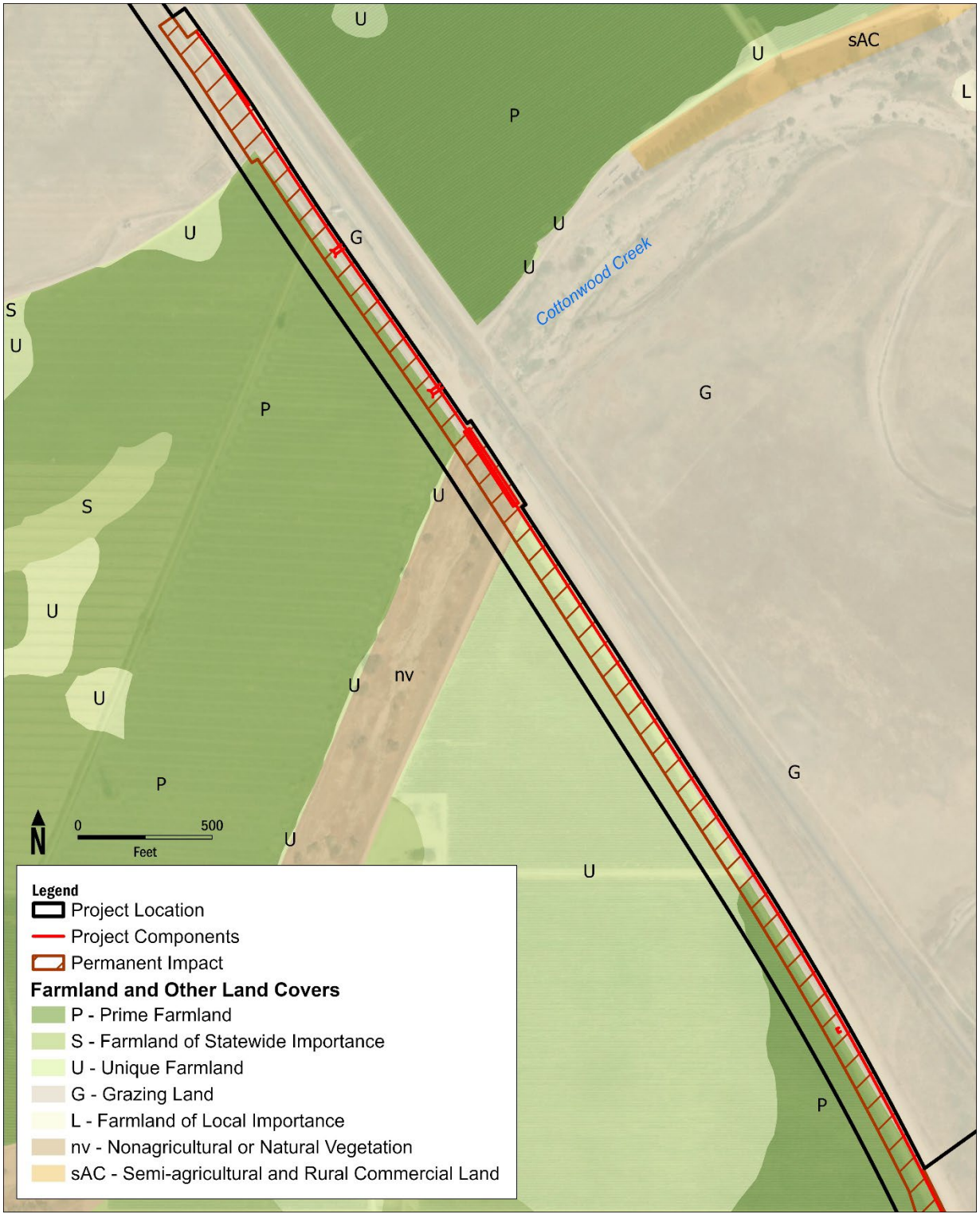
Figure 3.1-2 shows the permanent impacts to agricultural and farmland on the north segment of the Project. This area is surrounded primarily of Important Farmland. Project components in this area include the track bridge over Cottonwood Creek. Cottonwood Creek is designated non-agricultural or natural vegetation, but bridge footings would impact Important Farmland. As shown on **Table 3.1-3** the new bridge over Cottonwood Creek would permanently impact 0.014 acres of Important Farmland and convert this land to non-agricultural use.

