Chapter 4
Agricultural and Forestry Resources

4.1 Affected Environment

This section describes the regulatory and physical environmental setting for agricultural resources in the Plan Area. Because the Plan Area does not extend above the elevation marking the boundary of oak woodland savannah, the Plan is not expected to result in impacts on timber-producing forests; consequently, forestry resources are not discussed further in this chapter.

4.1.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal

Farmland Protection Policy Act

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) of 1984 requires federal agencies to consider how their activities or responsibilities that involve financing or assisting construction of improvement projects, or acquiring, managing, or disposing of federal land and facilities may affect farmland. This act does not apply to projects related to federal permits or licensing; therefore, it is not applicable to the BRCP.

State

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Department of Conservation (DOC) has the primary responsibility for reporting statewide farmland data and trends. Under its Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), DOC classifies farmlands using a system that combines technical soil ratings and current land use. Descriptions of the FMMP categories are presented in Table 4-1. The minimum mapping unit for all agricultural land categories except Grazing Land is 10 acres. The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres. The FMMP categorizes and maps Important Farmlands every 2 years on the basis of information from local agencies. Counties may, at their discretion, establish criteria for the designation of Farmland of Local Importance. Note that Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland are considered especially important agricultural resources. They are often referred to collectively as *important farmland*.

Table 4-1. Important Farmland Category Definitions

Farmland Category	Definition
Agricultural Lands	
Prime Farmland	Prime Farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics 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 4 years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	This land is similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture. Farmland of Statewide Importance must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
Unique Farmland	This is land of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Local Importance	This is land of importance to the local agricultural economy and is determined by each county's board of supervisors and local advisory committee.
Farmland of Local Potential	In a few counties the, local advisory committee has elected to additionally define areas of Local Potential (LP) farmland. This land includes soils that qualify for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, but are presently not cultivated or irrigated.
Grazing Land	Grazing land is land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock.
Nonagricultural Lands	
Urban and Built-up Land	This is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, and public administrative purposes; railroad yards; cemeteries; airports; golf courses; sanitary landfills; sewage treatment plants; water control structures; and other development purposes.
Other Land	Other land is that which is not included in any of the other mapping categories. The following types of land are generally included: low-density rural development; brush, timber, and other lands not suitable for livestock grazing; government lands not available for agricultural use; roads systems for freeway interchanges; vacant and nonagricultural areas larger than 40 acres and surrounded on all sides by urban development; confined livestock facilities of 10 or more acres; strip mines and borrow and gravel pits; and a variety of other rural land uses.
Water	Perennial water bodes with an extent of at least 40 acres.
Source: California Department of Conservation 2007.	

California Land Conservation Act of 1965

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, or Williamson Act, established the state's primary program for the retention of private land in agriculture and open space use. The act creates an arrangement whereby private landowners enter into a 10-year contract with counties and cities to maintain their land in agricultural and compatible open-space uses in exchange for a reduction in property taxes. The contract is automatically renewed for an additional year unless it is cancelled. The contract may be cancelled if the land is being converted to an incompatible use. Local

governments receive an annual subvention of forgone property tax revenues from the state through the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971.

Local

Butte County

General Plan

The Agriculture Element of the County's General Plan 2030 (Butte County 2010a) provides information about agricultural resources and uses in the County. It contains goals, policies, and actions designed to protect, maintain, promote, and enhance agriculture in the county. The following are relevant goals and policies related to agriculture.

Goal AG-1: Maintain, promote, and enhance Butte County's agriculture uses and resources, a major source of food, employment, and income in Butte County.

AG-P1.1: The county supports state and Federal legislation designed to conserve soil and protect agricultural land.

AG-P1.2: The county supports agricultural education and research at Butte County educational institutions.

AG-P1.3: Continue to work with landowners in establishing new and maintaining existing Williamson Act contracts.

Goal AG-2: Protect Butte County's agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

AG-P2.1: The county shall work with the Local Agency Formation Commission to create and maintain a consistent approach to the conservation of agricultural land through the designation of reasonable and logical sphere of influence boundaries.

AG-P2.3: Redesignation and rezoning of land designated as Agriculture to an urban designation shall be allowed only when the applicant can demonstrate that the following criteria are met and mitigated:

- The lot(s) for which conversion is requested is adjacent to uses other than agriculture or agricultural support uses (e.g., receiving plants, hulling plants),
- The conversion will not be detrimental to existing agricultural operations,
- The conversion land is adjacent to existing urban infrastructure and conversion will constitute a logical contiguous extension of a designated urban area,
- No feasible alternative exists that is less detrimental to agriculture, and
- Full mitigation of impacts to the extent allowed under the law is provided, including, but not limited to, roads, drainage, schools, fire protection, law enforcement, recreation, sewage, and lighting.

AG-P2.6: The county shall retain and protect agricultural lands through the use of proactive land use techniques, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Clustered development projects, allowing a "clustering" of permitted densities in a compact configuration in order to protect agricultural land; and
- Density bonuses, permitting increased density on developable land in exchange for protection of agricultural land.

AG-P5.3: The zoning ordinance shall require that a buffer be established on property proposed for residential development in order to protect existing agricultural uses from incompatible use

conflicts. The desired standard shall be 300 feet but may be adjusted to address unusual circumstances.

AG-P5.5: To protect agricultural areas from flooding, all urban/residential development projects shall provide a drainage plan prepared by a registered civil engineer that, at a minimum, addresses

- pre-development drainage conditions for the development site, including peak runoff rates and runoff volumes;
- post-development drainage conditions, including changes in peak runoff rates and runoff volumes;
- off-site drainage or flooding impacts and proposed or recommended mitigation measures; and
- mechanisms for maintenance of drainage facilities.

Goal AG-5: Reduced conflicts between urban and agricultural uses and between habitat mitigation banking and agricultural uses.

Butte County Municipal Code Section 24-12 to 24-14

The purpose of the Agricultural Zone (AG) is to support, protect, and maintain a viable, long-term agricultural sector in the County. Standards for the AG zone maintain the vitality of the agricultural sector by retaining parcel sizes necessary to sustain viable agricultural operations, protecting agricultural practices and activities by minimizing land use conflicts, and protecting agricultural resources by regulating land uses and development intensities in agricultural areas.

