Sacramento Municipal Utility District

Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project

Draft Environmental Impact Report • May 2022
Reflects Revisions Made in the Final EIR on July 11, 2022
State Clearinghouse #2022030186

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Lead Agency:

Sacramento Municipal Utility District
6201 S Street, MS B209
Sacramento, CA 95817-1899

or

P.O. Box 15830 MS B209
Sacramento, CA 95852-1830
Attn: Rob Ferrera
(916) 732-6676 or rob.ferrera@smud.org

Prepared by:

Ascent Environmental
455 Capitol Mall, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814
Contact: Cori Resha
Cori.Resha@ascentenvironmental.com

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AB	Assembly Bill
AQAP	air quality attainment plans
BACT	Best Available Control Technology
BMP	best management practices
BP	Before Present
CAAQS	California Ambient Air Quality Standards
CalEEMod	California Emissions Estimator Model
CARB	California Air Resources Board
CBC	California Building Code
CCAA	California Clean Air Act
CCR	California Code of Regulations
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
CESA	California Endangered Species Act
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
City	City of Rancho Cordova
CNDDB	California Natural Diversity Database
CNPS	California Native Plant Society
Cordova Park Project	Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project
County	Sacramento County
CRHR	California Register of Historical Resources
CRPR	California Rare Plant Rank
CVFPB	Central Valley Flood Protection Board
CWA	Clean Water Act
DAC	disadvantaged communities
District	Folsom Mining District
DPS	Distinct Population Segment
Draft EIR	draft environmental impact report
DSH	diameter at standard height
EFH	Essential Fish Habitat
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

ESA	federal Endangered Species Act
ESU	Evolutionary Significant Unit
GGRF	Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund
GHG	greenhouse gas
IS	Initial Study
kV	kilovolt
lbs/day	pounds per day
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
MND	Mitigated Negative Declaration
MRZ	Mineral Resource Zones
$MTCO_2e$	metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent
NAHC	Native American Heritage Commission
NCIC	North Central Information Center
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NO_2	nitrogen dioxide
NOP	Notice of Preparation
NO_X	oxides of nitrogen
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPPA	California Native Plant Protection Act
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NRMP	Natural Resources Management Plan
O_3	ozone
OPR	Governor's Office of Planning and Research
PM	particulate matter
$PM_{2.5}$	particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter
PM_{10}	particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter
Porter-Cologne Act	Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act
ppm	parts per million
PRC	Public Resources Code

project	Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project
ROG	reactive organic gas
RWQCB	regional water quality control board
SB	Senate Bill
SIP	State Implementation Plan
SMAQMD	Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District
SMUD	Sacramento Municipal Utility District
SNAHC	Sacramento Native American Health Center Inc.
SO_2	sulfur dioxide
SVAB	Sacramento Valley Air Basin
TAC	toxic air contaminants
TPZ	tree protection zone
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Service
WDR	waste discharge requirements
WEZ	work exclusion zone

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This summary is provided in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15123. As stated in the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15123(a), "an environmental impact report (EIR) shall contain a brief summary of the proposed actions and their consequences. The language of the summary should be as clear and simple as reasonably practical." As required by the Guidelines, this section includes: (1) a summary description of the project; (2) a synopsis of environmental impacts and recommended mitigation measures; (3) identification of the alternatives evaluated and of the environmentally superior alternative; and (4) a discussion of the areas of controversy associated with the project.

Summary Description of the Project

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) replaces aging electrical infrastructure as part of its routine maintenance and upgrade protocols. Accordingly, SMUD proposes to install approximately 0.6 miles of 12 kilovolt (kV) underground cable, approximately 2.12 miles of 69kV underground cable and up to 13 new utility vaults in the City of Rancho Cordova, near the location of existing 12kV and 69kV underground cables that are approaching the end of their operational lives. Installation of the new cable, conduit and utility vaults would be done by open trenching. Where possible, the new conduit will be installed to align with the existing cable, which would be abandoned in place.

Project Objectives

SMUD's objectives for the project are to:

- Provide safe and reliable electrical service to existing and proposed development in the Rancho Cordova area.
- Facilitate efficient maintenance of underground cables and infrastructure.
- Maximize the use of available SMUD property and resources.
- Minimize impacts to nearby sensitive receptors.
- Minimize potential conflicts with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova.

Project Location

The project is in the City of Rancho Cordova. The proposed 12kV alignment begins at SMUD's Cordova Park Substation located near the intersection of Ambassador Drive and

Trails Court. The 12kV path travels to Ambassador Drive where it follows the road for approximately 0.6 miles until it connects to existing riser poles just east of Ellison Drive.

The proposed 69kV alignment begins on the northwest side of Coloma Road, approximately 200 feet southeast of Sierra Madre Court. The 69kV alignment heads northwest from Coloma Road, crossing through the property of Mills Middle School and Cordova High School, until it connects to SMUD's Cordova Park Substation. From the substation, the 69kV alignment heads northeast nearly adjacent to, but outside, the backyards of homes facing Ambassador Drive until it reaches Rossmoor Drive. At Rossmoor Drive, the 69kV alignment turns and heads north towards the American River. The 69kV alignment stays along Rossmoor Drive until its termination near the American River, when the 69kV alignment connects to existing riser poles located between the boundaries of Rossmoor Drive and the American River. The proposed 69kV alignment is approximately 2.12 miles in length.

The existing 12kV and 69kV lines that run through the American River Parkway would be abandoned in place, and new conduit containing the new lines would be installed in separate trenches within the alignments described above. The proposed 12kV and 69kV alignments are highly disturbed due to vehicle traffic, including areas of pavement and dirt. There are residences adjacent to portions of the proposed 12kV and 69kV alignments. Along Ambassador Drive, the 12kV circuit would be installed beneath existing roadways, sidewalks, or curbs and gutters. Along Rossmoor Drive, the 69kV circuit would be installed beneath existing pavement or within an existing fuel break adjacent to the pavement.

Project Description

Project Elements

The project involves the installation of approximately 0.6 miles of new underground 12kV electrical lines (cable) and approximately 2.12 miles of new underground 69kV cable to replace existing underground 12kV and 69kV cable buried directly in the ground (direct-buried) that was installed in the 1970s. The new 12kV cable would be installed in conduits buried in dirt while the new 69kV cable would be installed in conduits housed in concrete-encased duct banks to provide pathways and adequate spacing. The proposed project also involves installation of up to 13 new utility vaults along the 69kV alignment to allow access for electric cable pulling, splicing and maintenance.

The existing direct-buried 12kV cable begins at SMUD's Cordova Park Substation and extends approximately 0.6 miles east, where it connects to existing riser poles.

The existing direct-buried 69kV cable begins on the northwest side of Coloma Road, approximately 200 feet southeast of Sierra Madre Court, and extends north across the eastern property lines of Mills Middle School, Cordova High School and Hagen Park until it enters SMUD's Cordova Park Substation located near the intersection of Ambassador Drive and Trails Court (approximately 0.45 miles). From SMUD's substation, the existing

69kV cable extends east beneath a dirt path for approximately 0.70 miles when it turns north and cuts across the American River Parkway towards the American River for approximately 0.75 miles. Note that the total existing 69kV alignment is approximately 1.9 miles and the proposed 69kV alignment is approximately 2.12 miles. The extra mileage is due to deviating from the existing route to align with Rossmoor Drive.

Since installation of the existing 12kV and 69kV cable in the 1970s, native trees have established within the existing alignment along the Parkway. SMUD has coordinated with Sacramento County to install the new conduit outside of the existing alignment to reduce potential impacts to these trees and other biological resources within the American River Parkway and to facilitate easier access for future maintenance.

Accordingly, SMUD proposes to install the conduit for the new 12kV cable beneath the pavement, sidewalks, or curbs and gutters of Ambassador Drive. The proposed 69kV alignment would deviate from the existing alignment by continuing east until it heads north at Rossmoor Drive. While the exact location of the 69kV alignment along Rossmoor Drive is not yet known and would be determined once existing utilities beneath the pavement are identified, the 69kV alignment would generally be within Rossmoor Drive or the fuel break immediately west of the pavement. The 69kV alignment would continue along Rossmoor Drive as it intersects with the American River Parkway bike trail and continue beyond the edge of pavement at the end of Rossmoor Drive. The 69kV alignment would connect to existing riser poles located between the boundaries of Rossmoor Drive and the edge of the American River. Within the American River Parkway, the existing direct-buried 69kV cable would be abandoned in place.

The project would include up to 13 utility vaults to be installed at various points along the 69kV alignment. The proposed utility vaults would consist of pre-cast concrete, measuring 8 feet x 14 feet x 8 feet inside, requiring an excavation area of approximately 15 feet x 20 feet x 15 feet, and would generally be spaced evenly throughout the alignment to allow for cable pulling, splicing and maintenance.

Project Construction

Construction activities would occur in two phases. Phase 1 would include the 12kV alignment, while Phase 2 would include the 69kV alignment and utility vaults. Construction activities would occur during hours identified in City of Rancho Cordova Zoning Code Section 6.68.090(E). If there is a need for work to occur outside of these hours, SMUD will provide additional notification to customers adjacent to the project boundary.

Most construction would include open trenching to a maximum depth of 7 feet, though some deeper excavation may be necessary to avoid conflicts with existing utility lines. Removing water from the construction area (dewatering) may be necessary due to the high water-table of the area. SMUD would use Baker tanks and/or filtration bags, if needed, to treat water prior to discharge into the existing storm drain system in a manner consistent with regulatory requirements. For the 12kV alignment, the 12kV cable would

be installed in conduit in the trenches. The 69kV electrical cable would be placed in a duct bank, which is a series of conduits encased in concrete. The trenches would then be backfilled with a cement-like slurry mixture or compacted aggregate base to the roadway subgrade elevation followed by replacement of the appropriate cover (e.g., pavement or dirt). Construction activities would generally be conducted in existing alignments or along the roadway and would include the temporary closure of footpaths and roads. Alternative routes of travel will be provided where feasible. Following construction activities each day, the open trenches would be covered, and equipment removed to allow safe use of footpaths and roadways.

Project Operation

As the project includes construction and installation of underground utility infrastructure, project operation would include the active use of these facilities in replacement of existing infrastructure. There would not be any above-ground structures installed as part of the project, and operation of project elements would not create sources of noise, light, or other features that would be noticeable to residents and recreationists in the area.

Project Schedule

Construction for Phase 1 (12kV alignment) is anticipated take up to 3 weeks and would begin in the summer of 2022. Phase 2 (69kV alignment) construction would take approximately 12 months once initiated and is anticipated to begin in the next 5 to 7 years, after the completion of Phase 1.

Potential Approvals and Permits Required

Elements of the project could be subject to permitting and/or approval authority of other agencies. As the lead agency pursuant to the CEQA, SMUD is responsible for considering the adequacy of the environmental impact report (EIR) and determining if the project should be approved. Other potential permits required from other agencies could include:

State

- State Water Resources Control Board/Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board: Construction Storm Water Discharge Permits for projects that disturb more than one acre of land.
- California Department of Transportation: permits for movement of oversized or excessive loads on State Highways.

Local

- Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District: Authority to Construct/Permit to Operate pursuant to Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District Regulation 2 (Rule 201 et seq.).

- City of Rancho Cordova:
  - Tree removal permit.
  - Encroachment permit.
- County of Sacramento:
  - Encroachment permit.

Environmental Impacts and Recommended Mitigation Measures

Project Specific Impacts

This EIR has been prepared pursuant to the CEQA (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 1500, et seq.) to evaluate the physical environmental effects of the proposed Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project. SMUD is the lead agency for the project. SMUD has the principal responsibility for approving and carrying out the project and for ensuring that the requirements of CEQA have been met. After the Final EIR is prepared and the EIR public-review process is complete, the SMUD Board of Directors is the party responsible for certifying that the EIR:

- has been completed in compliance with CEQA;
- was presented to the decision-making body of the lead agency, and that the decision-making body reviewed and considered the information contained in the final EIR prior to approving the project; and
- reflects the lead agency's independent judgment and analysis

Table ES-1, presented at the end of this chapter, provides a summary of the environmental impacts for the Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project that are evaluated in this Draft EIR. The table provides the level of significance of the impact before mitigation, recommended mitigation measures, and the level of significance of the impact after implementation of the mitigation measures. Note that this table does not include the impacts and conclusions included in the Initial Study (IS) (see Appendix B).

Significant-and-Unavoidable Impacts and Cumulative Impacts

The project would not result in any significant and unavoidable impacts.

Summary of Alternatives

Alternatives evaluated in this Draft EIR are:

- **Alternative A (No Project)**, which assumes the existing 12kV or 69kV lines would not be replaced and that the existing equipment would continue to be used until it is no longer considered viable, and then abandoned in place; and
- **Alternative B (Existing Cable Alignment)**, which assumes the proposed 12kV and 69kV alignments would be reoriented to follow the existing cable alignment; and,
- **Alternative C (Ambassador Drive Alignment)**, which assumes that the proposed 69kV alignment between the substation and Rossmoor Drive would be within Ambassador Drive.

