5.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS, IMPACTS, MITIGATION MEASURES AND LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

5.1 AGRICULTURE RESOURCES

This section describes existing agriculture resources within the project area, potential impacts, recommended mitigation measures to help reduce or avoid impacts and the level of significance of project impacts after mitigation.

5.1.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

5.1.1.1 Agricultural Land Use Trends

The project area is located in Orange County where substantial conversion from agricultural to urban land use has occurred. The decrease in agricultural use and the conversion of farmland into urban uses has been primarily due to the effects of urban expansion, lack of water, and economic considerations. According to the Resources Element of the Orange County General Plan, "urban areas encroach on agricultural lands throughout the county creating pressure to convert farmland to urban uses. The rising costs of irrigation water, agricultural land tax rates, labor costs, and damage from vandalism have increased production costs making it more difficult to have a successful agricultural operation. Growth projections through 2020 indicate the continued urbanization of the County. This urban development will continue to convert agricultural acreage to more intensive land uses" (County of Orange 2005b).

Table 5.1-1 shows the change in land use from agriculture to urban and other land uses between 1984 and 2010 for the County of Orange according to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) (CDC 2013).

LAND USE CATECODX ¹	TOTAL ACREAGE INVENTORIED					
LAND USE CATEGORY	1984	1990	2000	2010		
Prime Farmland	19,945	14,537	10,247	3,243		
Farmland of Statewide	2.005	1 220	824	267		
Importance	2,093	1,550	034	307		
Unique Farmland	4,495	5,299	5,872	3,654		
Farmland of Local Importance	0	0	0	0		
Important Farmland Subtotal	26,535	21,166	16,953	7,264		
Grazing Land	40,651	39,863	37,963	37,639		
Agricultural Land Subtotal	67,186	61,029	54,916	44,903		
Urban and Built-Up Land	230,561	252,087	273,384	289,172		
Other Land	211,020	195,480	180,188	174,667		
Water Area	692	863	972	972		
Total Area Inventoried	509,459	509,459	509,460	509,714		

TABLE 5.1-1 COUNTY OF ORANGE CHANGE IN LAND USE SUMMARY

Source: CDC (2013).

Note:

¹ Refer to descriptions of the various land use categories in Section 5.1.1.3 (Regulatory Setting).

As shown in Table 5.1-1, the total agricultural land containing Prime, Unique, and Statewide-Important Farmland in the County of Orange has decreased from 26,535 acres in 1984 to 7,264 acres in 2010. This

decrease represents an approximate 73 percent loss of important farmland over the 26-year period inventoried by the California Department of Conservation (CDC). Because of this substantial decrease, Policy 2, Agriculture, in the Goals, Objectives & Policies section of the Resources Element of the Orange County General Plan, is "to encourage to the extent feasible the preservation and utilization of agricultural resources as a natural resource and economic asset" (County of Orange 2005b).

5.1.1.2 Project Area Agricultural Land Use

The project area is located within a 2-mile stretch of the Santa Ana River (SAR) Parkway in northeastern Specifically, it is located between Gypsum Canyon Road on the west and the Orange County. Orange/Riverside/San Bernardino County boundaries on the east, and between the BNSF railroad and La Palma Avenue on the north and State Route (SR) 91 on the south. The majority of the project area is located within the City of Yorba Linda, with the easternmost portion of the project area located within unincorporated Orange County.

The project area contains Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland, as mapped per the FMMP. Figure 5.1-1 (Project Area Farmland) shows the location of important farmland land use categories within the project area. Table 5.1-2 provides the acreage associated with the mapped important farmland.

LAND USE CATEGORY	Acres
Prime Farmland	14.19
Farmland of Statewide Importance	1.15
Unique Farmland	3.41
Farmland of Local Importance	0
Important Farmland Total	18.75
S CDC (2012)	

TABLE 5.1-2 PROJECT AREA IMPORTANT FARMLAND

Source: CDC (2013).

As shown in Table 5.1-2, a total of 18.75 acres of important farmland occurs within the project area. Additionally, there are 4.27 acres of other active farmland not mapped by the FMMP within the project area, bringing the total amount of active agricultural lands uses within the project area to approximately 23.0 acres. This farmland is associated with the cultivation of citrus crops by a private party which is permitted by the County through an encroachment permit. The County may terminate the encroachment permit at any time at its convenience.