Butte County Right-to Farm Ordinance

Chapter 35 of the Butte County Municipal Code, also referred to as the Butte County Right-to-Farm Ordinance (Ord. No. 3965, § 1, 6-12-07), serves as a notification to owners, purchasers, residents, and users of property adjacent to agricultural operations of potential issues at the agriculture-urban interface. The Right-to-Farm Ordinance declares that properly conducted agricultural operations on agricultural land are not subject to nuisance claims, assuming the operation was not already on record as a nuisance when the operation began. Information about the Right-to-Farm Ordinance is provided by the County to residents with an annual tax bill and when an application is submitted for development on or adjacent to agricultural land.

City of Biggs

General Plan

The Conservation and Recreation Element of the City of Biggs General Plan identifies the context and sets goals and policies for the protection of agricultural resources. The relevant goals and policies excerpted below are outlined in this element.

Goal CR-2: Promote and protect the continued viability of agriculture surrounding Biggs.

Policy CR-2.2 (Agricultural Buffers): Protect agricultural resources by maintaining a clear boundary between urban, rural and agricultural uses.

Policy CR-2.5 (Use of Land): Plan for and allow for the developed use of designated agricultural buffer areas as the City expands and new buffer areas are established.

Policy CR-2.6 (Right-to-Farm Ordinance): Preserve and support agricultural enterprises by supporting right-to-farm policies.

Biggs Municipal Code

Chapter 14.160 of the municipal code, which identifies the zoning of OS-Open Space District, is intended to preserve land, either temporarily or permanently, for a variety of purposes, including agriculture. Permitted uses include agricultural crop production, including but not limited to orchards, row crops, rice, and pastures.

City of Chico

General Plan

The Open Space and Environment Element of the City of Chico General Plan identifies the context and sets goals and policies for the protection of agricultural resources. It focuses on the preservation and enhancement of resources such as agriculture and limits the adverse effects on these resources from implementation of the general plan. The relevant goals and policies excerpted below are outlined in this element.

Goal OS-5: Preserve agricultural resources for the production of local food and the maintenance of Chico's rural character.

Policy OS-5.1: Minimize conflicts between urban and agricultural uses by requiring buffers or use restrictions.

Policy OS-5.3: Support local and regional agriculture.

Chico Municipal Code

Section 19.64 of the municipal code identifies Agriculture Preservation Standards for the City. This section contains provisions that require subdivisions to disclose a property's proximity to farmland to prospective buyers and that limit the definition of a "nuisance" to exclude established farms operated according to commonly accepted farming practices.

City of Gridley

General Plan

The General Plan Conservation Element addresses goals, policies, and actions related to agricultural resources in the city of Gridley. It addresses the management, development, and use of natural resources, including agricultural resources. It is primarily oriented toward natural resource management and conservation. Relevant goals and policies related to agriculture are excerpted below.

Conservation Goal 1: Minimize the impacts of growth on agriculture in the Gridley area.

Conservation Policy 1.1: The City will encourage ongoing agricultural uses on properties within the Sphere of Influence until such properties are annexed to the City.

Conservation Policy 1.2: The City will discourage detachment from irrigation and agricultural drainage districts until such time as nonagricultural use is imminent.

Conservation Policy 1.3: New development will mitigate for the conversion of agricultural land to urban use and will include in-lieu fees to acquire agricultural conversion easements or direct placement of agricultural conservation easements on a similar quality and amount of land.

Gridley Municipal Code

Chapter 17.08 of the municipal code defines the purpose and intent of AR-5 Agricultural Residential Districts to establish and preserve agricultural-residential districts at a population density appropriate for rural residential uses, to control urban encroachment onto prime agricultural areas, and to maintain the public health and safety.

Chapter 17.31.040 of the municipal ordinance identifies agricultural overlay zones for commercial production of agriculture. In a rural area characterized by intensive commercial agricultural production, some agricultural production can be conducted within an urbanizing farm community with minimal adverse impacts. The AO district is intended to be applied to a secondary zoning designation, for purposes of allowing commercial agricultural uses to be conducted on properties that are designated on the general plan and zoning diagrams for urban uses, until those uses are actually developed.

City of Oroville

General Plan

The Open Space, Natural Resources, and Conservation Element of the City of Oroville General Plan identifies goals and policies to preserve and improve the quantity, quality, and character of open space, including agriculture, in Oroville. This element provides direction regarding the conservation, development, and use of natural resources in and around Oroville, including agriculture. The relevant goal and policy excerpted below are outlined in this element.

Goal OPS-6: Preserve the maximum feasible amount of agriculturally productive land, in order to maintain agriculture's contributions to the local economy, life style, air quality, habitat value, and sense of Oroville's heritage.

P6.2: Cooperate with Butte County to retain agricultural uses on lands within the Oroville Sphere of Influence prior to their annexation to the City.

4.1.2 Environmental Setting

The environmental setting for agriculture provides an overview of the location of agricultural in the Plan Area, describes the type of crops found in the Plan Area, their biological and economic characteristics, the DOC farmland classifications, and lands designated under the Williamson Act.

Overview

The majority of Butte County's land is in agriculture (approximately 640,000 acres, or 60%).[1] Agriculture dominates the western half of the Plan Area in the north Central Valley and encompasses approximately 423,000 acres (or 75%) of the Plan Area. Many of the incorporated cities in the county also have substantial portions of their land in agricultural production. Table 4-2 presents a summary of agricultural acreage found in each incorporated city's general plan planning area and the percent of agricultural lands.

[1] Agriculture includes the following categories defined by the FMMP: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Grazing Land.

Table 4-2. Summary of Agricultural Lands by City (acres)

City	Acres of Agricultural lands within GP Planning Area	Total Acres within GP Planning Area	Percent of GP Planning Area
Biggs	3,870	4,628	84
Chico	74,500	96,000	78
Gridley	2,654	4,589	58
Oroville	1,521	94,000	2

Sources: City of Oroville 2009a; City of Chico 2011a; City of Gridley 2010; City of Biggs 2013 and 2014.

Agriculture in the Plan Area is undertaken where the soils and topography are most suitable. The western part of the Plan Area is flat and generally well drained, and therefore well-suited for many crops; however, soil function changes from north to south. Figure 4-1 identifies the primary locations of rice, irrigated cropland and pasture, and orchards and vineyards in the Plan Area. Rice production dominates the southwestern section of the Plan Area, where the existing hydric soils formed in association with an internally draining flood basin. To the north, rice production is replaced primarily by and orchards as the dominant cover type (primarily west of SR 99) (Butte County Association of Governments 2015).