The following summary provides brief descriptions of the alternatives. For a more thorough discussion of project alternatives, see Chapter 5, “Alternatives.”

Alternative A (No Project)

Under this alternative, the existing 12kV and 69kV lines would continue to be used until they are no longer considered viable and then abandoned in place, without replacement. Under this alternative, SMUD would not be able to provide reliable and safe electrical service to existing and proposed development in the Rancho Cordova area.

Alternative B (Existing Cable Alignment)

Under this alternative, new 12kV and 69kV cable lines would be installed along the existing alignment that extends from Coloma Road to SMUD’s Cordova Park Substation and through the American River Parkway. Existing direct-buried cable would be abandoned in place and the new cables would be installed within 40 feet of the existing cable alignment. While the southern portion of this alternative (from Coloma Road to the substation) would be identical to the proposed project, it would differ in that the 12kV line would be installed in the same alignment as the 69kV alignment within the open space of the American River Parkway. From the substation, the alignment would extend approximately 0.70 miles east where it would then turn north and run through the open space of the Parkway. This alternative would not include any construction activities within roadway rights-of-way as all work would occur within school property, SMUD property, or open space.

This alternative would achieve most of the project objectives but not to the degree of the project. It would potentially conflict with the City of Rancho Cordova’s tree preservation ordinance, indicating that this alternative would not meet the objective of minimizing potential conflicts with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova.

Alternative C (Ambassador Drive Alignment)

Under this alternative, both the 12kV and 69kV alignments would be placed within Ambassador Drive. For the 12kV alignment, this is the same as the proposed project. For the 69kV alignment, this alternative would change the location of the alignment between SMUD's Cordova Park Substation and Rossmoor Drive. Instead of the 69kV alignment crossing through open space behind homes facing Ambassador Drive, that portion of the 69kV alignment would instead be located within Ambassador Drive.

This alternative would achieve most of the project objectives but not to the degree of the project. By locating both alignments within Ambassador Drive instead of the open space of the Parkway, Alternative C would not maximize the use of available SMUD property and easements and would not minimize impacts to nearby sensitive receptors as it would entail additional work within roadways used by local residents and would place noise-generating construction equipment closer to residences.

Environmentally Superior Alternative

State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Section 15126.6) directs that an EIR should identify the "environmentally superior" alternative. "If the environmentally superior alternative is the 'no project' alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives." The consideration of alternatives that fulfill CEQA requirements, in the instance of the project, is complicated by a simple factor: the project would not result in any significant and unavoidable impacts. The significant impacts of the project, which would be to Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation, can be clearly mitigated.

When considering objectives, the proposed project would best meet the project objectives, as stated in Chapter 2, "Project Description." In contrast, Alternative B, by keeping all project construction out of existing roadways, could conflict with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova, specifically the tree preservation ordinance. Similarly, Alternative C, by moving the 69kV alignment from the open space of the American River Parkway to within Ambassador Drive, would increase impacts to nearby sensitive receptors.

Consistent with State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Section 15126.6 [e][2]), because the environmentally superior alternative was identified as the No Project Alternative, another environmentally superior alternative shall be identified. Based on the environmental analysis contained in this Draft EIR, Alternative C would result in less-severe impacts compared to the project. However, and as noted above, Alternative C could still result in potential impacts on Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation. Therefore, the environmental impact differences between the project and Alternative C are not substantial enough that one is clearly superior over the other.

Areas of Controversy

In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21092 and State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Section 15082), SMUD issued a notice of preparation (NOP) on March 7, 2022, to inform agencies and the general public that an EIR was being prepared and to invite comments on the scope and content of the document (Appendix A). SMUD accepted comments on the scope of the EIR between March 7 and April 6, 2022. A noticed virtual scoping meeting for the EIR occurred on March 24, 2022.

Based on the comments received during the NOP comment period, the major areas of controversy associated with the project include:

- potential impacts to Tribal Cultural Resources;
- need for AB 52 and SB 18 compliance; and
- potential impacts to biological resources.

Areas of controversy that fall within the scope of CEQA are addressed in this Draft EIR and its appendices. Issues that fall outside the scope of CEQA are not evaluated in this Draft EIR; however, SMUD will continue to respond to these issues through the project planning process.

All of the substantive environmental issues raised in the NOP comment letters have been addressed or otherwise considered during preparation of this Draft EIR.

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
3.1 Tribal Cultural Resources			
Impact 3.1-1: Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a Tribal cultural resource, including human remains. Consultation with Wilton Rancheria, UAIC, and the SSBMI identified three Tribal cultural resources to be present within the study area and that the entire project location is sacred and sensitive for the presence of Tribal cultural resources including Native American burials. Because project-related ground-disturbing activities could result in damage to Tribal cultural resources, the project could cause a potentially significant impact.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.1-1a: Avoid TCRs through Project Design.** During the design phase of the 69kV alignment portion of the Project, SMUD will consult with consulting Tribes on the adequacy of the plans to avoid and protect in place the identified Tribal cultural resources. The consulting Tribes will review the plans starting at 30 percent design, or a similar milestone, and will continue to be consulted with until the design plans are finalized (100 percent design). To avoid impacts and protect the Tribal cultural resources in place, a qualified archaeologist, in collaboration with consulting Tribes, will ensure that no staging, storage, or work will come within a minimum of a 15-foot protection buffer from each Tribal cultural resource. If the archaeologist and consulting Tribes find at any time that the plans do not meet the 15-foot protection buffer, the design engineers will work with the archaeologist and consulting Tribes to modify the plans. If sufficient modifications to the plans cannot be achieved to ensure a 15-foot protection buffer, additional consultation with the participating tribes will be required to develop appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures. Such measures may include creation of a treatment plan, data recovery, reburial, or additional plan redesign. The project plans will not be considered final until the archaeologist has deemed them to be adequate for the avoidance and protection in place of the Tribal cultural resources. **Mitigation Measure 3.1-1b: Prepare and implement worker cultural resources awareness and respect training program.** A cultural resources awareness and respect training program will be provided to all construction personnel active on the project site prior to the start of project implementation and to any new workers who start on the project after starting. A representative or representatives from culturally affiliated Native American Tribe(s) will be invited to participate in the development and delivery of the cultural resources awareness and respect training program in coordination with a professional archaeologist meeting the United States Secretary of Interior's qualification standards for archaeology. The program will include relevant information regarding Tribal	LTS

NI = No impact B = Beneficial LTS = Less than significant PS = Potential significant S = Significant SU = Significant and unavoidable

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
		cultural resources, including applicable laws and regulations, the consequences of violating said laws and regulations, protocols for resource avoidance, and protocols for discoveries, including who to contact in the event of a discovery and what to do upon the discovery of human remains. The program will also underscore the requirement for confidentiality and culturally-appropriate treatment of any find of significance to Native Americans and protocols, consistent to the extent feasible, with Native American Tribal values. **Mitigation Measure 3.1-1c: Implement Tribal and Archaeological Monitoring.** All ground disturbing activities, including any preparatory grading, tree removal, or vegetation clearing, within the project site will be monitored by a Tribal monitor and a qualified archaeologist. SMUD shall contact the participating Tribes a minimum of seven days prior to beginning earthwork or other ground disturbing activities to ensure a Tribal monitor is available; construction activities will proceed if no response is received 48 hours prior to ground disturbing activities. The Tribal and archaeological monitor shall complete daily monitoring logs that describe each day's activities, including construction activities, locations, soil, and any cultural materials identified. In the event that unanticipated archaeological or Tribal cultural resources are discovered, including human remains, compliance with Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d would be required. Both the Tribal monitor and the archaeological monitor have the ability to halt work if a discovery occurs. **Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d: Halt Ground Disturbance Upon Discovery of Subsurface Tribal Cultural Resources and Evaluate Discovered Resource** If any suspected Tribal cultural resources or unique archaeological resources are discovered during ground disturbing construction activities, all work shall cease within 100 feet of the find, or a distance agreed upon by the Tribal monitor, archaeological monitor, SMUD, and the construction foreman based on the location and nature of the find and type of work occurring. The Tribal monitor shall determine if the find is a Tribal cultural resource. The Tribal monitor will make recommendations for further	

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
		evaluation and culturally appropriate treatment of discovered Tribal cultural resources as necessary in consultation with the archaeological monitor. Unless another type of treatment is recommended, resources will be preserved in place by redesigning the project; however, if project redesign is determined by SMUD, with evidence, to be technologically, regulatorily, or economically infeasible. Redesign could include modifying the route of the alignment; and route modification would remain within the boundary of the project study area. If redesign is demonstrated to be infeasible, culturally appropriate treatment would be developed in consultation with the participating Tribes. Culturally appropriate treatment may include, but is not limited to, processing materials for reburial, minimizing handling of cultural objects, leaving objects in place within the landscape, returning objects to a location within the project area where they will not be subject to future impacts from the project. Because curation of Tribal cultural resources is not considered by the participating Tribes to be appropriate or respectful, participating Tribes request that materials not be permanently curated, unless approved by the participating Tribes. Work at the discovery location cannot resume until all necessary investigation, evaluation, and treatment of the discovery under the requirements of the CEQA, including AB 52, have been satisfied. Implementation of this mitigation measure would also satisfy State and local regulations regarding the treatment of Tribal cultural resources as well as Section 7050.5 of the Health and Safety Code and PRC 5097 regarding the treatment of human remains.	
Impact 3.1-2: Potential for the project, in combination with other development, to contribute to a significant cumulative impact to Tribal cultural resources including human remains. The project, in combination with other cumulative development in the region, could result in impacts to Tribal cultural resources in the area. However, with the implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.1-1a through 3.1-1d, significant impacts would not occur and the project's potential contribution to cumulative impacts would be less than significant.	LTS	See Mitigation Measures 3.1-1a, 3.1-1b, 3.1-1c, and 3.1-1d. No additional mitigation is required.	LTS

NI = No impact B = Beneficial LTS = Less than significant PS = Potential significant S = Significant SU = Significant and unavoidable

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
3.2 Cultural Resources			
Impact 3.2-1: Change the significance of a known archaeological resource. Results of the records search for the study area indicate that the project would occur entirely within the boundaries of an historic-period archaeological resource, the Folsom Mining District (P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H). Six newly-identified features which are contributing elements of the District are located within the study area. Each could be impacted by project-related ground-disturbing activities. This would be a potentially significant impact.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.2-1: Establish Work Exclusion Zones to Avoid Archeological Features.** Prior to the start of operations, a 15-foot work exclusion zone (WEZ) will be established around each of the identified archeological features. The WEZ will be shown on project plans and will be installed prior to the start of work on Rossmoor Drive. The WEZ will be delineated by the installation of high visibility temporary construction fencing set 15 feet away from the edge of the feature. The installation of the WEZ fencing will be overseen by a professionally qualified archaeologist who meets the Secretary of the Interior's standards for archaeology. The archaeologist will review the WEZ location and mark the location of the WEZ on the ground prior to installation. No access, staging, storage, equipment, or personnel shall enter any portion of the WEZ. The WEZ for each archaeological feature will remain in place until all work on Rossmoor Drive is complete.	LTS
Impact 3.2-2: Change the significance of unknown archaeological resources. The project area is known to have been used by Native Americans and Euro-American for settlement, mining, and agricultural activities. Project-related ground-disturbing activities could result in discovery or damage of yet undiscovered archaeological resources as defined in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5. This would be a potentially significant impact.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.2-2a: Halt Ground-Disturbing Activity Upon Discovery of Archaeological Resources and Evaluate Discovered Resource.** In the event that a historic-period archaeological resource (such as concentrated deposits of bottles or bricks with makers marks, amethyst glass, ceramic or metal pipes, or other historic refuse) or a prehistoric archaeological resource (such as lithic scatters, midden soils), is uncovered during grading or other construction activities, all ground-disturbing activity within 100 feet of the discovery shall be halted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. SMUD will be notified of the potential find and a qualified archeologist shall be retained to investigate its significance. If the find is suspected to be Native American in origin, Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d shall be implemented. Any previously undiscovered resources found during construction will be recorded on appropriate California Department of Parks and Recreation 523 forms and	LTS