Table 3.1-3: Important Farmland Acres Permanently Impacted by Project Components

Project Component	Reference Map	Acres to be Converted
New Bridge over Cottonwood Creek	Figure 3.1-2	0.014
Trackwork*	Figures 3.1-2, 3.2-3, 3.1-4, and 3.1-5	15.152
Platform and Pedestrian Bridge	Figure 3.1-3	3.908
Avenue 12 Grade Separation	Figures 3.1-4	3.071
Culverts and Wildlife Crossings	Figures 3.1-2, 3.2-3, 3.1-4, and 3.1-5	0.315
PG&E Tower Relocation	Figure 3.1-5	0.000
Total		**22.46**

Source: (AECOM, 2024); * Trackwork is trackwork not included within other project components.

Figure 3.1-2: Farmland and Agricultural Permanent Impacts – Track North of Station and Across Cottonwood Creek



Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

Figure 3.1-3 shows the area of permanent impacts to agricultural land around the station platform and the pedestrian bridge. Agricultural land in this area is designated as Prime, Unique, and Farmland of Statewide Importance, with Grazing Land south of the station. As shown on **Table 3.1-3**, 3.908 acres of Important Farmland would be permanently impacted and converted to non-agricultural use in this area of the Project.

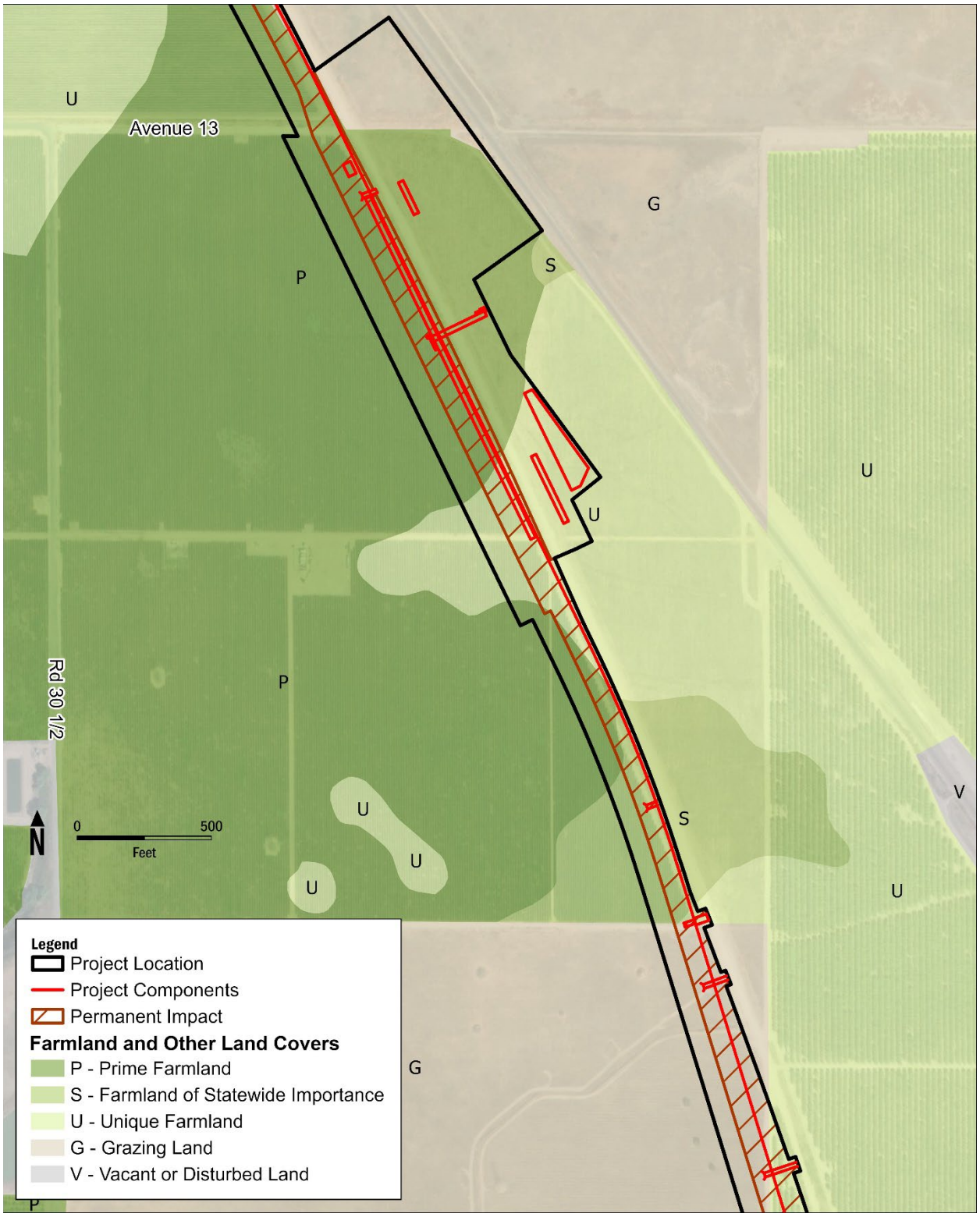
Figure 3.1-4 shows the Project area south of the station and the Avenue 12 Grade Separation. As shown on **Table 3.1-3**, 3.071 acres of Important Farmland would be permanently impacted and converted to non-agricultural use in this area of the Project.

