

## 3.4 Agricultural and Forestry Resources

This section of the Final Environmental Impact Report evaluates the consistency of the proposed Eagle Mountain Pumped Storage Project (Project) with the applicable plans and policies that govern agricultural land use and forestry in and around the Project area. This section discusses and evaluates agricultural and forestry resources in the Project area.

### 3.4.1 Regulatory Setting

The following federal, state, and local laws and policies apply to the protection of agricultural and forestry resources. The proposed Project will be constructed and operated in conformance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards (LORS).

#### 3.4.1.1 State

**Williamson Act of California** (California Land Conservation Act of 1965) is a law that provides relief of property tax to owners of farmland and open-space land in exchange for a 10-year agreement that the land will not be developed or otherwise converted to another use. The intent of the Williamson Act is to promote voluntary land conservation, particularly farmland conservation. The proposed Project would not convert farmland to a non-agricultural land.

#### 3.4.1.2 Local

**Riverside County General Plan – Eastern Riverside County Land Use Plan.** Local government jurisdiction of non-federal lands includes Riverside County, which has plans and controls land uses within their jurisdictional boundaries through the development of land use planning and zoning ordinances. The Project study area lies within Riverside County’s Desert Center Land Use Planning Area. The vast majority of the planning area is classified as “Rural Open Space” and zoned as “Natural Assets.”

Within the Desert Center Land Use Planning Area, Riverside County has established two specific Policy Areas. Policy Areas are specific geographic districts that contain unique characteristics that merit detailed attention and focused policies. The Eagle Mountain Policy Area encompasses the Project site, proposed landfill, and the Eagle Mountain townsite. Outside this specific policy area boundary, “Rural Open Space” dominates Riverside County land use designation, with the exception of an area of “Rural Open Space-Mineral Resources” to the north/northwest of the Central Project Area.

#### 3.4.1.3 Private Lands

The Desert Center Policy Area encompasses currently undeveloped land located adjacent to and north of the small, unincorporated community of Desert Center. The terminus of the proposed transmission line and substation are included within this Policy Area.

Private lands in the study area consist of a few residential/undeveloped parcels, some commercial area near Desert Center, scattered agricultural areas, and property owned by the

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) and Kaiser Eagle Mountain, LLC (Kaiser). The transmission line and water pipeline routes will cross some of these private land holdings.

### **3.4.2 Existing Conditions**

Several small agricultural areas used for irrigated cropland are located southeast of the Central Project Area (Figure 3.4-1). While the area is not mapped as “Important Farmland” by the State Department of Conservation or considered to be an important agricultural area as described in the Riverside County General Plan, approximately 994 acres within three areas are under California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act Contracts (Figure 3.4-2). Williamson Act contracts basically enable local governments to provide tax incentives to landowners in turn for protection of agricultural land. Currently, agriculture on the indicated Williamson Act lands is inactive and appears to be abandoned.

Irrigated crops grown in the area initially included jojoba, a seed crop, and asparagus. Approximately 5,000 acres of jojoba were grown in 1992 (Riverside County Agricultural Commissioner, 1992). However, due to difficulty in harvesting the seed crop, this acreage has been decreasing. An evaluation of agricultural land use inventoried in 2005 (field verified by Eagle Crest Energy Company in 2007) verifies this decrease in agricultural production. Agricultural lands, which are currently inactive and/or abandoned cropland, total approximately 5,200 acres. A small number of crop types that are currently in production in the area including jojoba, asparagus, citrus, dates, and palms. Based on a field verification of aerial photo information, it is concluded that currently active cropland in the Project vicinity is approximately 1,200 acres.

### **3.4.3 Potential Environmental Impacts**

#### **3.4.3.1 Methodology**

The methodology used for impact analysis involved a comparison and assessment of the proposed Project to relevant land use objectives and policies, surrounding land uses, and site features including agricultural resources. The analysis was conducted through a combination of document review, field visits, and communication with resource agency staff.

#### **3.4.3.2 Thresholds of Significance**

The State Water Resources Control Board concludes that the Project may have significant impacts on agricultural or forestry resources if it does any of the following:

- (a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agriculture use
- (b) Conflict with existing zoning for agriculture use or a Williamson Act contract

- (c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code §12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code §4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code §51104(g))
- (d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use and/or
- (e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which due to their location or nature could result in conversation of Farmland to non-agriculture use or conversion of forest land to non-forest land

### 3.4.3.3 Environmental Impact Assessment

The Project would not convert prime farmland, conflict with existing county zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract, or result in the conversion of farmland to a non-agricultural use.

The Project does not conflict with zoning for, or cause rezoning of forest land, timberland, or timberland zoned “Timberland Production.” The Project does not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

The proposed water pipeline will cross undeveloped desert and some previously-farmed lands. In spring 2009, inventories indicate that farmed lands are not presently in active use for agriculture (Figure 3.4-2). The open-cut, sidecast construction method proposed for the pipeline would cause temporary impacts to any active cropland. After pipeline installation and settling of restored surface soils, farming activity can be resumed over the pipeline. Pipeline construction will follow best management practices identified in the Erosion Control Plan Section 12.2. Construction-related impacts to farmed lands have been avoided through placement of the route adjacent to the road and transmission line ROWs.