Crops

Types

In the county, high-quality soils and a temperate Mediterranean climate support a wide variety of crops including fruits and nuts, field crops, and seed and vegetable crops. Other agricultural goods, including livestock, apiary (pollination) services, and nursery plants and timber, are also produced in the county. Rice, almonds, and English walnuts account for more than one-third of the county's total agricultural acreage (Butte County 2010a). Table 4-3 presents the extent of agricultural crops reported for the county in 2005. Most of these crops and acreage is located within the Plan Area. Figure 4-1 shows the general agricultural classifications for the primary agricultural communities within the Plan Area: rice, orchards/vineyards, irrigated cropland and irrigated pasture land. Approximately 48 percent of agricultural lands within the Plan Area is in rice production, 43 percent is in orchards/vineyards and 8 percent is in irrigated pasture (Butte County Association of Governments 2015).

Table 4-3. Extent of Agricultural Lands by Major Crop Type in the County

Crop Type	Acreage
Rice	96,400
Irrigated pasture	15,500
Alfalfa	1,885
Wheat	1,600
Other field crops	5,697
Subtotal Field Crops	121,082
Almonds	41,478
Olives	2,424
Peaches (all types)	2,987
Dried plums	12,297
Walnuts (English)	32,080
Other orchard/vineyard crops	3,258
Subtotal Orchards and Vineyards	94,524
Total	215,606

Source: Butte County Association of Governments 2015:Table 3-14.

Note: Values derived from the 2006 Agricultural Crop Report. The numbers in this table cannot be directly compared to the agricultural acreages from the land cover mapping in the BRCP, because the numbers in this table are based on reported production and the numbers from the land cover mapping include both producing and nonproducing agricultural land. For example, fallow rice fields and abandoned orchards are included in the agricultural land cover mapping

Economic Value

In 2010, the estimated gross value of agricultural production in all of the county was approximately $622 million (Butte County 2010b). Specialty crops and industries, including organic farming and agricultural tourism, also contribute to the agricultural economy in the county. As of 2010, registered organic producers and certified organic producers generated more than $8 million dollars of revenue (Butte County 2010b). Table 4-4 identifies the value of the county's top ten crops in 2010 dollars.

Table 4-4. Butte County's Top Ten Crops (2010)

Commodity	Value (dollars)
Rice	182,248,000
Walnuts	173,392,000
Almonds	113,781,000
Dried Plums	42,566,000
Nursery stock	23,837,000
Cattle and calves	11,714,000
Rice seed	10,494,000
Fruit and nut (misc.)	10,494,000
Peaches—clingstone	9,690,000
Kiwis	8,177,000
Olives (all)	7,270,000
Apiary pollination	7,078,000

Source: Butte County 2010b.

State Farmland Classifications

DOC important farmland types and acreages Countywide are shown in Table 4-5. Approximately 24% of the county's farmland is Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland.

Table 4-5. Important Farmland Acreages in Butte County

Farmland Type	Acres	Percent of Total County Lands
Prime Farmland	193,166	20%
Farmland of Statewide Importance	21,849	2%
Unique Farmland	22,177	2%
Total	237,192	24%

DOC farmland types and acreages in the Plan Area are shown in Figure 4-2; acreages are presented in Table 4-6. Nearly all of the County's Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland lie within the Plan Area.

Table 4-6. Important Farmland Acreages in the Plan Area

Important Farmland Type	Acres
Prime Farmland	193,158
Farmland of Statewide Importance	21,846
Unique Farmland	21,894
Total	236,899

Rice, irrigated cropland, and irrigated pasture within the Plan Area are land cover types that covered and non-covered species use as habitat for foraging, nesting, roosting, and other activities.

Acreages for the DOC farmland types for these three types of land cover are presented in Table 4-7. The total acreage of these land cover types (129,849 acres) is a little more than half of all the designated important farmland acreage within the Plan Area (236,899 acres).

Table 4-7. Important Farmland Acreages in the Plan Area for Rice, Irrigated Cropland, and Irrigated Pasture

Land Cover Type	Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Total
Rice	96,881	8,950	11,312	117,142
Irrigated Cropland	7,661	3,935	824	12,420
Irrigated Pasture	203	83	1	287
Total	104,744	12,968	12,137	129,849

Williamson Act Lands

Approximately 217,151 acres of County farmland were enrolled in Williamson Act contracts in 2009 (California Department of Conservation 2010). Approximately 200,730 acres (92%) of Williamson Act contracts lie within the Plan Area (Figure 4-3).

4.2 Environmental Consequences

This section incorporates by reference the impact determinations presented for agricultural and forestry resources in the Local Agencies' general plan EIRs (as described in more detail in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, *Resource Chapter Organization and NEPA/CEQA Requirements*).[2] The significance findings and mitigation measures of each of the general plan EIRs are compiled in Appendix C. The Lead Agencies have reviewed these analyses and found them to be appropriate for the purposes of this EIS/EIR.

4.2.1 Methods for Impact Analysis

This section describes the methods for analyzing the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives.

The BRCP would not provide individual project approvals or entitlements for any private or public development or infrastructure project. Accordingly, this EIS/EIR does not provide CEQA or NEPA coverage for individual covered activities and does not function as a *programmatic* or *umbrella* CEQA or NEPA document for regional development and infrastructure projects. The BRCP EIS/EIR evaluates only the adverse and beneficial environmental effects associated with the decisions of the Local Agencies, water and irrigation districts, and Caltrans to approve, permit, and implement the BRCP. Accordingly, the methods for analyzing direct impacts on agricultural and forestry resources are tailored to evaluate the decisions of the Local Agencies, water and irrigation districts, and Caltrans to approve, permit, and implement the BRCP. This EIS/EIR also incorporates the impact

[2] These previous CEQA documents are available collectively for public review at the BCAG offices (2580 Sierra Sunrise Terrace, Suite 100 Chico, CA 95928-8441). Individual general plans and EIRs are also available at each of the respective land use agencies.

determinations of the Local Agencies' general plan EIRs to analyze indirect impacts on agricultural and forestry resources.

The amounts of existing Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance (i.e., important farmlands) within the Plan Area were quantitatively and qualitatively compared to the anticipated reduction or modification to important farmland under each alternative. A qualitative analysis was used depending on the level of detail of information available for important farmlands for a given alternative. Specifically, information from the general plan EIRs was reviewed for each local jurisdiction to define the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1). Using GIS layers, the impact footprints were overlaid on the three different types of important farmlands to determine the amount of acreage that would be affected by the BRCP covered activities and converted to nonagricultural uses. Orchards and vineyards are included in these calculations because they are agricultural lands that are designated as important farmland categories within the Plan Area. Furthermore, impacts are identified through this GIS analysis were determined to be permanent unless otherwise indicated. Tables 4-8 and 4-9 summarize this information.