Figure 3.1-5 shows the of the project south of Avenue 12 to the southern Project limits and includes the area for the potential PG&E tower relocation. As shown on **Table 3.1-3**, no impacts or conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use would occur as a result of the PG&E tower relocation.

As shown on **Figures 3.1-2, 3.1-3, 3.1-4**, and **3.1-5**, culverts and wildlife crossings occur in various locations within the Project Footprint. As shown on **Table 3.1-3**, culverts and wildlife crossings would permanently impact 0.315 acres of Important Farmland and would convert these acres to non-agricultural use.

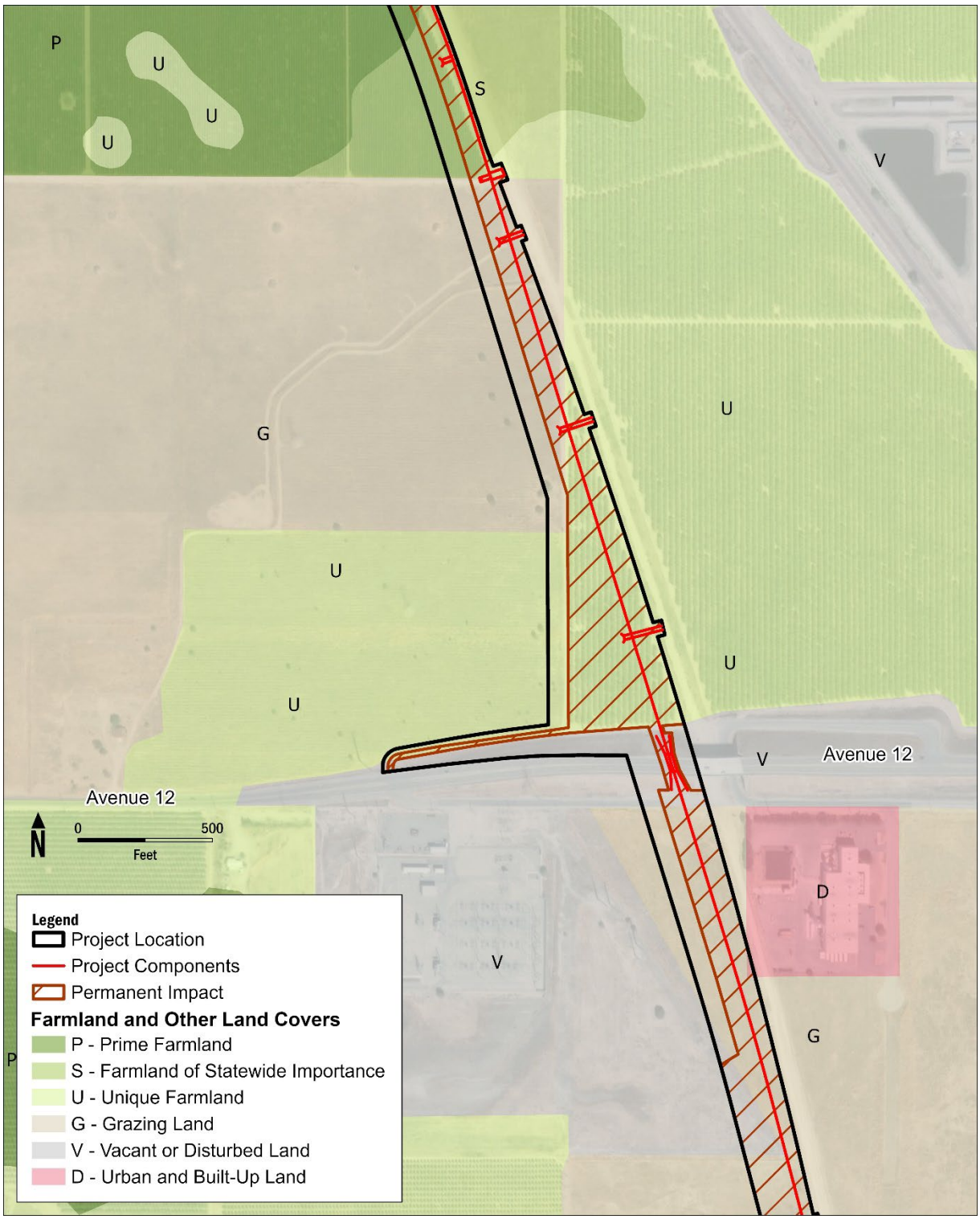
As shown on **Table 3.1-3**, the trackwork required for the project would permanently impact, 15.152 acres of Important Farmland and would convert these acres to non-agricultural use. This is trackwork that is not included as part of the project components described above.