5.1.1.3 **Regulatory Setting**

The preservation of agricultural activities and soils has been an explicit goal of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the CDC. Agricultural activities have a broad definition which includes activities associated with ranching with space/area for agricultural activities to occur. Agricultural soils are limited non-renewable resources that are usually confined to a particular location. However, not all agricultural activities occur on soils classified as appropriate for agriculture and not all soils rated as excellent farming soils are used for crop production. Generally, policies implemented to preserve agriculture are aimed at either protection of the space or protection of the soil.



Scale 1 : 10,800 1" = 900 feet	0	450	900	1,800	2,700
					Feet

Figure 5.1-1 Project Area Farmland

Santa Ana River Parkway Extension Project

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

In 1982, the CDC enacted the FMMP in response to a critical need for assessing the location, quality, and quantity of agricultural lands and conversion of these lands over time. The FMMP is a non-regulatory program and provides a consistent and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California. For the purpose of inventorying land, categorical definitions of important farmlands were developed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). These definitions gave recognition to the land's suitability for agricultural production. Seven categories of land use are identified in the FMMP and include Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, Urban and Built-Up Land, and Other Land.

Prime Farmland

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

Farmland of Statewide Importance

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

Unique Farmland

Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

Farmland of Local Importance

Land of importance to the local agricultural economy is determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.

The FMMP also includes Grazing Land, Urban and Built-up Land, Other Land, and Water categories described below.

Grazing Land

This classification indicates that existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities. The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres. Grazing Land does not include land previously designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance, and heavily brushed, timbered, excessively steep or rocky lands which restrict the access and movement of livestock.

Urban and Built-up Land

Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 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

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

Water

Perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

5.1.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

To determine whether there is a significant impact to Agriculture Resources, Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, recommends examining whether the proposed 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.
- 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.¹

5.1.3 METHODOLOGY RELATED TO AGRICULTURE RESOURCES

To assess impacts to agricultural resources, existing agricultural resources and/or areas determined to be of importance or value were identified from maps, data, and other resources available from the CDC's Division of Land Resources Protection, and the General Plans of the City of Yorba Linda and County of Orange.

As provided in Appendix G of CEQA Guidelines, in determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Model (1997) prepared by the CDC as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. A California LESA Model was prepared to quantitatively assess the significance of the proposed project's impacts related to farmland (the LESA Model is provided in Appendix C of this Draft EIR). The LESA Model is an approach for rating the relative quality of land resources based upon specific measurable features. The LESA Model was first

¹ As discussed in Section 4.0 (Effects Found Not To Be Significant) of this Draft EIR, the project area is not located on forest land, nor would the project involve the conversion of forest land to a non-forest use. Therefore, this section focuses only on conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

developed by the Federal NRCS in 1981. It was subsequently adapted in 1990 by the CDC to evaluate land use decisions that affect the conversion of agriculture lands in California. The formulation of the California LESA Model is intended to provide Lead Agencies, under CEQA, with an optional methodology to ensure that significant effects on the environment of agricultural land conversions are quantitatively and consistently considered in the environmental review process.

For determining the potential CEQA significance resulting from the conversion of agricultural lands to some other purpose, the California LESA Model includes scoring thresholds comprised of two Land Evaluation (LE) factors (Land Capability Classification [LCC] Rating and Storie Index Rating) and four Site Assessment (SA) factors (Project Size Rating, Water Resource Availability Rating, Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating, and Surrounding Protected Land Rating). For a given project, each of these factors is separately rated on a 100-point scale, and the total points determine whether agricultural land is significant (refer to Appendix C of this Draft EIR for additional details).

The LESA assessment prepared for the proposed project was based on information obtained from the USDA NRCS Geospatial Data Gateway and Web Soil Survey (USDA-NRCS 2015), the *California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Handbook* (CDC 1997).