Table 4-8. Summary of Alternative 1—No Action Alternative Important Farmland Impacts (acres)

Local Agency	Acres of Important Farmland Identified in General Plan EIRs[a]
Butte County[a]	4,770
City of Biggs[b]	685
City of Chico[c]	1,041
City of Gridley[d]	1,385
City of Oroville[e]	1,500
Total	9,381

Sources: Butte County 2010c; City of Biggs 2013; City of Chico 2011a; City of Gridley 2009; City of Oroville 2009a.

[a] 2006 FMMP data.

[b] 2010 FMMP data.

[c] 2008 FMMP data.

[d] 2006 FMMP data.

[e] 2004 FMMP data.

Table 4-9. Summary of Alternatives' Important Farmland Impacts (acres)

Alternative	Prime Farmland	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Total
Alternative 1 – No Action (No Plan Implementation)	3,730	1,066	2,205	7,002
Alternative 2 – Proposed Action	3,730	1,070	2,210	7,010
Alternative 3 – Reduced Development/ Reduced Fill	2,555	1,049	870	4,474

Notes: Alternative 4 is anticipated to result in impacts of similar extent to those under Alternative 2. Impacts are expected to occur over the life of the permit.

The existing Williamson Act lands were qualitatively compared to the anticipated reduction or modification of those lands under each alternative. Finally, a qualitative analysis, based on the assessment of conversion of important farmland and effects on Williamson Act lands, was performed to determine if each alternative would result in other changes in the existing environment that could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, *Resource Chapter Organization and NEPA/CEQA Requirements,* covered activities within the Local Agencies' jurisdictions have been analyzed in previous CEQA documents that are hereby incorporated by reference. The impacts on agriculture associated with the development of covered activities and the recommended mitigation measures are summarized in Appendix C. Agriculture impact analyses and mitigation measures contained in previous CEQA documents are incorporated by reference.

In adopting the EIRs for the local general plans, each participating jurisdiction determined that the programmatic impacts on Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance (i.e., Important Farmland) of implementing general plan policies and implementation of the general plan would be significant and unavoidable. The County and the City of Gridley also determined that there would be significant and unavoidable impacts on Williamson Act lands and farmland that would be converted to non-farmland uses. The Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville have determined that there would be a less-than-significant impact on Williamson Act lands and farmland that would be converted to non-farmland uses because their general plans would not involve land use changes for parcels currently enrolled in Williamson Act contracts or because the contracts for lands enrolled in the Williamson Act have been nonrenewed. It is assumed that all covered activities approved by the participating local jurisdictions would be consistent with the policies of their respective general plans and would be subject to any mitigation measures identified, such that impacts would be adequately mitigated.

4.2.2 Significance Criteria

In accordance with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, the action alternatives would be considered to have a significant effect if they would result in any of the conditions listed below.

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP, to nonagricultural use.
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or conflict with a Williamson Act contract.
- Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use.

The loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use is not discussed in the analysis because, as described above in Section 4.1, *Affected Environment*, forest land that is used for timber harvesting does not exist within the Plan Area.

4.2.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Alternative 1—No Action (No Plan Implementation)

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1, *Alternative 1—No Action (No Plan Implementation)*, under Alternative 1, project proponents would apply for permits on a project-by-project basis, without a coordinated and comprehensive effort to minimize and mitigate biological impacts through the

BRCP. Under Alternative 1, urban development and public infrastructure projects would continue to occur pursuant to the approved general plans of the Local Agencies and BCAG's regional plans. These include residential, commercial, and industrial development as well as construction, maintenance, and use of urban infrastructure, parks, recreational facilities, public services, and similar types of urban land uses. Other activities that would occur under Alternative 1 are construction and maintenance of public infrastructure projects outside of urban areas, including public infrastructure projects in and over streams (e.g. bridge replacements). No regional conservation strategy or conservation measures would be implemented; therefore, benefits to and impacts on agricultural resources associated with the conservation strategy and conservation measures would not occur. The primary mechanism for impacts on agricultural resources under Alternative 1 is direct conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses (e.g., urban, suburban) through the implementation of the various general plans.

Impact AG-1: Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The County and Cities of Biggs, Chico, Gridley, and Oroville determined that the implementation of their general plans—and thus, activities that would occur under the general plans—would result in significant impacts by converting Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural uses (City of Oroville 2009a; City of Gridley 2009; Butte County 2010c; City of Chico 2011a; City of Biggs 2013). General plan implementation in these jurisdictions would result in the conversion of thousands of acres of important farmland as summarized in Table 4-8 to nonagricultural uses (City of Gridley 2009; Butte County 2010c; City of Chico 2011a; City of Biggs 2013). The County and the City of Gridley concluded that implementation of the general plan goals, policies, and actions could reduce impacts on important farmland, but not to less-than-significant levels because conversion important farmland would still take place.

NEPA Determination: Alternative 1 would result in a conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural land uses as a result of implementation of all the Local Agency general plans. The County and the City of Gridley concluded that implementation of the general plan goals, policies, and actions could reduce impacts on important farmland, but not to less-than-significant levels because conversion important farmland would still take place. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: Alternative 1 would result in a conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural land uses as a result of implementation of all of the Local Agency general plans. The County and the City of Gridley concluded that implementation of the general plan goals, policies, and actions could reduce impacts on important farmland, but not to less-than-significant levels because conversion important farmland would still take place. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-2: Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or conflict with a Williamson Act contract (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The County and the City of Gridley determined that the implementation the general plans and, thus, activities that would occur under the general plan—would result in significant impacts by conflicting with Williamson Act contracts (City of Gridley 2009; Butte County 2010c). General plan implementation in these jurisdictions would result in the conversion of lands in Williamson Act

contracts to nonagricultural uses. Implementation of the County's General Plan 2030 would result in the conversion of 90 acres of land under Williamson Act contracts; implementation of the Gridley General Plan would result in the conversion of 117 acres of land under Williamson Act contracts.

Implementation of the general plans of the Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not conflict with Williamson Act lands (City of Oroville 2009a; City of Chico 2011a; City of Biggs 2013) because the proposed urban uses under the general plans would not convert lands currently under Williamson Act contracts or within a preserve, or because contracts for Williamson Act Lands have been nonrenewed since before the current general plans were proposed.