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Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
		evaluated for significance under all applicable regulatory criteria. If the archaeologist determines that the find does not meet the CRHR standards of significance for cultural resources, construction may proceed. If the find is determined to be significant by the qualified archaeologist (i.e., because the find is determined to constitute either an historical resource or a unique archaeological resource), the archaeologist shall work with SMUD to follow accepted professional standards such as further testing for evaluation or data recovery, as necessary. The results of the identification, evaluation, and/or data recovery program for any unanticipated discoveries shall be presented in a professional-quality report that details all methods and findings, evaluates the nature and significance of the resources, analyzes and interprets the results. **Mitigation Measure 3.2-2b: Implement Native American and Archaeological Monitoring.** Implement Mitigation Measure 3.1-1c.	
Impact 3.2-3: Potential for the project, in combination with other development, to contribute to a significant cumulative impact to cultural resources. The project, in combination with other cumulative development in the area, could result in impacts to cultural resources in the area. Through the implementation of project-specific mitigation measures, the contribution of the project would not be cumulatively considerable with respect to archaeological resources. Impacts would be less than significant.	LTS	See Mitigation Measures 3.2-1 and 3.2-2. No additional mitigation is required.	LTS
3.3 Air Quality			
Impact 3.3-1: Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan. The project would involve construction activities that would include 2.76 miles of underground cable replacement and installation of up to 13 underground utility vaults. The project does not include any land uses or operational emission sources that would result in long-term employment opportunities, new housing, or substantial increases in operational vehicle trips. Because the project is consistent with the land uses of the City's General Plan, the project would not conflict with the	LTS	No mitigation is required.	LTS

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Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
implementation of the SMAQMD AQAP and would not facilitate further growth. This impact would be less than significant.			
Impact 3.3-2: Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard. Project construction would not generate emissions in excess of the SMAQMD thresholds for ROG and NO_X. However, the project, without the application of BMPs and BACT, would generate daily and annual emissions of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ in excess of the SMAQMD thresholds during construction activities. Therefore, this impact would be potentially significant.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.3-1: Implement SMAQMD Basic Construction Emission Control Practices.** During construction, the contractor shall comply with and implement SMAQMD's Basic Construction Emission Control Practices, which includes SMAQMD-recommended BMPs and BACT, for controlling fugitive dust emissions. Measures to be implemented during construction include the following: • Water all exposed surfaces at least two times daily. Exposed surfaces include, but are not limited to, soil piles, graded areas, unpaved parking areas, staging areas, and access roads. • Cover or maintain at least two (2) feet of freeboard space on haul trucks transporting soil, sand, or other loose material on the site. Cover any haul trucks that will be traveling along freeways or major roadways. • Use wet power vacuum street sweepers to remove any visible track-out mud or dirt onto adjacent public roads at least once a day. Use of dry power sweeping is prohibited. • Limit vehicle speed on unpaved roads to 15 miles per hour. • All roadways, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots to be paved should be completed as soon as possible. In addition, building pads should be laid as soon as possible after grading unless seeding or soil binders are used. • Minimize idling time either by shutting equipment off when not in use or reducing the time of idling to 5 minutes (required by California Code of Regulations Title 13, Sections 2449[d][3] and 2485). Provide clear signage that posts this requirement for workers at the entrances to the site. • Maintain all construction equipment in proper working condition according to manufacturer's specifications. Equipment will be checked by a certified mechanic and determined to be running in proper condition before it is operated.	LTS

NI = No impact B = Beneficial LTS = Less than significant PS = Potential significant S = Significant SU = Significant and unavoidable

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
Impact 3.3-3: Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. Construction-related activities would result in temporary, intermittent emissions of diesel PM, which is the primary TAC of concern. Based on emissions modeling, maximum daily emissions of exhaust $PM_{2.5}$ would not exceed SMAQMD thresholds of significance. It is anticipated that operational emissions from the project would be negligible. As a result, this impact would be less than significant.	LTS	No mitigation is required.	LTS
Impact 3.3-4: Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people. Minor odors generated during project construction would be minor and temporary. Implementation of the project would not result in exposure of a substantial number of people to objectionable odors. Thus, this impact would be *less than* significant.	LTS	No mitigation is required.	LTS
3.4 Biological Resources			
Impact 3.4-1: Result in a Substantial Adverse Effect on Riparian Habitat or Other Sensitive Natural Community Project implementation would occur within the dripline of riparian habitat and sensitive natural communities and within the floodway of the American River. Working, trimming or removing vegetation within riparian, oak woodland habitat and sensitive natural communities could result in degradation of habitat value. This would be a potentially significant impact.	PS	No mitigation is required.	LTS
Impact 3.4-2: Result in the Loss of or Disturbance of Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle and Habitat. Project implementation would result in construction disturbances within 165 feet of an elderberry shrub. The single elderberry shrub is located in grassland habitat but near riparian habitat that is known to support valley elderberry longhorn beetle. Construction activities would occur a minimum of 100 feet from the shrub so no direct effects to this elderberry would occur. However, project construction could cause indirect effects to valley elderberry longhorn beetle and its habitat. This impact would be potentially significant.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.4-2: Avoid and protect elderberry shrubs.** • The elderberry shrub and a 20-foot buffer from the dripline of the shrub shall be fenced or flagged as close to the edge of construction as feasible and avoided during construction activities. • A qualified biologist will provide training for all contractors, work crews, and any onsite personnel on the status of valley elderberry longhorn beetle, its host plant and habitat, the need to avoid damaging elderberry shrubs, and the possible penalties for non-compliance. • As much as feasible, all activities that could occur within 165 feet of an elderberry shrub (but outside of the 20-foot no disturbance buffer), shall	LTS

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
		be conducted outside of the flight season of the valley elderberry longhorn beetle (the flight season typically occurs between March-July). • Project activities such as truck traffic or other use of machinery, shall not create excessive dust on the project site, such that the growth or vigor of elderberry shrubs could be adversely affected. Establishing and enforcing a 15 miles per hour speed-limit for off-road usage and watering non-paved access roads shall be implemented as needed to minimize excessive dust. • A qualified biologist (i.e., a biologist that holds a wildlife biology, botany, ecology, or other relevant degree from an accredited university and: 1) be knowledgeable in relevant species life histories and ecology, 2) be able to correctly identify relevant species and habitats, 3) have experience conducting field surveys of relevant species or resources, 4) be knowledgeable about survey protocols, 5) be knowledgeable about State and federal laws regarding the protection of special-status species, and 6) have experience with CDFW's CNDDB and Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS). The project proponent will review the resume and approve the qualifications of biologists.) shall monitor the work area within 165 feet of the elderberry shrub at project-appropriate intervals to ensure the avoidance and minimization measures listed above are implemented.	
Impact 3.4-3: Disturbance of nesting Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, or other avian species. Project implementation would result in construction disturbances that could cause Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, or other avian species to abandon their nests, if located nearby. Therefore, project construction could cause direct mortality of chicks and eggs. This impact would be potentially significant.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.4-3: Avoid disturbance of active nests.** • For project activities, including tree trimming or removal, that begin between February 1 and September 15, a qualified biologist will conduct preconstruction surveys for Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, and other nesting birds to identify active nests on and within 0.25 mile of the alignments for Swainson's hawk and on or within 500 feet for other birds. The survey for Swainson's hawks will be conducted before the beginning of any construction activities between March 1 and September 15, following the *Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's Hawk Nesting Surveys in California's*	LTS

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
		Central Valley (Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee 2000). • If active nests are found, a qualified biologist will establish appropriate buffers around the active nest sites identified during preconstruction bird surveys such that project-related activities are unlikely to result in nest abandonment or disruption of normal nesting activities. No project activity will commence within the buffer areas until a qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged, the nest is no longer active, or reducing the buffer would not likely result in nest abandonment. CDFW guidelines recommend implementation of 0.25-mile buffer for Swainson's hawk and white-tailed kite and 500-feet for other raptors, but the size of the buffer may be adjusted if a qualified biologist, in consultation with CDFW, determine that such an adjustment would not be likely to adversely affect the nest. Monitoring of the nest by a qualified biologist during and after construction activities will be required if the activity has potential to adversely affect the nest.	
Impact 3.4-4: Conflict with provisions of the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code or Sacramento County Code of Ordinances intended to protect biological resources. The alignments are located within the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County and are subject to the provisions of the Rancho Cordova Municipal Code and Sacramento County Code of Ordinances. Construction associated with the project may require the removal of trees, some of which could be considered protected trees under the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code and Sacramento County Code of Ordinances. Without acquisition of a permit from the City and County prior to tree removal, the project would conflict with local ordinances, which would constitute a significant impact.	S	**Mitigation Measure 3.4-4: Tree Protection** Prior to site disturbance, SMUD shall provide to the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County a plan for all tree work. A Certified Arborist shall approve all work plans prior to submittal to the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County. Tree planting will comply with the City of Rancho Cordova's and Sacramento County's landscaping requirements. For those trees that will be preserved on site during project construction, the following guidelines are recommended to ensure the long-term survival and stability of the trees. • **Educate Workers:** Educate all workers on site about tree protection guidelines and requirements prior to construction. • **Establish a Tree Protection Zone:** Establish a tree protection zone (TPZ) around any tree or group of trees designated for retention. The TPZ should at minimum be equal to 1.5 times the radius of the dripline. The TPZ may be adjusted on a case-by-case basis after consultation with a Certified Arborist.	LTS

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Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
		• **Install Fencing and Signage:** Install fencing around the TPZ of all trees or groups of trees designated for retention. The fencing should remain in place for the duration of construction activities. Post appropriate signage to help convey the importance of the TPZ to workers. • **Prohibit Construction Activities within the TPZ:** Prohibit construction-related activities, including grading, trenching, construction, demolition, or other work, within the TPZ. No heavy equipment or machinery should be operated within the TPZ. No construction materials, equipment, machinery, or other supplies should be stored within the TPZ. Vehicle and foot traffic should not be permitted within the TPZ. No wires or signs should be attached to any trees designated for retention. • **Prune Selected Trees:** Prune selected trees to provide necessary clearance during construction and to remove any defective limbs or other tree parts that may pose a failure risk. All pruning should be completed by a Certified Arborist or Tree Worker and adhere to the Tree Pruning Guidelines of the International Society of Arboriculture. • **Monitor Trees and TPZs:** Monitor the integrity of the TPZs and the health of the trees designated for retention regularly throughout the construction process. A Certified Arborist should monitor the health and condition of the protected trees and, if necessary, recommend additional mitigations and appropriate actions. This could include the monitoring of trees adjacent to project facilities to determine if construction activities (including the removal of nearby trees) would affect protected trees in the future. • **Treat Impacted Trees:** Provide supplemental irrigation and other care, such as mulch and fertilizer, as deemed necessary by a Certified Arborist, to any trees impacted by construction. Treatment of any injuries should be performed by a Certified Arborist.	

Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
Impact 3.4-5: Conflict with provisions of the County of Sacramento American River Parkway Plan and the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan. Portions of the alignments are located within the American River Parkway and subject to the provisions of the County of Sacramento American River Parkway Plan and the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan (which is in preparation). Construction associated with the project may require the trimming of vegetation, removal of trees, and construction in access roads and pedestrian trails within the American River Parkway. However, the project would be constructed within existing access/trail areas, and on either a paved road or fire break and includes project design features that are consistent with the American River Parkway Plan Goals and Policies and as such it would not conflict with the Plan. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant.	LTS	No mitigation is required.	LTS
Impact 3.4-6: Interfere with Wildlife Movement or Migration or Impede the Use of Nursery Sites. While the 69kV alignment includes areas within the American River Parkway, which provides a movement corridor and nursery sites for wildlife, the project would install underground features and would not interfere with wildlife movement in the area. This impact would be less than significant.	LTS	No mitigation is required.	LTS
3.5 Transportation			
Impact 3.5-1: Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. Project construction would temporarily interfere with existing vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation as it would include temporary closures of roads, pathways, and bike lanes. Because project construction activities could affect the existing circulation system, this impact would be potentially significant.	PS	**Mitigation Measure 3.5-1: Traffic Control Plan** Prior to project construction within or adjacent to public roadways, SMUD's construction contractor shall develop a traffic control plan for the project and submit the plan to the City of Rancho Cordova's Department of Public Works. The plan shall identify temporary lane, sidewalk, bicycle lane, and transit stop closures and provide information regarding how access and connectivity will be maintained during construction activities. The plan shall include details regarding traffic controls that would be employed, including signage, detours, and flaggers. The traffic control plan shall be implemented by the contractor during construction to allow for the safe passage of vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists along the project route.	LTS

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Table ES-1 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts	Significance before Mitigation	Mitigation Measures	Significance after Mitigation
Impact 3.5-2: Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3(b), which pertains to vehicle miles travelled. Because the project would not change the amount of development projected for the area, would be consistent with the population growth and VMT projections in regional and local plans, and would have only a slight increase in VMT during construction, this impact would be less than significant.	LTS	No mitigation is required.	LTS
Impact 3.5-3: Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment) Implementation of the project would not result in any changes in road geometry or use, but would require temporary closure of vehicle lanes, bicycle lanes, and pathways. This impact would be potentially significant.	PS	Implement Mitigation Measure 3.5-1: Traffic Control Plan	LTS
Impact 3.5-4: Result in inadequate emergency access. While project operation would not change any roadways in the area, project construction would require temporary closures of roadways used for emergency access. This impact would be potentially significant.	PS	Implement Mitigation Measure 3.5-1: Traffic Control Plan	LTS

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1 Introduction

This draft environmental impact report (Draft EIR) evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District's (SMUD's) proposed Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project ("Cordova Park Project" or "project"). This Draft EIR has been prepared under the direction of SMUD in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000-21177) and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR], Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387) ("the State CEQA Guidelines"). SMUD is the lead agency under CEQA for consideration of this EIR and potential approval of the project.