#### Environmental Impact Assessment Summary:

- (a) *Would the Project convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agriculture use?* No. There is no active farmland within the Project boundary.
- (b) *Would the Project conflict with existing zoning for agriculture use or a Williamson Act contract?* No. There are no conflicts with existing zoning for agriculture of Williamson Act contracts.
- (c) *Would the Project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?* No. There are no forested lands in the Project area.
- (d) *Would the Project result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?* No. There are no forested lands in the Project area.

(e) *Would the Project involve other changes in the existing environment which due to their location or nature could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agriculture use or conversion of forest land to non-forest land?* No. There are no active farmlands or forested lands in the Project boundary.

**Impact 3.4-1. Impacts to Agricultural Lands or Forestry Lands.** None of the facilities or structures of the Project are anticipated to have a significant adverse effect on existing agricultural lands or forest; therefore this impact is *less than significant*. No currently active farmland or forest is proposed to be crossed by the water pipeline or transmission line corridor. The Central Project Area is within mining pit and therefore does not have the ability to impact active farmland or forestry resources.

### **3.3.4 Mitigation Program**

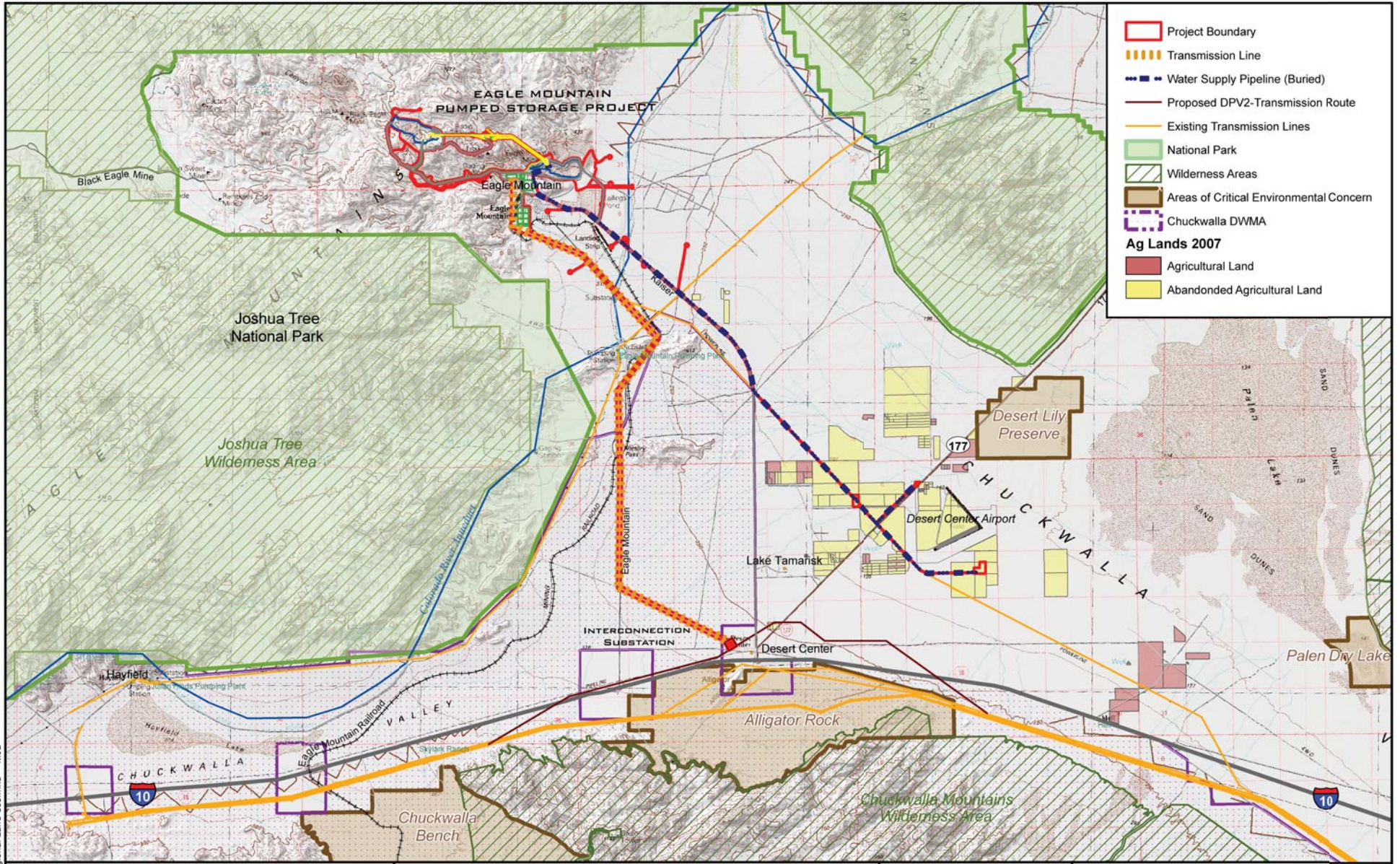
No mitigation is required for impacts to agricultural or forestry resources.