NEPA Determination: Alternative 2 would result in the conversion of Williamson Act land to nonagricultural uses through the implementation of the County and City of Gridley general plans. Implementation of these two general plan goals, policies, and actions or mitigation measures would not reduce impacts to less-than-significant levels. Consequently, impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: Alternative 2 would result in the conversion of Williamson Act land to nonagricultural uses through the implementation of the County and City of Gridley general plans. Implementation of these two general plan goals, policies, and actions or mitigation measures would not reduce impacts to less-than-significant levels. Consequently, impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-3: Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable: CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The County and the City of Gridley determined that the implementation of their general plans—and thus, activities that would occur under the general plans—would result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use (City of Gridley 2009; Butte County 2010c). As discussed in Impact AG-1, these jurisdictions expect conversion of significant amounts of farmland acreage to nonagricultural uses. The Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville determined that although implementation of their general plans could result in changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses, the policy provisions in the general plan and continued implementation of the agricultural preservation standards under the municipal codes would ensure that agricultural operations are not adversely affected (City of Oroville 2009b; City of Chico 2011b; City of Biggs 2013). Additionally, the City of Oroville is not proposing to place incompatible land uses immediately adjacent to any existing agricultural parcels; accordingly, the proposed action (Alternative 2) would not result in changes to the existing environment that would result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses within these jurisdictions (City of Oroville 2009a).

NEPA Determination: Alternative 1 would involve other changes in the existing environment that would result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses through the implementation of the County and City of Gridley general plans. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: Alternative 1 would involve other changes in the existing environment that would result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses through the implementation of

the County and City of Gridley general plans. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Alternative 2—Proposed Action

Under Alternative 2, covered activities would include the existing, planned, and proposed land uses over which the Permit Applicants have land use authority; state and local transportation projects; maintenance of water delivery systems (e.g., WCWD canals and similar delivery systems); habitat restoration, enhancement, and management actions (conservation measures); and adaptive management and monitoring activities. Covered activities relevant to agricultural resources would be those removing existing important agricultural lands from production, such as permanently developing the land or restoring it to habitat. Most covered activities would require individual permits and approvals pursuant to the Local Agencies' general plans and land use regulations, or the requirements of the implementing agency (such as Caltrans and irrigation districts) and would undergo subsequent project-level CEQA review and relevant NEPA review for construction and operations-related impacts; although some covered activities, however, may be exempted from environmental review requirements due to project characteristics, including small projects or infill projects.

The primary impact mechanism under Alternative 2 is permanent conversion of existing important agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses. Covered activities that could result in the permanent conversion of existing agricultural lands include those within the Local Agencies' jurisdictions (i.e., implementation of the general plan), maintenance activities of the participating water agencies, road projects by Caltrans, and some activities on the BRCP conservation lands, such as natural community restoration, where such restoration occurs on existing agricultural land (as discussed in Chapter 5 of the BRCP).

The conservation strategy and conservation measures outside the Local Agencies' jurisdiction would result in potential effects on agricultural lands through converting existing agricultural lands to natural communities to provide habitat for covered species. In addition other covered activities (such as pipeline construction by irrigation and water districts or roadway construction by Caltrans) outside Local Agencies' jurisdiction would also result in potential effects on agricultural lands through modifying agricultural lands adjacent to or within specific areas or road alignments. Some of these activities—such as conservation of lands that can continue in agricultural production—would not result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. Other activities, such as restoration, are expected to convert a limited amount of important farmland, but only when the activity is incompatible with the existing farming practices, such as conversion of existing row crops to wetland habitat. However, restoration activities involving nonagricultural lands would not result in conversion of farmland to agricultural uses.

A maximum of 3,822 acres (2.7%) of the three agricultural communities evaluated in the BRCP (i.e., rice, irrigated cropland, and irrigated pasture) within the Plan Area would be permanently affected by Alternative 2 (Butte County Association of Governments 2015). Table 4-10 summarizes these permanent effects.

Table 4-10. Maximum Extent of Permanent Direct Impacts on Agricultural Communities (acres)

Agricultural Community[a]	Existing in Plan Area	Maximum Extent Permanently Removed by Covered Activities	Percent Remaining in Plan Area with Implementation of Covered Activities
Rice[b]	120,316	1,615	98.7
Irrigated Cropland[c]	20,413	2,102	89.7
Irrigated Pasture	1,160	105	90.9
Total	141,889	3,822	97.3

Source: Butte County Association of Governments 2015:Table 4-5.

[a] Orchard/vineyard (5,216 acres) and nonnative woodland (7 acres) are omitted because they do not provide suitable habitat for non-covered species.

[b] 40 acres of permanent direct effects due to rerouting existing canals in the Basin CAZ outside of UPAs is included.

[c] 20 acres of permanent direct effects due to rerouting existing canals in the Basin CAZ outside of UPAs is included.

Table 4-11 summarizes the DOC designations of the three agricultural communities of rice, irrigated cropland, and irrigated pasture expected to be affected by Alternative 2. Approximately 2,283 acres (or 60%) of the three agricultural communities that would be affected are DOC-designated farmland. Almost all of the ricelands affected are DOC designated (1,460 total designated acres out of 1,615 total acres); approximately one-third of the irrigated cropland affected are DOC designated (766 total designated acres out of 2,102 acres), and approximately half of the irrigated pasture land affected are DOC designated (56 designated acres out of 105 acres).

Table 4-11. DOC Farmland Designations of Three Agricultural Communities (acres)

Agricultural Community[a]	Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Total
Rice	1,125	189	145	1,460
Irrigated Cropland	373	367	26	766
Irrigated Pasture	20	36	0	56
Total	1,518	592	172	2,283

The conservation strategy and conservation measures of Alternative 2 include a total protection target of 26,962 acres for agricultural lands, since agricultural lands are considered a natural community and changes in agricultural lands can affect the distribution and abundance of wildlife species. Table 4-12 summarizes the protection targets for agricultural communities established by the BRCP. These targets focus on protecting and maintaining sufficient agricultural croplands, in combination with native habitats, to provide conservation of covered species that use agricultural habitats. These protection targets would meet the BRCP biological objectives for ecological corridors and covered species habitat contributing to the support of covered species populations and habitat and other native species. For example, the protection targets for riceland focus on sustaining sufficient rice and associated water conveyance infrastructure that includes, and is connected to, occupied giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*) habitat; this target would concurrently protect sufficient foraging habitat to maintain the wintering population of greater sandhill cranes (*Grus*

canadensis tabida)and ensure continued agricultural production on these lands (Butte County Association of Governments 2015).