1.1 Purpose and Intended Uses of this EIR

CEQA requires that public agencies consider the potentially significant adverse environmental effects of projects over which they have discretionary approval authority before taking action on those projects PRC Section 21000 *et seq*. CEQA also requires that each public agency avoid or mitigate to less-than-significant levels, wherever feasible, the significant adverse environmental effects of projects it approves or implements. If a project would result in significant and unavoidable environmental impacts (i.e., significant effects that cannot be feasibly mitigated to less-than-significant levels), the project can still be approved, but the lead agency's decision-maker, in this case the SMUD Board of Directors, must prepare findings and issue a "statement of overriding considerations" explaining in writing the specific economic, social, or other considerations that they believe, based on substantial evidence, warrant approving the project despite the occurrence of significant effects (PRC Section 21002, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15093).

According to the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064(f)(1), preparation of an EIR is required whenever a project may result in a significant adverse environmental impact. An EIR is an informational document used to inform public agency decision makers and the general public of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to mitigate or avoid the significant effects, and describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project that could feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project while substantially lessening or avoiding any of the significant environmental impacts. Public agencies are required to consider the information presented in the EIR when determining whether to approve a project.

Because it will carry out the project, SMUD is the lead agency, as defined by CEQA, for this EIR. Other public agencies with jurisdiction over the project are listed below in Section 1.3, "Agency Roles and Responsibilities."

1.2 Scope of the Draft EIR

Pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, a lead agency shall focus an EIR's discussion on significant environmental effects and may limit discussion of other effects to brief explanations about why they are not significant (PRC Sections 21002.1(e) and 21100, CEQA Guidelines Section 15143). A determination of which impacts would be potentially significant was made for this project based on comments received as part of the public scoping process (Appendix A) and the information presented in the Initial Study (IS) prepared for the project (Appendix B), as well as additional research and analysis of relevant project data during preparation of this Draft EIR. Accordingly, SMUD has determined that the project has the potential to result in significant environmental impacts on Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation, which are addressed in this Draft EIR.

The IS (Appendix B) presents the reasons that possible significant effects of the project were determined not to be significant and therefore were not discussed in detail in this EIR, pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15126.2(a) and 15128. Effects dismissed from detailed consideration in an IS as clearly insignificant or unlikely to occur need not be discussed further in the EIR unless the lead agency subsequently receives information inconsistent with the finding in the IS (CEQA Guidelines Section 15143).

The following resources would not experience any significant environmental impacts from the project, as explained in the IS:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forest Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gases
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise and Vibration
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

Chapter 3, "Existing Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation" summarizes the rationale as to why significant impacts to each of the aforementioned resources would not occur.

1.3 Agency Roles and Responsibilities

This Draft EIR will be used by SMUD and CEQA responsible and trustee agencies to ensure that they have met their requirements under CEQA before deciding whether to approve or permit project elements over which they have jurisdiction. It may also be used

as an informational resource by other state and local agencies, which may have an interest in resources that could be affected by the project, or that have jurisdiction over portions of the project.

As the lead agency pursuant to CEQA, SMUD is responsible for considering the adequacy of the EIR and determining if the project should be approved.

Under CEQA, a responsible agency is a public agency, other than the lead agency, that has responsibility to carry out or approve a project (PRC Section 21069). A trustee agency is a state agency that has jurisdiction by law over natural resources that are held in trust for the people of the State of California (PRC Section 21070). Trustee agencies are: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Lands Commission, California State Parks, and the University of California (CEQA Guidelines Section 15386); none of these agencies have resources that would be affected by the project.

The following agencies may serve as responsible agencies for the project:

State

- State Water Resources Control Board/Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
- California Department of Transportation, District 3

Local

- City of Rancho Cordova
- County of Sacramento
- Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District

1.4 CEQA Public Review Process

1.4.1 Notice of Preparation

The purpose of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to provide sufficient information about the project and its potential environmental impacts to allow agencies and interested parties the opportunity to provide a meaningful response related to the scope and content of the EIR, including mitigation measures that should be considered and alternatives that should be addressed (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082[b]). Comments submitted in response to the NOP are used by the lead agency to identify broad topics to be addressed in the EIR.

In accordance with PRC Section 21092 and State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082, SMUD issued an NOP on March 7, 2022 to inform agencies and the general public that an EIR was being prepared and to invite comments on the scope and content of the document (Appendix A). The NOP was submitted to the State Clearinghouse, which then

distributed the NOP to potential responsible and trustee agencies; posted on SMUD's website (https://www.smud.org/CordovaParkCableReplacement); posted with the Sacramento County Clerk; and made available at SMUD's offices. In addition, the NOP was distributed directly to property owners within 500 feet of the project site, interested Native American Tribes, and the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (which has requested to be notified directly of SMUD's projects). Finally, notice was published in the *Sacramento Bee* on Monday, March 7, 2022. The NOP was available for a 30-day review period, with comments accepted through April 6, 2022.

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(c), a noticed virtual scoping meeting for the EIR occurred on March 24, 2022.

Comments on environmental issues received during the NOP public comment period are considered and addressed in this Draft EIR. Appendix A contains the comment letters received during the NOP public comment period. A summary of the comments received is presented below.

Table 1-1 Comment Letters and Discussion Location in Draft EIR

NOP Comment Letter	Comment/Topic	Addressed in Draft EIR Section
Letter 1 Native American Heritage Commission	*Tribal Cultural Resources* - Requests AB 52 and SB 18 compliance.	Section 3.1, Tribal Cultural Resources
Letter 2 California Department of Fish and Wildlife	*Biological Resources* – Provides information regarding CDFW requirements and suggestions for information to be included in the EIR.	Section 3.4, Biological Resources
Letter 3 Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board	*Hydrology and Water Quality* – provided information about regulations and permitting.	See Section 3.11 of the Initial Study (IS) included as Appendix B of this Draft EIR
Letter 4 Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District	*Air Quality* – Requests reference to the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District's *Guide to Air Quality Assessment in Sacramento County*.	Section 3.3, Air Quality.

1.4.2 Public Review of this Draft EIR

This Draft EIR is being circulated for a 45-day period for review and comment by the public and other interested parties, agencies, and organizations. A virtual public meeting will be held on June 9, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. to present information and receive input from agencies and the public on the Draft EIR. Copies of the Draft EIR are available online at https://www.smud.org/CordovaParkCableReplacement and hardcopies at the following locations for review:

Sacramento Municipal Utility District
Customer Service Center
6301 S Street
Sacramento, CA 95817

Sacramento Municipal Utility District
East Campus Operations Center
4401 Bradshaw Road
Sacramento, CA 95827

During the public comment period, written comments from the public as well as organizations and agencies on the Draft EIR's accuracy and completeness may be submitted to SMUD. Written comments (including via email) must be received by 5:00 p.m. on June 27, 2022. Written comments should be addressed to:

SMUD–Environmental Services
P.O. Box 15830 MS B209
Sacramento, CA 95852-1830
Attn: Rob Ferrera

Email comments may be addressed to rob.ferrera@smud.org.

1.4.3 Final EIR

After the end of the public comment period, responses to comments on environmental issues will be prepared. Consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15088(b), commenting agencies will be provided a minimum of 10 days to review the responses to their comments before any action is taken by SMUD on the Final EIR or project. The Final EIR (containing this Draft EIR and the Responses to Comments document) will then be considered for certification by SMUD's Board of Directors. If the Board certifies the EIR, it will then consider whether to approve the project.

The level of detail contained throughout this EIR is consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15151 and recent court decisions, which provide the standard of adequacy on which this document is based. The Guidelines states as follows:

> *An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of the environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible... The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.*

CEQA (Guidelines Section 15091(d)) requires that when a public agency makes findings based on an EIR, the public agency must adopt a reporting or monitoring program for those measures it has adopted or made a condition of the project approval to mitigate significant adverse effects on the environment. The reporting or monitoring program must be designed to ensure compliance during project implementation.

1.5 Organization of the Draft EIR

The organization of this Draft EIR is as follows:

- **Executive Summary** – This chapter introduces the proposed Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project; provides a summary of the environmental review process, effects found not to be significant, and key environmental issues; and lists significant environmental impacts and mitigation measures to reduce significant impacts to a less-than-significant level.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – This chapter describes the purpose and scope of this EIR, agency roles and responsibilities, and the CEQA public review process. This chapter also gives a brief outline of this document's organization.

- **Chapter 2: Project Description** – This chapter presents a detailed description of the proposed project including its location, background, objectives, and characteristics of project construction and operation.

- **Chapter 3: Existing Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation** – This chapter presents a summary of the environmental analysis provided in the IS (Appendix B). In addition, this chapter presents analysis of potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation, including presentation of applicable thresholds of significance, environmental impacts, policy considerations related to the environmental issue area being analyzed, and mitigation measures capable of avoiding or reducing the magnitude of otherwise significant impacts. This chapter also discusses the potential cumulative impacts that would result from implementation of the project together with other past, present and probable future projects and including whether the project's incremental increase to an already significant impact is cumulatively considerable.

- **Chapter 4: Other CEQA Sections** – As required under CEQA, this chapter provides additional analysis of environmental effects that could result from implementation of the proposed project, including effects found not to be significant, growth-inducing impacts, significant irreversible changes to the environment, and significant and unavoidable impacts. This section also provides an evaluation of environmental-justice-related issues that pertain to the project.

- **Chapter 5: Alternatives** – This chapter presents and analyzes a reasonable range of feasible alternatives to the proposed project.

- **Chapter 6: List of Preparers** – This chapter identifies all individuals responsible for the preparation of this EIR.

- **Chapter 7: References** – Lists the sources of information cited throughout this EIR.

2 Project Description

2.1 Introduction

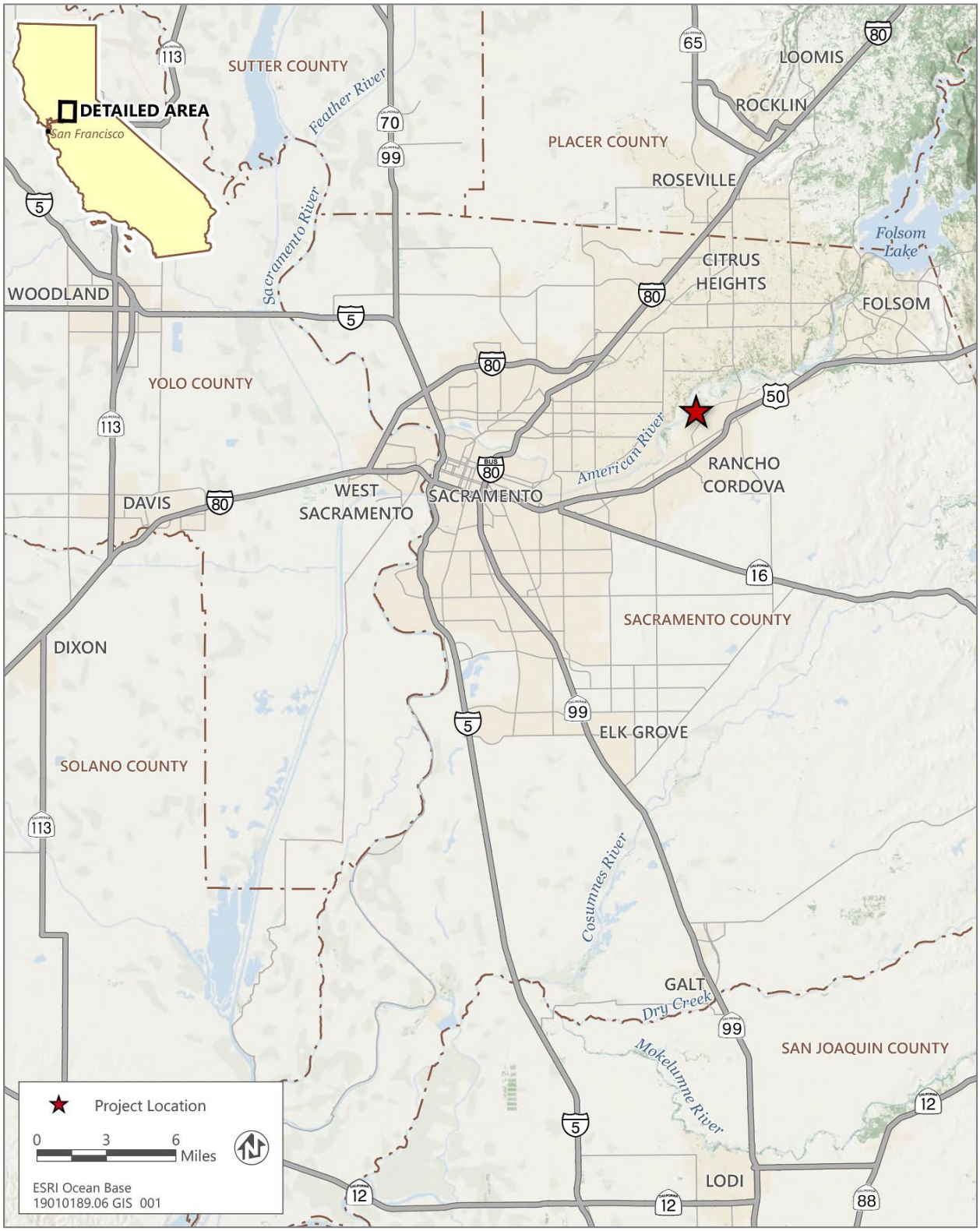
This chapter presents a detailed description of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District's (SMUD's) proposed Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project (project) located in Rancho Cordova, California. It is SMUD's goal for the project to provide consistent and reliable electrical service to its existing and future customers. This chapter describes the project's location, background, objectives, components, and anticipated schedule for construction and operation.