### **3.4.5 Level of Significance after Mitigation Program**

No mitigation is required for impacts to agricultural or forestry resources.

No residual impacts to agricultural or forestry resources would occur with Project implementation.





- Project Boundary
- Transmission Line
- Water Supply Pipeline (Buried)
- Proposed DPV2-Transmission Route
- Existing Transmission Lines
- National Park
- Wilderness Areas
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Chuckwalla DWMA
- Ag Lands 2007**
- Agricultural Land
- Abandoned Agricultural Land

04-Jun-2010 Figure 3.4-1 Regional Land Use.mxd MJD

SOURCE:  
Open Space- BLM  
Ag Lands- Field investigation 2007



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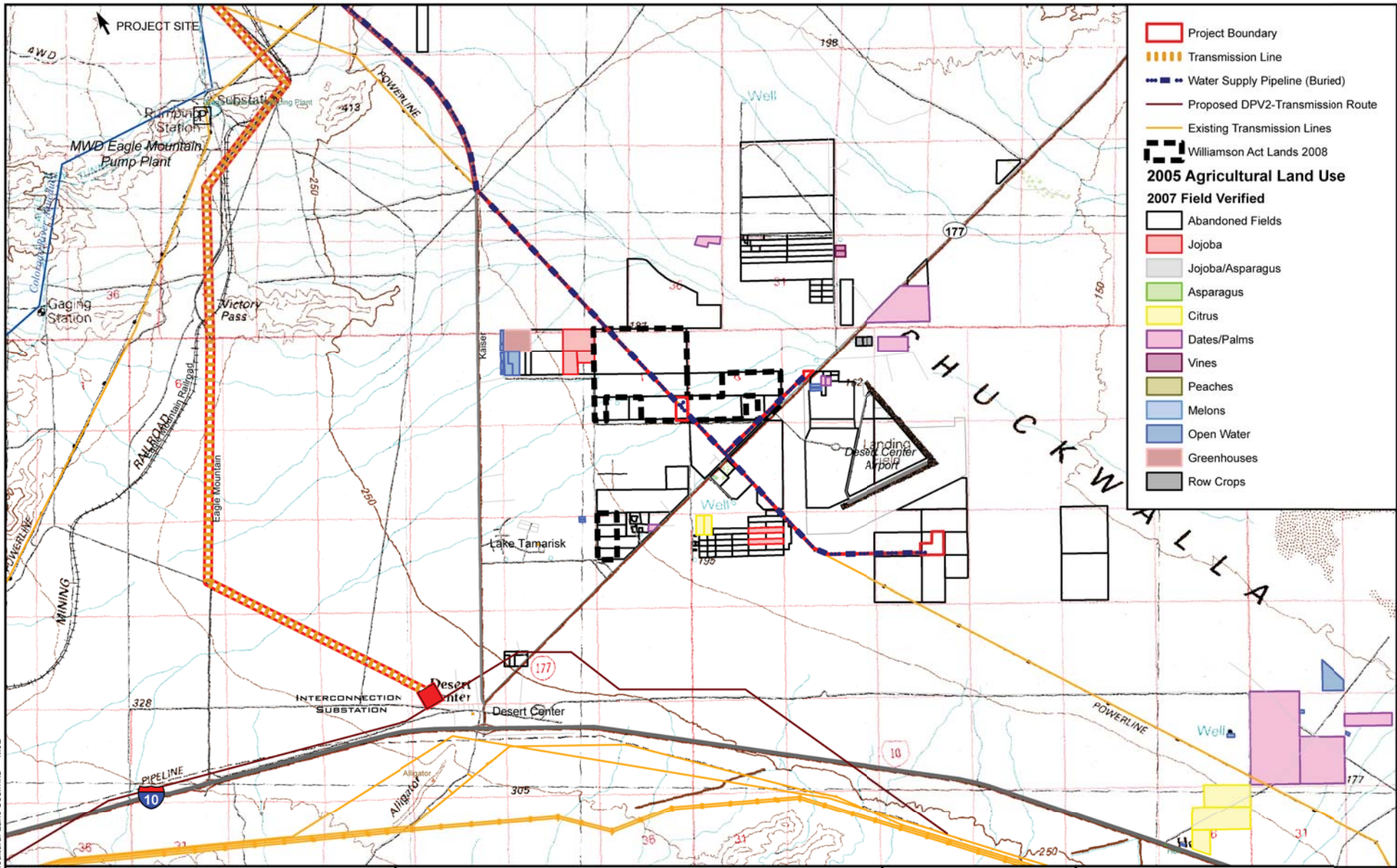


REGIONAL LAND USE

July 2013

Figure 3.4-1





04-Jun-2010 Figure 3.4-2 Agricultural Land Use.mxd MJD

SOURCE:  
Open Space- BLM  
Ag Lands- Field investigation 2007



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AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

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Figure 3.4-2