

4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

| Issues & Supporting Information Sources | Potentially Significant Impact | Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated | Less Than Significant Impact | No Impact |
|--|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 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 prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agricultural farmland. Would the Project: | | | | |
| a. 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 in the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4.2.1 Environmental Setting

The California Department of Conservation (CDOC) has the primary responsibility for regulation and reporting related to California agricultural lands. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), has defined Important Farmlands based upon a number of factors, including the physical and chemical characteristics of the land and the suitability of the land for producing crops (refer to Table 4.2-1 for the definitions that are relevant to the proposed Project). Important Farmlands are afforded special protection due to their importance to agricultural production.

Both the Old River and Connection Slough sites are bordered by Important Farmland (CDOC 2008). The portion of Holland Tract that adjoins the Old River site is a combination of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance. Parts of Holland Tract are under cultivation; but in the vicinity of the Old River site, the fields are fallow and are used for cattle grazing. The proposed alternate storage site on Holland Tract is currently grazed by cattle and is classified as Farmland of Local Importance. The portion of Bacon Island that is just west of the Old River site contains Prime Farmland and is currently in agricultural production (row crops). The Connection Slough site is bordered by Prime Farmland on Mandeville Island, and a combination of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance on the Bacon Island side. The latter designation applies to the proposed dredged materials disposal site on Bacon Island. With the exception of this site, the areas surrounding the Connection Slough site are actively farmed with row crops. The lands surrounding the Connection Slough site are under Williamson Act contracts; those surrounding the Old River site are not. The lands surrounding both sites are zoned for agricultural purposes. The construction area in Contra Costa County just west of Old River is zoned General Agriculture, 5-acre minimum parcel size (A-2). The construction area in San Joaquin County to the east is zoned General Agriculture, 80-acre minimum parcel size (AG-80). The areas on either side of Connection Slough are designated as AG-80.

Table 4.2-1 Important Farmland Definitions

| Farmland Category | Definition |
|--|--|
| Prime Farmland | Prime Farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban built-up land or water). It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to acceptable farming methods. In general, Prime Farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. |
| Unique Farmland | Unique Farmland is land other than Prime Farmland that is used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. |
| Farmland of Statewide Importance | This is land, in addition to Prime and Unique Farmlands, that is of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oil seed crops. Criteria for defining and delineating this land are to be determined by the appropriate State agency or agencies. Generally, additional farmlands of statewide importance include those that are nearly Prime Farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some may produce as high a yield as Prime Farmlands if conditions are favorable. |
| Farmland of Local Importance | In some local areas there is concern for certain additional farmlands for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops, even though these lands are not identified as having national or statewide importance. Where appropriate, these lands are to be identified by the local agency or agencies concerned. |
| Source: CDOC undated. | |
| Note: The definitions for Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance were developed by the USDA-SCS as part of the nationwide Land Inventory and Monitoring (LIM) system. The LIM definitions have been modified for use in California with the most significant modification being that Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance must be irrigated. | |

4.2.2 Regulatory Setting

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (7 United States Code [USC] 4201) is the federal statute that provides the basis for the policy of avoiding impacts on agricultural resources from federal programs. The Act does not prohibit federal agencies from undertaking actions that convert farmland to nonagricultural use, but only requires that they “identify and take into account the adverse effects of federal programs on the preservation of farmland; consider alternative actions, as appropriate, that could lessen such adverse effects; and assure that such federal programs, to the extent practicable, are compatible with state (and local) programs and policies to protect farmland” (7 USC 4202[b]).

As noted above, the CDOC has the primary responsibility for regulation and reporting related to California agricultural lands

The Williamson Act, formally known as the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Government Code Sections 51200–51297.4, as amended), enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners that restrict specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open-space use. In return, these landowners receive property tax assessments that are based upon farming and open space uses rather than other potentially higher tax bases.)

Contra Costa and San Joaquin counties regulate land use through zoning and general plan designations, which specify allowable uses, as well as through general plan policies, described below.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN, CONSERVATION ELEMENT

8-32. Agriculture shall be protected to assure a balance in land use.

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY GENERAL PLAN, RESOURCES CHAPTER

5. Agricultural areas shall be used primarily for crop production, ranching, and grazing. All agricultural support activities and non-farm uses shall be compatible with agricultural operations and shall satisfy the following criteria:
- a. The use requires a location in an agricultural area because of unusual site area requirements, operational characteristics, resource orientation, or because it is providing a service to the surrounding agricultural areas.
 - b. The operational characteristics of the use will not have a detrimental impact on the management or use of surrounding agricultural properties.
 - c. The use will be sited to minimize any disruption to the surrounding agricultural operations.
 - d. The use will not significantly impact transportation facilities, increase air pollution, or increase fuel consumption.

4.2.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.2.3.1 No Project

The No Project alternative would not affect agricultural resources because no development would occur.

4.2.3.2 2-Gates Project

a. 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 in the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use

Less than Significant. Most construction would occur in the river channels or on the adjacent banks that are not used for agricultural purposes. About half of the laydown and construction support areas would be located on the levees, while the balance would be in fallow fields at the base of the levees. These areas are not currently in agricultural production. All areas would be returned to their prior condition once construction is complete. The approximately 7-acre area on northeast Bacon Island that would be used for the storage of dredged material is classified as Farmland of Local Importance, which is not considered “Farmland” under CEQA and NEPA; moreover, use of this site for storage would not remove soils, and would help offset the land subsidence that results from the decomposition of organic carbon in the peat soils. The potential storage area on Holland Tract also is classified as Farmland of Local Importance and is currently fallow. It would be used only temporarily and would not result in the loss of agricultural soils. The Project would not permanently convert Farmland to non-agricultural use at either the Old River or Connection Slough sites.

b. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract

Less than Significant. With the exception of temporary construction areas, the Project would be constructed primarily within river channels or on existing levees. Disturbed areas would be restored upon the completion of construction. Farming would be able to continue unimpeded both during and after construction. Any dust generated by the Project would be minimized by adherence to the dust suppression methods required for construction in both Contra Costa and San Joaquin counties (refer to Section 4.3, Air Quality). The Project would not require any activities that would conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract.

1 **c. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could**
2 **result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use**

3 **Less than Significant.** The Project would install operable gates on river channels that are
4 occasionally used by farm vessels, but access would be maintained at all times; therefore, farmers
5 would continue to be able to access their lands by boat. The Project would not involve other
6 changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in
7 conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

8 4.2.3.3 Cumulative Impacts

9 The Project would not result in the permanent loss of Farmland, conflict with agricultural zoning
10 or Williamson Act contracts, or otherwise result in the loss of Farmland; therefore, no cumulative
11 impacts would occur.