Figure 3.1-3: Farmland and Agricultural Permanent Impacts – Platform and Pedestrian Bridge



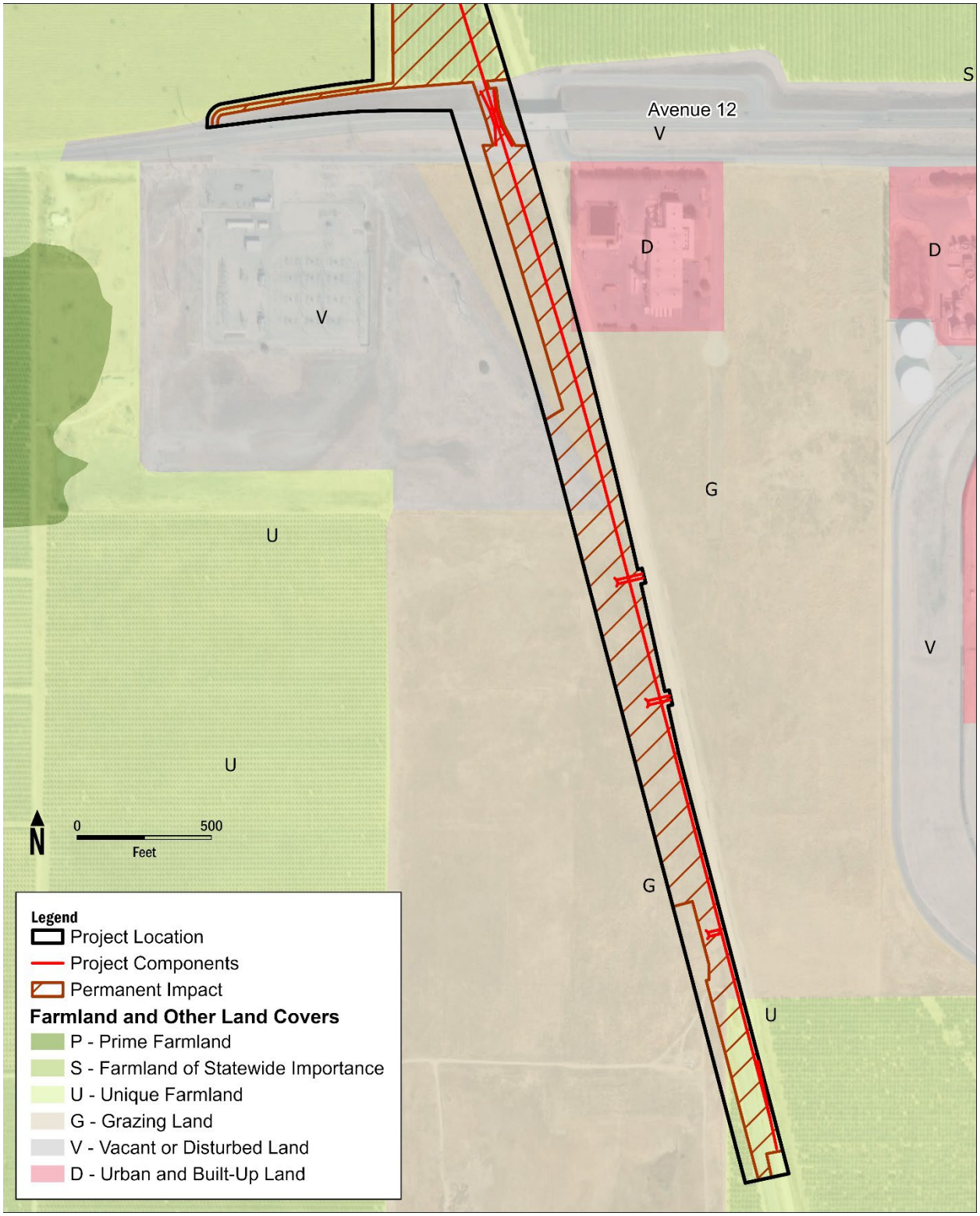
Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