5.1.4 POTENTIAL IMPACTS

5.1.4.1 Conversion of Important Farmland

The project area contains 14.19 acres of Prime Farmland, 3.41 acres of Unique Farmland, and 1.15 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance. As discussed previously, this farmland is associated with the cultivation of citrus crops, which are permitted by the County through an encroachment permit with a private party. The County may terminate the encroachment permit at any time at its convenience. Implementation of the proposed project would provide new trails and bikeways on the north and south banks of the SAR, three non-vehicular bridges, and other associated amenities. As shown in Figure 5.1-2 (Farmland Impacts), one of the non-vehicular bridges (Bridge #1) would be constructed on, and would bisect, existing Prime Farmland.

The proposed project would result in approximately 0.22 acre of temporary impacts (i.e., disturbance associated with construction staging/laydown, access, and work area) and 0.13 acre of permanent impacts (i.e., permanent loss) to Prime Farmland. It is anticipated the Prime Farmland that is temporarily affected or removed during construction would continue to be available for agricultural use following construction of the proposed project. Nevertheless, implementation of the proposed project would result in the permanent conversion of 0.13 acre of land designated as Prime Farmland pursuant to the FMMP.

It should be noted that the permanent staging area component of the proposed project (located on the north bank of the SAR, near La Palma Avenue just east of Gypsum Canyon Road) would also be located on land currently being used to cultivate citrus crops. Although these particular citrus crops are not situated on land designated as important farmland pursuant to the FMMP, they are located on high-quality soils suitable for agricultural uses. The proposed project would result in approximately 0.76 acre of temporary impacts and 0.57 acre of permanent impacts to these citrus crops (i.e., other active farmland).

In total the proposed project would temporarily affect 0.98 acre of farmland (0.22 acre of Prime Farmland and 0.76 acre of other active agricultural land) and permanently convert of 0.70 acre of farmland (0.13 acre of land designated as Prime Farmland and 0.57 acre of other active farmland).



Scale 1 : 4,800 1" = 400 feet	0	200	400	800	1,200
					Feet

Figure 5.1-2 Farmland Impacts

- Santa Ana River Parkway Extension Project

California LESA Model

Consistent with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the Orange County Public Works Department (lead agency) used the California LESA Model (refer to Appendix C of this Draft EIR) to determine if implementation of the proposed project would significantly impact agricultural resources (Farmland). As shown in Table 5.1-3, the final LESA score for the proposed project is 36.2.

	Factor Rating (1-100 Points)	Factor Weighting ¹	Weighted Factor Rating	
Land Evaluation (LE)				
Land Capability Classification (LCC) Rating	55.0 0.25		13.8	
Storie Index	50.2	0.25	12.6	
LE Subtotal		0.50	26.4	
Site Assessment (SA)				
Project Size Rating	30	0.15	4.5	
Water Resources Availability Rating	5.0	0.15	0.8	
Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating	0	0.15	0	
Surrounding Protected Resources Lands Rating	90	0.05	4.5	
SA Subtotal 0.50			9.8	
Total			36.2	

TABLE 5.1-3FINAL LESA SCORE SUMMARY FOR THE PROJECT SITE

Source: Data compiled by AECOM in 2015.

Notes:

¹The LE and SA factor weights are shown on page 29 of the LESA instruction manual (CDC 1997)

Based on Table 5.1-4 and as described in the LESA analysis, a final LESA score of 0 to 39 points is not considered significant.

Total LESA Score	Scoring Decision
0 to 39 Points	Not considered significant.
40 to 59 Points	Considered significant only if Land Evaluation (LE) and Site Assessment (SA) subscores
	are each greater than or equal to 20 points.
60 to 79 Points	Considered significant unless either LE or SA subscore is less than 20 points.
80 to 100 Points	Considered significant.

TABLE 5.1-4 CALIFORNIA LESA MODEL SCORING THRESHOLD

Source: CDC 1997:31.

Therefore, impacts of the proposed project related to the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use would be less than significant.

5.1.4.2 Other Changes Which Could Result in the Conversion of Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

Implementation of the proposed project would not have a significant indirect effect of increasing development pressure and accelerating the loss of other agricultural land in the surrounding area. This is because the proposed project consists of recreational trails and associated amenities and does not introduce a new land use to the project area. As such, implementation of the proposed project would not

involve other changes in the existing environment which would result in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use. Therefore, no impact would occur.

5.1.5 MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures would be required.

5.1.6 LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Implementation of the proposed project would not result in significant impacts related to agriculture resources.