SMUD replaces aging electrical infrastructure as part of its routine maintenance and upgrade protocols. Accordingly, SMUD proposes to install approximately 0.6 miles of 12 kilovolt (kV) underground cable, approximately 2.12 miles of 69kV underground cable and up to 13 new utility vaults in the City of Rancho Cordova, near the location of existing 12kV and 69kV underground cables that are approaching the end of their operational lives. Installation of the new conduit (cables would later be pulled through the conduit) and utility vaults would be done by open trenching. Where possible, the new conduit will be installed to align with the existing cable, which would be abandoned in place.

2.2 Project Location and Setting

The project is in the City of Rancho Cordova (see Figure 2-1). The proposed 12kV alignment begins at SMUD's Cordova Park Substation located near the intersection of Ambassador Drive and Trails Court. The 12kV path travels to Ambassador Drive where it follows the road for approximately 0.6 miles until it connects to existing riser poles just east of Ellison Drive.

The proposed 69kV alignment begins on the northwest side of Coloma Road, approximately 200 feet southeast of Sierra Madre Court. The 69kV alignment heads northwest from Coloma Road, crossing through the property of Mills Middle School and Cordova High School, until it connects to SMUD's Cordova Park Substation. From the substation, the 69kV alignment heads northeast nearly adjacent to, but outside, the backyards of homes facing Ambassador Drive until it reaches Rossmoor Drive. At Rossmoor Drive, the 69kV alignment turns and heads north towards the American River. The 69kV alignment stays along Rossmoor Drive until its termination near the American River, when the 69kV alignment connects to existing riser poles located between the boundaries of Rossmoor Drive and the American River. The proposed 69kV alignment is approximately 2.12 miles in length.



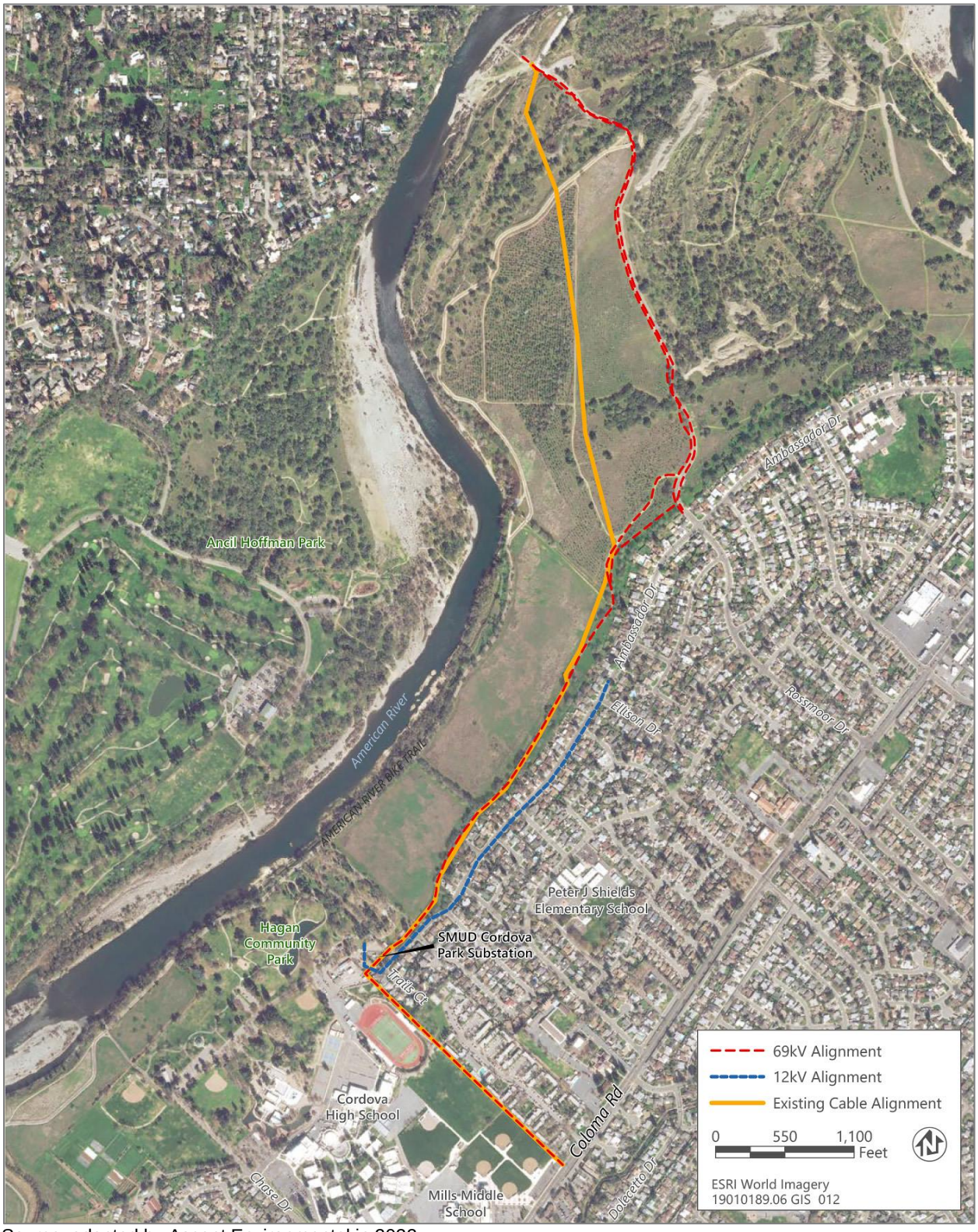
Source: adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2022

Figure 2-1. Project Location

The existing 12kV and 69kV lines that run through the American River Parkway would be abandoned in place, and new conduit containing the new lines would be installed in separate trenches within the alignments described above. The proposed 12kV and 69kV alignments are highly disturbed due to vehicle traffic, including areas of pavement and dirt. There are residences adjacent to portions of the proposed 12kV and 69kV alignments. Along Ambassador Drive, the 12kV circuit would be installed beneath existing roadways, sidewalks, or curbs and gutters. Along Rossmoor Drive, the 69kV circuit would be installed beneath existing pavement or within an existing fuel break adjacent to the pavement.

Figure 2-2 shows both the 12kV and 69kV proposed alignments, as well as the alignment of the existing underground direct-buried cable. The alignments presented on Figure 2-2 illustrate SMUD's preferred locations for conduit installation; however, as needed to avoid resources, the analysis in this EIR assumes the conduit would be installed within the boundary of the study area.

The 12kV alignment would extend from the substation along Ambassador Drive, which is fully paved and includes curbs, gutters, and sidewalks through the residential neighborhood. The western portion of the 69kV alignment up to the substation extends between residential units and school properties. From the substation, the 69kV alignment travels along an unpaved trail within the American River Parkway that abuts the rear of residential units facing Ambassador Drive. At Rossmoor Drive, the 69kV alignment would follow the existing paved alignment of Rossmoor Drive within the American River Parkway. Near the terminus of the 69kV alignment near the American River, there are restroom facilities and a small, paved parking lot for park users.



Source: adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2022

Figure 2-2. Project Alignments

2.3 Project Objectives

SMUD's objectives for the project are to:

- Provide safe and reliable electrical service to existing and proposed development in the Rancho Cordova area.
- Facilitate efficient maintenance of underground cables and infrastructure.
- Maximize the use of available SMUD property and resources.
- Minimize impacts to nearby sensitive receptors.
- Minimize potential conflicts with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova.

2.4 Required Public Approvals

Elements of the project could be subject to permitting and/or approval authority of other agencies. As the lead agency pursuant to the CEQA, SMUD is responsible for considering the adequacy of the environmental impact report (EIR) and determining if the project should be approved. Other potential permits required from other agencies could include:

State

- State Water Resources Control Board/Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board: Construction Storm Water Discharge Permits for projects that disturb more than one acre of land.
- California Department of Transportation: permits for movement of oversized or excessive loads on State Highways.

Local

- Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District: Authority to Construct/Permit to Operate pursuant to Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District Regulation 2 (Rule 201 et seq.).
- City of Rancho Cordova:
  - Tree removal permit.
  - Encroachment permit.
- County of Sacramento: Encroachment permit.

2.5 Project Description

2.5.1 Project Elements

The project involves the installation of approximately 0.6 miles of new underground 12kV electrical lines (cable) and approximately 2.12 miles of new underground 69kV cable to replace existing underground 12kV and 69kV cable buried directly in the ground (direct-buried) that was installed in the 1970s. The new 12kV cable would be installed in conduits buried in dirt while the new 69kV cable would be installed in conduits housed in concrete-encased duct banks to provide pathways and adequate spacing. The proposed project also involves installation of up to 13 new utility vaults along the 69kV alignment to allow access for electric cable pulling, splicing and maintenance.

The existing direct-buried 12kV cable begins at SMUD's Cordova Park Substation and extends approximately 0.6 miles east, where it connects to existing riser poles.

The existing direct-buried 69kV cable begins on the northwest side of Coloma Road, approximately 200 feet southeast of Sierra Madre Court, and extends north across the eastern property lines of Mills Middle School, Cordova High School and Hagen Park until it enters SMUD's Cordova Park Substation located near the intersection of Ambassador Drive and Trails Court (approximately 0.45 miles). From SMUD's substation, the existing 69kV cable extends east beneath a dirt path for approximately 0.70 miles when it turns north and cuts across the American River Parkway towards the American River for approximately 0.75 miles. Note that the total existing 69kV alignment is approximately 1.9 miles and the proposed 69kV alignment is approximately 2.12 miles. The extra mileage is due to deviating from the existing route to align with Rossmoor Drive.

Since installation of the existing 12kV and 69kV cable in the 1970s, native trees have established within the existing alignment along the Parkway. SMUD has coordinated with Sacramento County to install the new conduit outside of the existing alignment to reduce potential impacts to these trees and other biological resources within the American River Parkway and to facilitate easier access for future maintenance.

Accordingly, SMUD proposes to install the conduit for the new 12kV cable beneath the pavement, sidewalks, or curbs and gutters of Ambassador Drive. The proposed 69kV alignment would deviate from the existing alignment by continuing east until it heads north at Rossmoor Drive. While the exact location of the 69kV alignment along Rossmoor Drive is not yet known and would be determined once existing utilities beneath the pavement are identified, the 69kV alignment would generally be within Rossmoor Drive or the fuel break immediately west of the pavement. The 69kV alignment would continue along Rossmoor Drive as it intersects with the American River Parkway bike trail and continue beyond the edge of pavement at the end of Rossmoor Drive. The 69kV alignment would connect to existing riser poles located between the boundaries of Rossmoor Drive and the edge of the American River. Within the American River Parkway, the existing direct-buried 69kV cable would be abandoned in place.

The project would include up to 13 utility vaults to be installed at various points along the 69kV alignment. The proposed utility vaults would consist of pre-cast concrete, measuring 8 feet x 14 feet x 8 feet inside, requiring an excavation area of approximately 15 feet x 20 feet x 15 feet, and would generally be spaced evenly throughout the alignment to allow for cable pulling, splicing and maintenance.

2.5.2 Project Construction

Construction activities would occur in two phases. Phase 1 would include the 12kV alignment, while Phase 2 would include the 69kV alignment and utility vaults. Construction activities would occur during hours identified in City of Rancho Cordova Zoning Code Section 6.68.090(E). If there is a need for work to occur outside of these hours, SMUD will provide additional notification to customers adjacent to the project boundary.