Figure 3.1-4: Farmland and Agricultural Permanent Impacts – Track south of Station and Avenue 12 Grade Separation



Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

Figure 3.1-5: Farmland and Agricultural Permanent Impacts – Track South of Avenue 12 and Area for Potential PG&E Tower Relocation



Source: (DOC, 2020); (FMMP, 2020)

Important Farmland that is temporarily converted to nonagricultural uses through construction would be degraded for agricultural purposes and would be vulnerable to permanent conversion to nonagricultural uses. As shown on **Table 3.1-3**, 22.46 acres of Important Farmland would be permanently converted to non-agricultural use. As such, the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use is considered a significant impact under CEQA.

Mitigation Measure (MM) AG-1 and MM AG-2 would reduce impacts related to the conversion of Important Farmland as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP to non-agricultural use, but not to a less than significant level, and thus impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Guideline 15370(e) defines mitigation to include "compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environment." A recent Appellate Court decision (V *Lions Farming, LLC v. County of Kern, et al. (California Independent Petroleum Association, et al., Real Parties) (2024) 100 Cal.App.5th 412,*) found that agricultural conservation easements (ACEs) are a type of compensatory mitigation for conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use and are effective at providing mitigation for the purposes of CEQA and does advance CEQA's purpose of long-term protection of the environment. However, this 2024 decision did not overturn a prior 2020 court decision (*King & Gardiner Farms, LLC v. County of Kern* (2020) 45 Cal.App.5th 814) that found that agricultural conservation easements do not reduce loss of important farmland to a less than significant level because they do not actually physically replace the lost important land (they only preserve existing agricultural land). Consequently, while ACEs are feasible mitigation, they are not considered sufficient to reduce the loss of Important Farmland to a less than significant level.

MM AG-1: Restore Important Farmlands used for temporary staging areas

To the extent feasible, SJJPA and its contractor(s) will avoid construction staging in areas that are actively being used for agriculture. If areas with active agriculture cannot be avoided, then the following mitigation measure would be implemented:

Prior to any ground-disturbing activities at the site of a temporary construction staging area located on Important Farmland, the contractor will prepare a restoration plan addressing specific actions, sequence of implementation, parities responsible for implementation, and successful achievement of restoration for temporary impacts. Actions will include removing and stockpiling the top 18 inches of soil for replacement onsite during restoration activities. Before beginning construction use of parcels of Important Farmland, the contractor will submit the restoration plan to SJJPA for review and obtain approval and obtain landowner approval. The restoration plan will include time-stamped photograph documentation of the preconstruction conditions of all temporary staging areas. All construction access, mobilization, material laydown, and staging areas on Important Farmlands will be returned to a condition equal to the preconstruction staging condition. This requirement is included in the design-build construction contract requirements.

MM AG-2: Conserve Important Farmlands (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance)

SJJPA will enter into an agreement with DOC and its California Farmland Conservancy Program to implement agricultural land mitigation. SJJPA will fund the California Farmland Conservancy Program's work to identify suitable agricultural land for mitigation of impacts and to fund the purchase of agricultural conservation easements from willing sellers. The performance standards for this measure are to preserve Important Farmland in an amount commensurate with the quantity and quality of the converted farmlands, in the same agricultural region as the impact occurs, at a

replacement ratio of not less than 1:1 for Important Farmlands that are permanently converted to nonagricultural use by the Project.