Table 4-12. Agricultural Community Protection Targets (acres)

	Total Existing in Plan Area	CAZ Habitat Protection Targets						Total Protection Target	Percent Protected by Target
		Sierra Foothills	Cascade Foothills	Northern Orchards	Southern Orchards	Basin	Sac. River		
Rice	120,316	0	0	1,317	0	21,660	205	23,182	19.3%
Irrigated pasture and irrigated cropland	21,572	0	0	796	2,534	250	200	3,780	17.5%
Total (acreage)	141,889	1,240	0	2,113	2,534	21,910	405	26,962	19%

Source: Butte County Association of Governments 2015:Table 5-5.

Note: Targets include land cover types to be protected for both conservation of natural communities and mitigation for covered activities that remove natural communities. Consequently, the amount of each natural community that is protected may be less than shown if all the permanent development covered activities and the habitat protection that is required to mitigate impacts are not implemented.

Impact AG-1: Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The covered activities under Alternative 2 are estimated to result in impacts on important farmland as summarized in Table 4-9. A total of 3% of important farmlands in the plan area—comprising approximately 2% of the existing Prime Farmland, 5% of Unique Farmland, and 10% of Farmland of Statewide Importance— would be affected under Alternative 2. These impacts include both those related to covered activities within the jurisdictions of the Local Agencies as a result of implementation of the general plans (as described in Impact AG-1 under Alternative 1) and covered activities outside the jurisdiction of the Local Agencies (e.g., implementation of conservation measures). As shown in Table 4-10, up to 1,615 acres of rice, 2,102 acres of irrigated cropland, and 105 acres of irrigated pasture land would be permanently removed by the BRCP covered activities. As shown in Table 4-11, 60% of these lands are important farmland (Butte County Association of Governments 2015). Much of the agricultural land that would be converted is considered important farmland.

Although Alternative 2 could result in the conversion of approximately 7,000 acres of important farmland to nonagricultural uses, it would also result in a protection target of 26,962 acres (or 19%) of agricultural land in the Plan Area. A total of 6,962 acres of agriculture will be protected as mitigation for the direct effects of the covered activities on agricultural habitat for covered species, and an additional 20,000 acres of agriculture will be protected to contribute to conservation of covered species. The protection target is meant to protect and maintain the working landscape of rice primarily through voluntary permanent agricultural conservation easements (Butte County Association of Governments 2015). This protected acreage would be connected with large areas of protected grasslands that are themselves connected to existing protected areas of grasslands and other natural communities (Butte County Association of Governments 2015). The protection target

would result in protecting more than 38% of agricultural types that are valuable for wildlife in the Plan Area, including 25,380 acres of rice and 9,461 acres of irrigated pasture and cropland. Although the locations of the agricultural easements and protection targets are unknown and may not be acquired because almost all the important farmland in the Plan Area consists of existing rice, irrigated cropland, irrigated pasture, and orchard/vineyards (Figures 4-1 and 4-2), it is likely that most of the 26,962 acres protected would be important farmland. The protection of this land would prohibit the conversion of this important farmland in perpetuity.

NEPA Determination: Although the agricultural protection target of Alternative 2 would preserve more than 30% of agricultural communities—most of which would likely be important farmland—the covered activities identified in the BRCP, primarily the implementation of the County and city general plans, would convert important farmland to nonagricultural uses. The general purpose of Alternative 2 is to comprehensively protect and conserve covered species and to conserve, enhance, and restore the habitat and ecosystems upon which these species depend to ensure their long-term survival in the Plan Area; Alternative 2 also aims to provide for long-term conservation and management of covered species within the Plan Area at a regional scale while allowing for compatible future land uses and development under the general plans of the Local Agencies and the Regional Transportation Plan. Nevertheless, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: Although the agricultural protection target of Alternative 2 would preserve more than 30% of agricultural communities—most of which would likely be important farmland—covered activities would convert important farmland to nonagricultural uses. Overall, this impact would be significant. The general purpose of Alternative 2 is to comprehensively protect and conserve covered species and to conserve, enhance, and restore the habitat and ecosystems upon which these species depend to ensure their long-term survival in the Plan Area; Alternative 2 also aims to provide for long-term conservation and management of covered species within the Plan Area at a regional scale while allowing for compatible future land uses and development under the general plans of the Local Agencies and the Regional Transportation Plan. Nevertheless, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-2: Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or conflict with a Williamson Act contract (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The covered activities under Alternative 2 would affect Williamson Act lands. Impacts associated with implementation of the general plans are the same as those identified in the discussion of Impact AG-2 under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2 would also entail a protection target of 26,962 acres of agricultural lands. As discussed above under Impact AG-1, the precise location of protected lands is unknown; however, given the extent of Williamson Act lands in the Plan Area it is likely that many existing and future Williamson Act lands would be preserved by this protection target. Furthermore, the protection target would not conflict with the Williamson Act because agricultural production and activity would continue to occur on these lands, thereby upholding conditions of the Williamson Act.

NEPA Determination: Although the agricultural protection target would not conflict with Williamson Act lands and implementation of the general plans of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not remove or conflict with Williamson Act lands, implementation of the County and the City of Gridley general plans would conflict with the Williamson Act. Implementation of the general plan goals, policies, and actions would not reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: Although the agricultural protection target would not conflict with Williamson Act lands and implementation of the general plans of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not remove or conflict with Williamson Act lands, implementation of the County and the City of Gridley general plans would conflict with the Williamson Act. Implementation of the general plan goals, policies, and actions would not reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-3: Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The impacts associated with implementation of the general plans are the same as those disclosed in the discussion of Impact AG-3 under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2 would also entail a protection target of more than 26,000acres of agricultural communities (approximately 38% agriculture types that are valuable for wildlife in the Plan Area), thus protecting this agricultural land from conversion to nonagricultural uses. These activities would not place incompatible land uses immediately adjacent to any existing agricultural parcels. Moreover, the conservation strategy and conservation measures protecting, preserving, or enhancing natural communities would be compatible with existing farmland, and would not result in indirect conversion of agricultural lands.