Most construction would include open trenching to a maximum depth of 7 feet, though some deeper excavation may be necessary to avoid conflicts with existing utility lines. Removing water from the construction area (dewatering) may be necessary due to the high water-table of the area. SMUD would use Baker tanks and/or filtration bags, if needed, to treat water prior to discharge into the existing storm drain system in a manner consistent with regulatory requirements. For the 12kV alignment, the 12kV cable would be installed in conduit in the trenches. The 69kV electrical cable would be placed in a duct bank, which is a series of conduits encased in concrete. The trenches would then be backfilled with a cement-like slurry mixture or compacted aggregate base to the roadway subgrade elevation followed by replacement of the appropriate cover (e.g., pavement or dirt). Construction activities would generally be conducted in existing alignments or along the roadway and would include the temporary closure of footpaths and roads. Alternative routes of travel will be provided where feasible. Following construction activities each day, the open trenches would be covered, and equipment removed to allow safe use of footpaths and roadways.

As design for both the 12kV and 69kV proceed, the exact placement of the alignments will be determined based on existing utility infrastructure location, avoidance of identified environmental resources, and engineering/construction considerations.

2.5.3 Project Operation and Maintenance

Project operation would include the active use of the underground electrical components installed during construction. SMUD would maintain the new 12kV and 69kV lines in the same way as it maintains the existing 12kV and 69kV lines under baseline conditions. Maintenance would entail regular inspection including testing and addressing issues warranting repair as identified during inspection. Components in vaults would be inspected to verify stability, structural integrity, and condition. Utility covers would be visually inspected to check for damaged lids, disposition of lid covers (for safety and trip hazards), and the presence of water. While inspecting utility covers, crews inspect the condition of cable splices and grounding for the cable.

SMUD would access components associated with SMUD's underground electrical facilities in pickup trucks or service trucks using existing roads; no off-road travel would be necessary. Inspections would take less than a day. There would not be any above-ground structures installed as part of the project, and operation of project elements would not create sources of noise, light, or other features that would be noticeable to residents and recreationists in the area. Maintenance of the project could result in vehicle movement, vehicle noise, and human presence.

2.5.4 Project Schedule

Construction for Phase 1 (12kV alignment) is anticipated take up to 3 weeks and would begin in the summer of 2022. Phase 2 (69kV alignment) construction would take approximately 12 months once initiated and is anticipated to begin in the next 5 to 7 years, after the completion of Phase 1.

3 Existing Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation

This chapter is organized by environmental resource category; each resource category is organized to provide an integrated discussion of the existing environmental conditions (including regulatory setting and environmental setting), potential environmental effects (including direct and indirect impacts), and measures to reduce significant effects, where feasible, associated with implementation of the Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement project. As shown below and in the Initial Study (IS) (see Appendix B), further analysis was determined to be necessary for potentially significant impacts to Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation as part of this EIR. This chapter, combined with "Mandatory Findings of Significance" as provided in Appendix B also present an analysis of the project's cumulative impacts, which are the impacts of the project considered together with other past, present, and probable future projects producing related impacts, as required by Section 15130 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines.

Terminology Used In the EIR

This Draft EIR may use the following terms to describe the level of significance of impacts identified during the environmental analysis:

Significant and Unavoidable Impact: An impact that exceeds the defined threshold of significance and cannot be eliminated or reduced to a less than significant level through the implementation of feasible mitigation measures.

Potentially Significant Impact: An impact that exceeds the defined thresholds of significance prior to implementation of mitigation measures. The analysis may determine that the impact can be reduced to less than significant through implementation of feasible mitigation measures. Or if feasible mitigation measures are not available or would not reduce the magnitude of the impact below the threshold of significance, the impact would be determined significant and unavoidable.

Less-than-Significant Impact: An impact that does not exceed the defined thresholds of significance or that is potentially significant and can be eliminated or reduced to a less than significant through implementation of feasible mitigation measures.

No Impact: Where an environmental issue is evaluated and it is determined that the project would have no effect on the issue, the conclusion is drawn that the proposed project would have "No Impact" and no further analysis is presented.

Mitigation Measures: The State CEQA Guidelines Section 15370 define mitigation as:

a) avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;

b) minimizing impacts by limiting the degree of magnitude of the action and its implementation;

c) rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;

d) reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and

e) compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

Cumulative Impacts: An analysis of cumulative impacts follows the project-specific impacts and mitigation measures evaluation in each section. A cumulative impact consists of an impact that is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects causing related impacts.

The beginning of the cumulative impact analysis in each section includes a description of the cumulative analysis methodology and the geographic or temporal context in which the cumulative impact is analyzed (e.g., the City of Rancho Cordova, Valley Nisenan ancestral territory, the Sacramento Valley Air Basin, other activity concurrent with project construction). In some instances, a project-specific impact may be considered less than significant, but when considered in conjunction with other cumulative projects or activities may be considered significant or potentially significant.

As noted above, where a cumulative impact is significant when compared to existing or baseline conditions, the analysis must address whether the project's contribution to the significant cumulative impact is "considerable." If the contribution of the project is considerable, then the EIR must identify potentially feasible measures that could avoid or reduce the magnitude of the project's contribution to a less-than-considerable level. If the project's contribution is not considerable, it is considered less than significant, and no mitigation for the project's contribution is required.

Introduction to the Analysis

In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2, this draft environmental impact report (Draft EIR) identifies and focuses on the significant direct and indirect environmental effects of the project, giving due consideration to both its short-term and its long-term effects. Short-term effects are generally those associated with construction, and long-term effects are generally those associated with project operations. As part of the IS, prepared for the project and provided in Appendix B, the project was determined to have either less-than-significant or no impact for the majority of environmental resource categories. The following discussion summarizes the analysis conducted for these resource categories, and presents any mitigation determined to be necessary to reduce impacts to less than significant. Refer to Appendix B for additional information.

Environmental Resource Categories Not Evaluated Further

Aesthetics

The project site is located in a developed area of Rancho Cordova. Surrounding uses include single- and multi-family residential development, schools, and open space of the American River Parkway. The visual character of the project alignments and the surrounding area is typical of the City of Rancho Cordova's residential areas, which includes school buildings, single and multi-family residential units, landscaping, lawns, and open space. Distant views consist of the Sierra Nevada foothills, although existing buildings, trees, and other city infrastructure preclude/limit these views in many locations. The American River is also visible from the northern end of the 69kV alignment, though the view is partially obscured by trees and vegetation along the river's edge.

The closest scenic resource to the project alignment is the American River, located approximately 200 feet from the riser pole at the northern terminus of the 69kV alignment. Between the project alignment and the American River, there is extensive open space and vegetation that blocks views of the American River. Views in the project area are limited to the open space and vegetation of the Parkway, primarily because of the flat terrain and the level of development/landscaping that preclude long-range views. While project construction activities, particularly the temporary and short-term presence of construction equipment, would temporarily interfere with views of the river and the Parkway, these impacts would cease upon completion of construction. Further, the project would not involve the operation of above-ground facilities that could permanently impede long-distance views in the area.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to aesthetics and this issue is not discussed further.

Agriculture and Forest Resources

The project site does not contain any farmland or lands designated as Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance). The project site is not zoned for agricultural uses, and there are no Williamson Act contract lands within or near the project alignments. There are no areas either within or adjacent to the project alignment that have been designated as forest land or timberland or support trees in the concentration or cover that would qualify them as such.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to agriculture and forest resources and this issue is not discussed further.

Energy

During Phase 1, an estimated 72,427 gallons of gasoline and 5,392 gallons of diesel would be consumed and during Phase 2, an estimated 1,254,910 gallons of gasoline and 89,721 gallons of diesel would be consumed, accounting for both onsite equipment use

and offsite vehicle travel. This one-time energy expenditure required to construct the alignments would be nonrecoverable. The energy needs for project construction would be temporary and would not require additional capacity or increase peak or base period demands for electricity or other forms of energy. Furthermore, the project includes the replacement of aging underground cables, which would result in increased transmission efficiency. Increased efficiency in energy transmission allows for increased energy conservation, which would be consistent with the City's General Plan Policy NR.7.1. Furthermore, the underground cable replacement helps support electrification which is a technology use type recommended in the SMUD's Zero Carbon Plan for building and vehicle decarbonization. Thus, the project would not conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to energy resources, and this issue is not discussed further.

Geology and Soils

No Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones exist in Sacramento County (CGS 2010). Consequently, the project is not expected to expose people or structures to adverse effects caused by the rupture of a known fault. Additionally, the project site is located in a flat area of Rancho Cordova so there is no risk of landslides. The project would not require the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. Thus, the project would have no impact related to soil suitability for use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. The project site is located in the Sacramento Valley, which has historically experienced a low level of seismic ground shaking. The California Geological Survey has identified the region as an area of low to moderately low earthquake shaking potential (CGS 2016). The project would be constructed in a manner consistent with the California Building Code (CBC) Title 24, which identifies specific design requirements to reduce damage from strong seismic ground shaking, ground failure, landslides, soil erosion, and expansive soils. The potential for erosion and topsoil loss at the project site would be minimal because the project would prepare and implement erosion and sediment control plans and comply with the requirements of the CBC. The new 69kV cable would be placed in a series of conduits encased in concrete. Trenches associated with underground infrastructure would then be backfilled with a cementitious slurry mixture or compacted aggregate base to the roadway subgrade elevation to reduce the risk of expansive soils. The Rancho Cordova area is not considered sensitive for paleontological resources as it is generally underlain by younger Holocene alluvium (City of Rancho Cordova 2006:4.11-4).

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to geology and soils, and this issue is not discussed further.

Greenhouse Gases

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with implementation of the project would be generated during project construction. Project-related construction activities would

result in the generation of GHG emissions from the use of heavy-duty off-road construction equipment and vehicle use during worker commute. Construction activities would include site preparation, trenching, and resurfacing. The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District has established quantitative significance thresholds for evaluating GHG emissions. For construction of all types, emissions due to land development projects, the established significance threshold is 1,100 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent ($MTCO_2e$) annually (SMAQMD 2021). Phase 1 and a portion of Phase 2 construction activities were assumed to occur in 2022, while the remainder of Phase 2's emissions were also assumed to occur in 2023. In 2022, Phase 1 and Phase 2 construction-related GHG emissions would generate a total of 425 $MTCO_2e$. In 2023, Phase 2 construction-related GHG emissions would generate a total of 470 $MTCO_2e$. Individually, 2022 and 2023 annual emissions would be under the 1,100 $MTCO_2e$ annual threshold. Furthermore, the sum of GHG emissions for both 2022 and 2023 construction activities, 895 $MTCO_2e$, would not exceed the annual 1,100 $MTCO_2e$ threshold. In general, it is expected that the new infrastructure would be more efficient than existing equipment. Thus, the project would not conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopting for the purpose of reducing emissions of GHGs.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to GHGs, and this issue is not discussed further.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The project site is not located within an airport land use plan or within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, or within the vicinity of a private airstrip. Implementation of the project would not result in an aviation-related safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area.

There are two public schools adjacent to the project alignment and five schools within one-quarter mile of the project alignments. Small quantities of hazardous materials such as fuels, oils, and lubricants would be used during project construction. The project would be required to comply with existing regulations associated with the transport, use, and disposal of hazardous materials. Compliance with applicable regulations regarding hazardous materials would reduce the potential for hazardous emissions within one-quarter mile of existing schools

The project alignments and surrounding areas are not located on any site included on a list of hazardous materials sites (SWRCB 2022; DTSC 2022). Further, if any hazardous materials or conditions are discovered during project construction, SMUD and its contractor would comply with existing laws and regulations related to the use, disposal, and transport of hazardous materials.

Project construction may require temporary lane closures along the project alignments that could interfere with or slow down emergency vehicles. However, project activities that may involve public right-of-way would be required to obtain an encroachment permit from the City of Rancho Cordova. As part of this encroachment permit application, SMUD

would be required to prepare and then later implement a traffic control plan, which would require the provision of temporary traffic controls and maintenance of emergency access during construction. Once project construction is complete, all roads would return to their pre-construction state and project operations would not interfere with emergency repose or evacuation plans.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to hazards and hazardous materials, and this issue is not discussed further.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The project alignments are located within the Sacramento River Basin. As such, the applicable water quality standards are listed in the Fifth Edition of the Water Quality Control Plan (Basin Plan) For the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins (CRWQCB 2018). Construction of the project would occur within the City of Rancho Cordova and would disturb more than one acre of land surface. Therefore, the applicable waste discharge requirements (WDRs) are the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) stormwater National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit (Order No. R5-2016-0040-008 and NPDES No. CAS082597 Municipal Stormwater NPDES Permit) and the Statewide NPDES General Construction Permit for stormwater runoff (Order No. 2009-0009-DWQ [as amended by 2010-0014-DWQ and 2012-0006-DWQ] and NPDES No. CAS000002 [Construction General NPDES Permit]), and the dewatering and low threat discharges general NPDES permit (Order No. R5-2008-0081 and NPDES No. CAG995001 [Dewatering General NPDES Permit]).

