4.2.1 Introduction

This section of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) addresses potential impacts of the proposed project on agricultural and forest resources. This section also provides the environmental and regulatory settings and discusses mitigation measures to reduce impacts, where applicable.

4.2.2 Environmental Setting

Regional

Kern County has a long history of agricultural operations. Kern County covers 8,202 square miles, including 1,373 square miles of harvested agricultural land and 2,317 square miles of range land (Kern County Department of Agriculture, 2009). In 2008 17 percent of the total land was harvested land and 28 percent of County land was rangeland. Agriculture in Kern County was worth $4 billion in 2008. The top five commodities during that year were almonds, grapes, milk, carrots and citrus. Kern County is growing rapidly and other non-agricultural uses are encroaching on agricultural lands. The California Department of Conservation (DOC) 2006–2008 Land Use Conversion table shows that 3,423 acres of land, including all of the categories of important farmland, grazing land, and other land, were converted to non-agricultural use. 16 square miles of this land were converted to urban land (DOC, 2009).

Local

The project site is located at the base of the Tehachapi and Piute Mountains in the Mojave Desert, just west of the Fremont Valley (see Figure 3-1). The project site is entirely designated for extensive agriculture and is largely agriculturally zoned. As discussed in Section 3.4, “Environmental Setting,” zoning for the 13,535-acre project site is Exclusive Agriculture (A); Limited Agriculture and Mobilehome Combining (A-1 MH). The project proponents are requesting the County change the A-1 to A WE (Exclusive Agriculture, Wind Energy Combining District) and adopt Wind Energy (WE) Combining District overlays for the remaining A-zoned parcels, with the exception of Zone Map 132 which would add both a WE overlay as well as a Floodplain (FP) Combining District overlay.

While there are parcels that are being farmed in the Tehachapi Valley area located 14 miles southwest of the site, these lands are not adjacent to the project site and there is no active farming within a 10-mile radius of the project site. Additionally, the project site has no developed water source. Therefore, the agricultural productivity of the land is limited. The project site is designated as open range land and has historically been used for grazing (mainly cattle and sheep) with portions of it continuing to be used for grazing. None of the lands are classified as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland, and no parcels within the project site are subject to Williamson Act land use contracts. The nearest Prime Farmland is located over 11 miles west of the proposed project site. No portion of the site is subject to a Williamson Act land use contract and the nearest contracted land is located more than 3 miles west of the project site.