NEPA Determination: The agricultural protection target in Alternative 2 would protect important farmlands from conversion to nonagricultural uses, and the BRCP conservation strategy would not result in incompatible land uses with existing farmland. However, implementation of the County and the City of Gridley general plans would result in other changes in the environment that would convert farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. These impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: The agricultural protection target in Alternative 2 would protect important farmlands from conversion to nonagricultural uses, and the BRCP conservation strategy would not result in incompatible land uses with existing farmland. However, implementation of the County and the City of Gridley general plans would result in other changes in the environment that would convert farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. These impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Alternative 3—Reduced Development/Reduced Fill

Alternative 3 is similar to Alternative 2 except that it uses the various general plan EIR reduced development alternatives as described in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*, to create a single reduced development footprint. Covered activities under this alternative would be similar to those described in the BRCP but would be limited to the reduced development footprint for a reduced permit term of 30 years. The reduced footprint and reduced land conservation would result in fewer built structures and less ground disturbance.

It is anticipated that under Alternative 3, fewer acres of natural communities would be conserved because reduced development would provide reduced funding for the conservation strategy. Consequently, the protection target for agricultural habitat would be less than the 26,962 acres

identified under Alternative 2. However, it is anticipated that the conservation measures would be the same because the reduction of fill would be achieved through the reduced development footprint of the Local Agencies' general plans rather than through modification of the conservation measures. Consequently, the impacts related to implementation of the conservation strategy and conservation measures would be the same as under Alternative 2.

Impact AG-1: Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

Alternative 3 is estimated to result in impacts on important farmland as summarized in Table 4-9. A total of 2% of important farmland—comprising approximately 1% of the existing Prime Farmland, 5% of Unique Farmland, and 4% of Farmland of Statewide Importance— would be affected under this alternative. These impacts include both those related to covered activities within the jurisdictions of the Local Agencies as a result of implementation of the general plan (as described in the discussion of Impact AG-1 under Alternative 1), as well as those associated with covered activities outside the jurisdiction of the Local Agencies (e.g., implementation of conservation measures, water district and irrigation district activities, etc.). Although there would be less development converting agricultural lands and it would be more highly concentrated and centralized around existing urban uses, Alternative 3 is nevertheless anticipated to result in a conversion of substantial amounts of important farmland to nonagricultural uses.

As a result of reduced development within the Plan Area, it is anticipated that fewer acres of rice would be protected through voluntary easements under this alternative. Although the locations of the agricultural easements and protection targets are unknown, because almost all the important farmland in the Plan Area consists of existing rice, irrigated cropland, irrigated pasture, and orchard/vineyards (Figures 4-1 and 4-2), it is likely that most of the acres protected would be important farmland. The protection of this land would prohibit the conversion of this important farmland in perpetuity.

NEPA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 3 (expected to be less than 26,962 acres) would preserve important farmland. However, the covered activities within jurisdiction of the Local Agencies and covered activities associated with implementation of the BRCP conservation strategy and conservation measures would also convert important farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 3 (expected to be less than 26,962 acres) would preserve important farmland. However, the covered activities within jurisdiction of the Local Agencies and covered activities associated with implementation of the BRCP conservation strategy and conservation measures would also convert important farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-2: Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or conflict with a Williamson Act contract (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The BRCP covered activities under this alternative would affect Williamson Act lands. Impacts associated with implementation of the general plans would be similar, but reduced, to those identified in the discussion of Impact AG-2 under Alternative 1. Although the urban development would be more localized and dense, some Williamson Act lands would still be removed from agricultural production, except in the Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville. As disclosed in the discussion of Impact AG-2 under Alternative 2, these cities would not remove any lands from Williamson Act contracts, or such contracts are already in nonrenewal status (City of Oroville 2009a; City of Chico 2011a; City of Biggs 2013).

It is anticipated that Alternative 3 would result in the protection of fewer acres of Williamson Act lands than Alternative 2, because the reduction in development would necessitate lower protection targets. As discussed above under Impact AG-1 for this alternative, the precise location of protected lands is unknown; however, given the extent of Williamson Act lands in the Plan Area, it is likely that many existing and future Williamson Act lands would be preserved by this protection target. Furthermore, the protection target would not conflict with the Williamson Act because agricultural production and activity would continue to occur on these lands, thereby upholding conditions of the Williamson Act.

NEPA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 3 would not conflict with Williamson Act lands and the implementation of the general plans of the Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not remove or conflict with Williamson Act lands. However, the County and City of Gridley determined a conflict would occur as it is expected less than 200 acres of Williamson Act contracts would be removed from production. While goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce some of these impacts, they would not be reduced to a less-than-significant level. No feasible mitigation is available to prevent these lands from conversion to nonagricultural uses. Furthermore, the purpose of the general plan updates is to provide planning for the urban areas of the local jurisdictions. Consequently, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 3 would not conflict with Williamson Act lands and the implementation of the general plans of the Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not remove or conflict with Williamson Act lands. However, the County and City of Gridley determined a conflict would occur as it is expected less than 200 acres of Williamson Act contracts would be removed from production. While goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce some of these impacts, they would not be reduced to a less-than-significant level. No feasible mitigation is available to prevent these lands from conversion to nonagricultural uses. Furthermore, the purpose of the general plan updates is to provide planning for the urban areas of the local jurisdictions. Consequently, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-3: Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The impacts associated with implementation of the general plans are the same as those disclosed in the discussion of Impact AG-3 under Alternative 1.

Alternative 3 would result in the protection of a lesser extent of agricultural lands than under Alternative 2 (less than 26,962 acres) through implementation of the conservation strategy. Even

though the acreage would be less, this acreage would be protected from conversion to nonagricultural uses. These activities would not place incompatible land uses immediately adjacent to any existing agricultural parcels. Moreover, the conservation strategy and conservation measures protecting, preserving, or enhancing natural communities under this alternative, would be compatible with existing farmland. This alternative would not result in indirect conversion of agricultural lands.

NEPA Determination: Although the agricultural protection target of Alternative 3 would protect important farmlands from conversion to nonagricultural uses and the conservation strategy would not result in incompatible land uses with existing farmland, implementation of the general plans for the County and the City of Gridley would result in other changes in the environment that would convert farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: Although the agricultural protection target of Alternative 3 would protect important farmlands from conversion to nonagricultural uses and the conservation strategy would not result in incompatible land uses with existing farmland, implementation of the general plans for the County and the City of Gridley would result in other changes in the environment that would convert farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands in these jurisdictions, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Alternative 4—Greater Conservation

Alternative 4 would be similar to Alternative 2 except that under Alternative 4, the conservation strategy would include the conservation of an additional 9,850 acres of grassland and 35,310 acres of riceland. Alternative 4 would include the same conservation measures as Alternative 2, and all other acreage protection targets for natural communities/land types would be the same as described under Alternative 2. Therefore, impact mechanisms for agricultural resources would be similar to those described for Alternative 2.