Because the project would involve construction activities within previously disturbed areas, which are primarily paved areas, the project would not involve construction practices or develop facilities that would substantially prevent or otherwise redirect groundwater resources in the project site. Implementation of the project would not result in an increase in impervious surfaces; there would be no change in surface infiltration characteristics affecting groundwater recharge and the project would not be expected to substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in or near the project site.

A portion of the project alignments are within the 100-year floodplain (City of Rancho Cordova 2006:4.9-9). Thus, flooding could occur in the area. Project construction could temporarily impede or redirect flood flows if construction equipment would be located near gutters and areas near storm drain inlets. However, if notified of an impending chance of flood conditions, SMUD would vacate and shore up the project area to prevent damage to its construction equipment and infrastructure. Construction activities would be temporary and project operation would not require above-ground features that could impede or redirect flood flows.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to hydrology and water quality, and this issue is not discussed further.

Land Use and Planning

The project would replace existing underground cable and install new underground utility vaults in the City of Rancho Cordova. Because the duct banks and conduit that would house the new cable would be underground, there would be no division or impediment to the surrounding community as such underground facilities do not interfere with community life. The project would not lead to a physical division of an established community. The project does not propose any land use changes. The project would not conflict with any adopted plans, policies, or regulations adopted for avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to land use and planning, and this issue is not discussed further.

Mineral Resources

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act directs the State Geologist to classify (identify and map) the non-fuel mineral resources of the State to show where economically significant mineral deposits occur and where they are likely to occur based upon the best available scientific data. Areas known as Mineral Resource Zones (MRZs) are classified on the basis of geologic factors, without regard to existing land use and land ownership. The areas are categorized into four general classifications (MRZ-1 through MRZ-4). Of the four, the MRZ-2 classification is recognized in land use planning because the likelihood for occurrence of significant mineral deposits is high, and the classification may be a factor in the discovery and development of mineral deposits that would tend to be economically beneficial to society.

A majority of the project alignments are classified as MRZ-3; however, portions of the 69kV alignment along Rossmoor Drive, near Rossmoor Bar River access, have been classified as MRZ-2. The MRZ-3 classification indicates that these areas contain mineral deposits, the significance of which cannot be evaluated from available data. The MRZ-2 classification indicates that significant mineral deposits are present, or there exists a high likelihood that significant mineral deposits are present (Dupras 1999a). The project alignments are not designated as a locally important mineral resource recovery site in the *Rancho Cordova General Plan,* and no existing mining sites have been identified along the alignments (City of Rancho Cordova 2006: 4.8-13; Dupras 1999b). The project alignments are within the boundaries of the Folsom Mining District, a large and complex historic-era archaeological district. Potential impacts related to the Folsom Mining District are evaluated in Section 3.2, “Cultural Resources,” of this Draft EIR as this is no longer an active mining area.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to mineral resources, and this issue is not discussed further.

Noise

In the project area, the dominant noise source is roadway traffic, primarily from vehicles along Coloma Road and activities and events at Cordova High School and Mills Middle School. The project would result in temporary increase in noise levels during construction as a result of heavy equipment movement and pavement removal, but no permanent increases in ambient noise levels would occur during operation. Construction-related noise sources would include both mobile and stationary on-site equipment (e.g., dozers, loaders, generators). Construction noise would be short-term and temporary, and operation of heavy-duty construction equipment would be intermittent throughout the day during construction.

The City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code Chapter 6.68 exempts certain activities, including construction, from the City's noise standards as long as the activities do not take place between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. on weekdays and Friday commencing at 8:00 p.m. through and including 7:00 a.m. on Saturday; Saturdays commencing at 8:00 p.m. through and including 7:00 a.m. on the next following Sunday and on each Sunday after the hour of 8:00 p.m. This exemption provides that construction equipment must include appropriately maintained exhaust and intake silencers. However, the City does not specify limits in terms of maximum noise levels that may occur during the allowable construction hours.

The project is not located within an airport land use plan or within two miles of a public airport or public use airport. Additionally, the project is not located within two miles of a private airstrip. Finally, the project would not include any new land uses where people would live or work.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to noise and vibration, and this issue is not discussed further.

Population and Housing

The project involves the replacement of an underground cable that does not include new homes, businesses, or infrastructure that would induce or generate population growth. Therefore, the project would not result in substantial unplanned population growth. Further, no persons or homes would be displaced as a result of implementation or operation of the proposed project.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to population and housing, and this issue is not discussed further.

Public Services

Implementation of the project would not increase demand for fire or police protection services such that the construction of new or expansion of existing fire or police service facilities would be required. The project does not include a residential/commercial component that would increase demand for services nor would it increase the service

boundary of any existing public service providers. As noted above, the project would not provide any new housing that would generate new students in the community or a need for new or expanded park facilities. For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to public services, and this issue is not discussed further.

Recreation

The project would not involve any changes to permitted uses of existing recreational facilities, nor would it require the construction of new recreational facilities or the expansion of existing ones that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. Thus, the project would not result in potentially significant impacts related to recreation, and this issue is not discussed further.

Utilities and Service Systems

The project involves replacement of existing electrical utility lines and would not require water supply or generate wastewater requiring disposal. Removing water from the construction area (dewatering) may be necessary due to the high water-table of the area. SMUD would use Baker tanks and/or filtration bags, if needed, to treat water prior to discharge into the existing storm drain system in a manner consistent with regulatory requirements.

The project would generate a small amount of solid waste during construction, but would not generate solid waste during project operation. Construction debris could include asphalt, concrete, scrap lumber, finishing materials, metals, and organic materials. Compliance with the current CALGreen Code and Rancho Cordova's Construction and Demolition Debris Reduction, Reuse and Recycling requirements would result in a reduction of construction waste and demolition debris and increase recycling.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to utilities, and this issue is not discussed further.

Wildfire

The project alignments are located within a local responsibility area that is designated as a non-Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (non-VHFHSZ) (CAL FIRE 2008). Construction of the project would require road lane closures that could temporarily impair emergency response plans or evacuation plans. As required by the City of Rancho Cordova, SMUD and its construction contractor would develop and implement a traffic control plan that would maintain access and connectivity during project construction activities. Because access and connectivity would be maintained during construction, the project would not substantially impair an emergency response plan or evacuation plan. Once construction is complete, the project alignments would be returned to their pre-construction condition and there would not be any above-ground features that would potentially impair emergency response or evacuation.

The project is located in an area of predominantly flat terrain and would not involve the changing to slopes that could expose people to risks of flooding from post-fire slope instability. Project facilities would be located under the ground surface and would not result in changes to existing drainage.

For the reasons above, the project would not result in significant impacts related to wildfire, and this issue is not discussed further.

Environmental Resource Categories Evaluated Further

As described in Chapter 1, "Introduction," this EIR's analysis provides a more detailed evaluation of a single environmental resource topic because other topics have already been addressed in the IS (see Appendix B):

- Section 3.1, Tribal Cultural Resources
- Section 3.2, Cultural Resources
- Section 3.3, Air Quality
- Section 3.4, Biological Resources
- Section 3.5, Transportation

The format of Sections 3.1 through 3.5 is as follows:

Regulatory Setting gives a summary of regulations, plans, policies, and laws that are relevant to the environmental effects in each resource section. Regulations originating from the federal, state, and local levels are each discussed as appropriate.

Environmental Setting presents the existing environmental conditions on the project site and surrounding area as appropriate, in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 15125). This setting generally serves as the baseline against which environmental impacts are evaluated.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures identifies the thresholds of significance used to determine the level of significance of the environmental impacts for each resource topic, in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15126, 15126.2, and 15143. The thresholds of significance used in this Draft EIR are based on the checklist presented in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines; best available data; and regulatory standards of federal, state, and local agencies. The level of each impact is determined by comparing the effects of the project to the environmental setting. Key methods and assumptions used to frame and conduct the impact analysis as well as issues or potential impacts not discussed further (such issues for which the project would have no impact) are also described.

Project impacts are organized numerically in each subsection (e.g., Impact 3.1-1, Impact 3.1-2, Impact 3.1-3, etc.). A bold-font impact statement, a summary of each impact, and its level of significance precedes the discussion of each impact. The discussion that follows the impact summary includes the substantial evidence supporting the impact significance conclusion.

The Draft EIR must describe any feasible measures that could avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate for significant adverse impacts, and the measures are to be fully enforceable through incorporation in and adoption of a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (Public Resources Code Section 21081.6[b]). Mitigation measures are not required for effects that are found to be less than significant. Where feasible mitigation for a significant impact is available, it is described following the impact along with its effectiveness at addressing the impact. Each identified mitigation measure is labeled numerically to correspond with the number of the impact that would be mitigated by the measure. Where sufficient feasible mitigation is not available to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level, or where SMUD lacks the authority to ensure that the mitigation is implemented when needed, the impacts are identified as remaining "significant and unavoidable."

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3.1 Tribal Cultural Resources

This section analyzes and evaluates the potential impacts of the project on known and unknown (undiscovered or unidentified) Tribal cultural resources. Tribal cultural resources, as defined by Assembly Bill (AB) 52, Statutes of 2014, in Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21074, are sites, features, places, cultural landscapes, sacred places and objects, with cultural value to a Tribe. A Tribal cultural landscape is defined as a geographic area (including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife therein), associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values. Because Tribal cultural resources are known to be in the immediate vicinity of the project alignments (as explained further in Section 3.1.2), unanticipated Native American human remains would also be considered a Tribal cultural resource, and are therefore analyzed in this section.

One comment letter regarding Tribal cultural resources was received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix A). The Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) requested AB 52 and Senate Bill (SB) 18 compliance information; SB 18 does not apply to the project because there is no General Plan amendment associated with the project (which is the trigger for SB 18 compliance). Additionally, SB 18 is not a CEQA requirement and therefore is not discussed in this section. AB 52 compliance is described below.

3.1.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal

There are no federal regulations that apply.

State

California Register of Historical Resources

All properties in California that are listed in or formally determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are also listed in the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR). The CRHR is a listing of State of California resources that are significant in the context of California's history. It is a Statewide program with a scope and with criteria for inclusion similar to those used for the NRHP. In addition, properties designated under municipal or county ordinances are also eligible for listing in the CRHR.

A historical resource must be significant at the local, State, or national level under one or more of the criteria defined in the California Code of Regulations Title 15, Chapter 11.5, Section 4850 to be included in the CRHR. The CRHR criteria are tied to CEQA because any resource that meets the criteria below is considered a significant historical resource under CEQA. As noted above, all resources listed in or formally determined eligible for listing in the NRHP are automatically listed in the CRHR.

The CRHR uses four evaluation criteria:

Criterion 1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

Criterion 2. Is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history.

Criterion 3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction; represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values.

Criterion 4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.

Similar to the NRHP, a historical resource must meet one of the above criteria and retain integrity to be listed in the CRHR. The CRHR uses the same seven aspects of integrity used by the NRHP: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and associations.

California Environmental Quality Act

CEQA requires public agencies to consider the effects of their actions on "[T]ribal cultural resources." PRC Section 21084.2 establishes that "[a] project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a [T]ribal cultural resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment." PRC Section 21074 states:

a) "Tribal cultural resources" are either of the following:

   1) Sites, features, places, cultural landscapes, sacred places, and objects with cultural value to a California Native American Tribe that are either of the following:

      A) Included or determined to be eligible for inclusion in the CRHR.

      B) Included in a local register of historical resources as defined in subdivision (k) of Section 5020.1.

   2) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Section 5024.1 for the purposes of this paragraph, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American Tribe.

b) A cultural landscape that meets the criteria of subdivision (a) is a Tribal cultural resource to the extent that the landscape is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape.

c) A historical resource described in Section 21084.1, a unique archaeological resource as defined in subdivision (g) of Section 21083.2, or a "nonunique archaeological resource" as defined in subdivision (h) of Section 21083.2 may also be a Tribal cultural resource if it conforms with the criteria of subdivision (a).

AB 52, signed by the California Governor in September of 2014, established a new class of resources under CEQA: "[T]ribal cultural resources," defined in PRC Section 21074. Pursuant to CEQA requirements, lead agencies undertaking CEQA review must, upon written request of a California Native American Tribe, begin consultation before the release of an EIR, negative declaration, or mitigated negative declaration.

Health and Safety Code, Section 7050.5

Section 7050.5 of the Health and Safety Code requires that construction or excavation be stopped in the vicinity of discovered human remains until the coroner can determine whether the remains are those of a Native American. If they are determined to be those of a Native American, the coroner must contact Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC).