Impact AG-2	Construction of the Project would not potentially conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Willamson Act contract.
Level of Impact	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**

As discussed in Section 3.1.2. 2, *State,* the Williamson Act provides a mechanism to keep agricultural land in productive agricultural use by providing tax incentives. There are no Williamson Act parcels within or adjacent to the study area. Therefore, Construction of this Project would not conflict with a Williamson Act contract. Parcels in and adjacent to the study area are zoned by Madera County as ARE-40 (Agriculture, Rural, Exclusive District) and POS (Public Open Space). Parcels south of Avenue 12 are zoned IH (Industrial, Urban or Rural, Heavy District) (Madera County, 2024). This zoning designation was adopted for the purpose of avoiding a physical environmental effect on agricultural land.

In addition, the Project Footprint partially falls in the adopted Madera State Center Community College (SCCC) Specific Plan boundary. The area covered under the SCCC Specific Plan is designated as the Madera State Center New Growth Area (Madera County, 2015). Madera County General Plan Policy 5.A.5 states that Madera County allows the conversion of existing agricultural lands in New Growth Areas (Madera County, 2015).

The ARE-40 zoning district is intended to preserve agricultural lands. Agricultural Exclusive land is designated for agricultural uses, including limited agricultural support service uses (e.g., barns, animal feed facilities, silos, stables, fruit stands, and feed stores), agriculturally oriented services (e.g., wineries and cotton gins), timber production, mineral extraction, airstrips, public and commercial refuse disposal sites, recreational uses, public and quasi-public uses, and similar and compatible uses.

Further, the Madera County Title 18 Zoning Ordinance allows certain uses such as Public, Quasi-Public, Office Use (i.e., construction trailer/temporary contractor's office) and Utility, Transportation, and Communication Uses in ARE-40 with either a Conditional Use Permit, zoning permit, or the use is allowed by right (e.g., Utility, Transportation, and Communication Uses).

Therefore, as no parcels in the study area are under a Williamson Act contract; no impacts to Williamson Act lands would occur. While construction activities would occur on parcels zoned for agricultural use, under Madera County zoning ordinances, construction-related uses are conditionally permitted. Mitigation Measure AG-3 would reduce conflicts to existing zoning to less than significant.

MM AG-3: Approval of Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for certain uses in ARE-40.

Prior to construction, SJJPA will apply for and obtain a CUP from Madera County for construction staging and activities within parcels that are zoned ARE-40.

Impact AG-3	Construction of the Project would not 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.
Level of Impact	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**

As described previously, there is no forest land within the study area. However, construction of this Project would require the temporary and permanent use of land that is designated as Important Farmland and would be removed from agricultural use for the duration of construction, as well as land permanently needed for project elements such as the relocated electric tower. Temporary use of Important Farmland parcels would be leased from the landowner (through a temporary conservation easement) and temporarily removed from agricultural use for the duration of construction. Parcels needed for Project elements such as the relocated electric tower, the track alignment and station footprint would result in the permanent conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use.

The expanded parking and station building would be constructed on land already being considered for conversion of farmland as previously approved in the Phase 2 partial build-out of the Madera Station, as described in Chapter 2 Project Description. In addition, the Project Footprint partially falls in the adopted Madera State Center Community College (SCCC) Specific Plan boundary. The area covered under the SCCC Specific Plan is designated as the Madera State Center New Growth Area (Madera County, 2015). Madera County General Plan Policy 5.A.5 states that Madera County allows the conversion of existing agricultural lands in New Growth Areas (Madera County, 2015). Further, as described under Impact AG-2, Madera County Zoning allows for conditional approval of certain construction-related activities.

While the Madera County General Plan Policy allows the conversion of existing farmland in certain areas, implementation of MM AG-1, MM AG-2, and MM AG-3 would reduce potential impacts related to other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use to less than significant.

Project Operations

Operation of the Project would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), to non-agricultural use, affect parcels under a Williamson Act contract, or conflict with agricultural zoning. No operational impacts would occur.

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