Impact AG-1: Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The impacts associated with covered activities that do not include the preservation of grasslands or riceland would be the same as those disclosed in the discussion of Impact AG-1 under Alternative 2: the conversion of approximately 7,000 acres (or 3%) of important farmland in the Plan Area. Not all of the covered restoration activities are expected to convert important farmland because some of the activities would actually place conservation easements on the farmland and allow the land to continue to be in production (discussed further below).

This alternative would result in the preservation and conservation of more ricelands than Alternative 2. While the ricelands might not constitute an increase of agricultural land in the Plan Area—because the easements would likely be placed on lands already in rice cultivation—protection under the conservation strategy would ensure that the land would not be converted to nonagricultural uses. As such, Alternative 4 would protect a considerable amount of important farmland from the risk of future conversion to nonagricultural uses.

NEPA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 4 would preserve important farmland. However, the covered activities within jurisdiction of the Local Agencies would convert important farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans or mitigation measures could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 4 would preserve important farmland. However, the covered activities within jurisdiction of the Local Agencies and covered activities associated with implementation of the conservation strategy and conservation measures would also convert important farmland to nonagricultural uses. While the goals, policies, and actions of the general plans or mitigation measures could reduce impacts on some of the agricultural lands, it would not reduce them to a less-than-significant level. Consequently, the impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-2: Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or conflict with a Williamson Act contract (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The covered activities under Alternative 4 would affect Williamson Act lands. Impacts associated with implementation of the general plans are the same as those identified in the discussion of Impact AG-2 under Alternative 1.

The location of additional ricelands to be preserved under Alternative 4 is unknown; whether they would be located on lands either currently under Williamson Act contract or might later be enrolled is also unknown. However, rice production is a compatible use with the Williamson Act because it is an agricultural use. Consequently, protection of additional ricelands would not result in a conflict with a Williamson Act contract.

NEPA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 4 would not conflict with Williamson Act lands and the implementation of the general plans of the Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not remove or conflict with Williamson Act lands. However, the County and the City of Gridley determined that there would be a conflict with the Williamson Act within their jurisdictions. While goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce some of these impacts, they would not be reduced to a less-than-significant level. No feasible mitigation is available to prevent these lands from conversion to nonagricultural uses. Consequently, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 4 would not conflict with Williamson Act lands and the implementation of the general plans of the Cities of Biggs, Chico, and Oroville would not remove or conflict with Williamson Act lands. However, the County and the City of Gridley determined that there would be a conflict with the Williamson Act within their jurisdictions. While goals, policies, and actions of the general plans could reduce some of these impacts, they would not be reduced to a less-than-significant level. No feasible mitigation is available to prevent these lands from conversion to nonagricultural uses. Consequently, this impact would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-3: Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use (NEPA: significant and unavoidable; CEQA: significant and unavoidable)

The impacts associated with implementation of the general plans are the same as those disclosed in the discussion of Impact AG-3 under Alternative 1.

Those impacts associated with implementation of the conservation strategy that do not involve grasslands or ricelands would be the same as those disclosed in the discussion of Impact AG-1 under Alternative 2. The location of additional ricelands to be preserved under Alternative 4 is unknown, but they would be located on existing agricultural lands. While the ricelands might not constitute an increase of agricultural land in the Plan Area—because the easements would likely be placed on lands already in rice cultivation—protection under the conservation strategy would ensure that the land would not be converted to nonagricultural uses. Thus, the Alternative 4 would protect a considerable amount of important farmland from the risk of future conversion to nonagricultural uses; moreover, such protection would not result in an incompatible land use such that indirect conversion of farmland might occur.

NEPA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 4 would protect important farmlands from conversion to nonagricultural uses and the conservation strategy would not result in incompatible land uses with existing farmland. However, the County and the City of Gridley determined that implementation of the general plans would result in other changes in the environment that would convert farmland to nonagricultural uses. Consequently, the effect would be significant and unavoidable.

CEQA Determination: The agricultural protection target of Alternative 4 would protect important farmlands from conversion to nonagricultural uses and the conservation strategy would not result in incompatible land uses with existing farmland. However, the County and the City of Gridley determined that implementation of the general plans would result in other changes in the environment that would convert farmland to nonagricultural uses. Consequently, the effect would be significant and unavoidable.

4.2.4 Cumulative Analysis

Methods and Approach

The cumulative analysis for agricultural resources is a qualitative evaluation using the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects listed in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2, under *Cumulative Impacts*. This analysis considered agricultural and urban development projects, including roadway projects, and water supply development projects; the general plan EIR impact determinations for cumulative impacts, where applicable; and the impact determinations identified above for the various alternatives.

This analysis determines whether the covered activities not analyzed in previous environmental documents would result in cumulatively considerable incremental contribution that, when combined with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would result in a cumulatively significant impact.

Cumulative Impacts

Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects are identified in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2, under *Cumulative Impacts*. Such projects have resulted in an increase in agricultural uses in the Plan Area due to conversion of land to agricultural uses. However, in the last few decades, there has been a substantial conversion of agricultural lands to urban and suburban uses in the Plan Area, which has resulted in cumulatively significant effects on agricultural resources.

Alternative 1—No Project (No Plan Implementation)

The Local Agencies determined that cumulatively considerable and significant impacts on agricultural resources would result from the conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural uses. Accordingly, past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects—including implementation of the general plan—would result in cumulatively considerable and significant impacts. Therefore, Alternative 1 would result in an incremental contribution to cumulative impacts.

Alternative 2—Proposed Action

The Local Agencies determined that cumulatively considerable and significant impacts on agricultural resources would result from the conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural uses. Accordingly, past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects—including implementation of the general plan—would result in cumulatively considerable and significant impacts on agricultural resources. Although the covered activities associated with implementation of the conservation strategy and conservation measures would protect important farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses, the extent of conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses as a result of covered activities would be significant. Consequently, Alternative 2 would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to cumulative impacts on agriculture.

Alternative 3—Reduced Development/Reduced Fill and Alternative 4—Greater Conservation

Although the extent of conversion of agricultural lands associated with implementation of the conservation strategy and conservation measures varies among these two alternatives, the mechanism and implications are the same as under Alternative 2. Each of these alternatives would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to cumulative impacts on agriculture.

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