California Native American Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Sites Act

The California Native American Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Sites Act (PRC Section 5097.9) applies to both State and private lands. The act requires, upon discovery of human remains, that construction or excavation activity cease and that the county coroner be notified. If the remains are those of a Native American, the coroner must notify the NAHC, which notifies (and has the authority to designate) the most likely descendants (MLD) of the deceased. The act stipulates the procedures the descendants may follow for treating or disposing of the remains and associated grave goods.

Public Resource Code Section 5097

PRC Section 5097 specifies the procedures to be followed in the event of the unexpected discovery of human remains on nonfederal land. The disposition of Native American human burials falls within the jurisdiction of the NAHC. Section 5097.5 of the Code states the following:

> No person shall knowingly and willfully excavate upon, or remove, destroy, injure, or deface any historic or prehistoric ruins, burial grounds, archaeological or vertebrate paleontological site, including fossilized footprints, inscriptions made by human agency, or any other archaeological, paleontological or historical feature, situated on public lands, except with the express permission of the public agency having jurisdiction over such lands. Violation of this section is a misdemeanor.

3.1.2 Environmental Setting

Study Area

Figure 2-2 shows both the 12kV and 69kV proposed alignments, as well as the alignment of the existing underground direct-buried cable. The alignments presented on Figure 2-2 illustrate SMUD's preferred locations for cable installation; however, as needed to avoid resources, the analysis in this EIR assumes the cable would be installed within the boundary of the study area identified in Figure 3.1-1. The study area was designed to encompass all areas within the alignment that could be subject to ground disturbing project actions. The study area also encompasses all areas proposed for staging, access, and storage within the alignment.

For the portion of the project involving the 69kV alignment within the American River Parkway, the majority of the study area is defined as the location of the existing underground cable alignment with a 40-foot buffer on either side. As the existing 69kV alignment approaches Rossmoor Drive, it turns to the north through a wooded area (see Figure 3.1-1). To avoid impacts to the trees, the existing alignment here will be abandoned in place, and a new alignment which extends east towards Rossmoor Drive will be selected. To provide alternatives for this eastward trending alignment, a space equaling 5.19 acres was included in the study area. Once the alignment reaches Rossmoor Drive, a path will be chosen which either parallels the road or is placed within the road. To accommodate all possible alignments along Rossmoor Drive, the study area included a 40-foot-wide corridor starting from the edge of pavement on the west side of the road and a 10-foot-wide corridor starting at the edge of pavement on the east side; the 40-foot-wide corridor on the west side of Rossmoor Drive is equivalent to the existing park fuel break. A 0.58-acre area around the existing electrical tower on the south bank of the American River was also included in the study area to accommodate utility vault installation and equipment staging at the termination point of the new alignment.

Source: Data received from SMUD in 2022

Figure 3.1-1: Study Area

Ethnographic Setting

The study area is within the traditional territory of the Valley Nisenan, also known as the Southern Maidu. These Indigenous people are the southernmost linguistic group of the Maidu-Penutian language family who occupied the northern portion of California's Central Valley. Although boundaries with neighboring tribes were often fluid and overlapping, the southern portion of the Valley Nisenan territory is defined as extending from the original confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers near today's Old Sacramento, up the American River and its tributaries to the crest of the Sierras. The northern portion of their territory consisted of the lower half of the Feather River, and then east along both the Bear and Yuba rivers up to the Sierra crest. Their neighbors were the Plains Miwok to the south, the Patwin across the Sacramento River to the west, and the Konkow and Mountain Maidu to the north. Settlements were typically located on low, natural rises next to streams and rivers or on gentle, south-facing slopes. Populations within the settlements are estimated to have varied from 15 individuals or more for smaller occupation sites and satellite villages, and up to 500 or more in large villages (SMUD 2022).

Valley Nisenan relied on a wide range of abundant natural resources. Large and small mammals, such as pronghorn antelope, deer, tule elk, black bears, cottontails, and jackrabbits, were hunted by individuals or by communal effort. Plant resources included acorns, pine nuts, buckeye nuts, berries, grass seeds, herbs, and underground tubers. To procure these resources, Valley Nisenan employed a variety of tools and hunting implements. The bow and arrow, snares, traps, nets, and enclosures or blinds were used for hunting land mammals and birds. For fishing, they made canoes from tule, balsa, or logs, and used harpoons, hooks, nets, and basketry traps. To collect plant resources, sharpened digging sticks, long poles for dislodging acorns and pinecones, and a variety of basketry, such as seed beaters, burden baskets, and carrying nets, were utilized. Foods were processed with a variety of tools, such as bedrock mortars, bedrock grinding slicks, hand stones, pestles, hopper mortars, or metates (SMUD 2022).

A key component of Valley Nisenan life was their participation in an extensive east-west trade network between the coast and the Great Basin. From coastal groups marine *Olivella*, abalone, shell and steatite moved eastward, while salt and obsidian traveled westward from the Sierras and Great Basin. Basketry, an important trade item, moved in both directions (SMUD 2022).

The traditional culture and lifeways of the Valley Nisenan, and Central Valley Indigenous people in general, were disrupted beginning in the early 1800s. Although Spanish explorers entered their territory as early as 1808, there is no record of the forced movement of any Nisenan to the missions, at least no evidence similar to that recorded for the neighboring Plains Miwok. Regardless, Valley Nisenan and other Indigenous peoples were affected by land grant settlements and devastated by foreign disease epidemics that swept through the densely populated Central Valley. In particular, an epidemic presumed to be malaria, swept through the region in 1833, wiping out entire villages and causing the death of an estimated 75 percent of the Valley Nisenan population. Not long after in 1839, Captain John Sutter settled into the area and

conscripted many of the surviving local Indigenous peoples to work for him at his fort and various other endeavors, including his hock farm on the banks of the Feather River (SMUD 2022).

Additional impacts to Valley Nisenan traditional lifeways resulted from the California Gold Rush in 1849. As a steady influx of non-native people exploited their lands and wasted their resources, many lifeways of the Valley Nisenan, as well as neighboring groups, were irretrievably interrupted. As a result, surviving Valley Nisenan either retreated to the foothills and mountains, or became domestics and laborers for the expanding ranching, farming, and mining industries (SMUD 2022).

Known Nisenan Villages Near the Project Site

The banks of the American River were heavily populated in Indigenous times. At least four Nisenan villages are known to have been present within ten miles of the project alignment. On the north side of the American River, east of California State University Sacramento but west of the project area, was *Kadema*, *Kishkish,* and *Yamankudu*. On the south side of the river, the closest known village was *Yalisumni*. Additional un-named villages on the south side of the American River are evidenced by three particularly deep and large archaeological sites, CA-SAC-157, CA-SAC-319, and CA-SAC- 320/H, each site being located less than three miles from either end of the project alignment (SMUD 2022).

Contemporary Native American Setting

Defining Tribal cultural resources involves the knowledge and expertise of living California Native Americans. As the embodiment of a continuous connection between tribal history and the landscape, they are uniquely qualified to act as the interpreters and stewards of their culture, including the ability to define the significance of the material remains and landscapes of their ancestor's lifeways.

As described above, the Project is located on land traditionally inhabited by the Valley Nisenan. Today, many descendants of Valley Nisenan still reside on lands once inhabited by their ancestors or on lands set aside for tribal communities by the federal government in California which may or may not been traditionally inhabited by their ancestors. Contemporary Californian Native American tribes with ancestral connections to the study area and Valley Nisenan heritage include the United Auburn Indian Community (UAIC), Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians (SSBMI), Ione Band of Miwok, and Wilton Rancheria.

These tribes today maintain connection to their history and culture in a multitude of ways, including through ceremony, language and traditional knowledge instruction, community service, and tribal governance. For example, a "Big Time" is typically celebrated every September to mark the start of autumn and acorn gathering time at Chaw'se Grinding Rock State Park in Pine Grove. This celebration includes serving traditional foods, traditional dancing, healing rituals, and worship in the roundhouse. Language and

traditional skill classes are offered by most of the tribes, including by the SSBMI which has a Traditional Ecological Knowledge department to assist members with learning about respectful and traditional uses of plants and animals, and the UAIC who has a Pre-K through 8th grade school where key aspects of Indian culture and critical thinking are taught to prepare tribal members to face future challenges (Private School Review 2022; SSBMI 2022a). Tribal community service departments provide family support services to adults and children in order to promote the health and well-being of tribal community members and their families as well as connection to their heritage. Common services offered by all tribes include Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) advocacy and intervention, housing assistance, health care assistance, Elder programs, and grants and scholarships for higher education (Ione Band of Miwok Indians 2022; SSBMI 2022a; UAIC 2022; Wilton Rancheria 2022a). Governance on tribal lands is typically outlined by tribally prepared constitutions, codes and/or ordinances, and are carried out by tribal departments which are in turn typically overseen by the tribal council. This includes the office of Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Because tribes retain inherent sovereign powers over their members and territory, SSBMI and the Wilton Rancheria also have Tribal Courts which serve as culturally- sensitive, independent judicial forums where tribal cultural values are held at the forefront of dispute resolutions (SSBMI 2022b; Wilton Rancheria 2022b).

Consultation and Research

Sacred Lands File Search

A search of the NAHC Sacred Lands File was requested on May 18, 2021. On June 21, 2021, the results were returned as positive for the presence of Native American resources within the study area. A list of Native American individuals and Tribes to contact for more information was also provided with the results.

Tribal Consultation

As discussed previously, 1 comment letter regarding Tribal cultural resources was received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix A). NAHC requested AB 52 and SB 18 compliance information; SB 18 does not apply to the project because there is a no General Plan amendment associated with the project (which is the trigger for SB 18 compliance). Additionally, SB 18 is not a CEQA requirement and therefore is not discussed in this section. The AB 52 consultation process is described below.

On August 19, 2021, in compliance with AB 52 requirements, SMUD sent letters to the Ione Band of Miwok Indians, UAIC, Shingle Springs Rancheria, and Wilton Rancheria; responses were received from all four Tribes. Because Tribal consultation involves the locations and details of sites, the specific details of the consultations are confidential pursuant to California law. A summary of events related to communication between the Tribes and SMUD is provided below:

- June 14, 2021: Wilton Rancheria participated in in-field consultation and gave preliminary confirmation to SMUD that they wanted to consult.

- September 13, 2021: UAIC replied to SMUD's letter indicating a desire to consult and to have a forensic canine survey conducted.

- September 18, 2021 SMUD sent the Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe an invitation to consult under AB 52 in response to a request to consult under AB 52 sent to the consultant.

- September 16, 2021: Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians submitted a letter indicating a desire to consult.

- Monthly or bimonthly meetings with all three Tribes or individual Tribes, as requested by the Tribes, have been conducted since September to the present. SMUD conducts regular meetings with UAIC, SSBMI, IBMI, and Wilton Rancheria, and these meetings include updates on all SMUD projects, regardless of whether Tribes have elected to consult on various projects. SMUD does not currently hold standing meetings with the Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe.

- January 13, 2022, a meeting to discuss the was held with Wilton Rancheria, UAIC, and Shingle Springs to discuss the findings of the forensic canine survey, designation of Tribal cultural resources, and next steps for an EIR. Based on the results of the meeting, three Tribal cultural resources were identified within the study area. The Tribal cultural resources identified were the sites of the positive responses identified as a result of the forensic canine field survey.

Forensic Canine Field Survey

Consultation and background research identified that the project location is known to be sensitive for the presence of Native American human remains and burials. As requested by the UAIC, and in agreement with the other consulting Tribes, a forensic a canine field survey was arranged to investigate the study area for the presence of human remains. December 2021, the Institute for Canine Forensics (ICF) conducted a canine field survey of the 69kV project study area (see Figure 3.1-1); Ambassador Drive (i.e., the 12kV alignment) was not included in the investigation because it is paved, and intact pavement creates a scent barrier for the dogs (SMUD 2022:42). This investigation was conducted as a non-ground disturbing testing method to help ascertain possible locations within the study area where human remains may be present. Four locations of "scattered scent" were identified. Three of these locations are within the study area and one is adjacent to the study area, but at a sufficient distance as to not be disturbed by project activities. A "scattered scent" alert by the dog indicates that the location of scent is highly disturbed and that the remains may be fragmentary and dissipated, and/or contain only soils once associated with an interment. No locations of possible intact or partially intact burials were identified by the dogs as a result of the canine investigation (SMUD 2022:4). A professional archaeologist and Tribal representatives from the UAIC and Wilton Rancheria were present during the canine field survey. Results of the canine investigation and a copy of the final report were sent to the UAIC, Wilton Rancheria, Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, and Ione Band of Miwok Indians.

Tribal Cultural Resources

Consultation with affiliated Tribes has identified the presence of three Tribal cultural resources in the study area. The consultation also identified that entire region encompassing the project alignment is considered to be sacred and highly sensitive for the presence of Tribal cultural resources, including human remains, based on tribal oral traditions, tribal knowledge, and the results of past investigations.

The three Tribal cultural resources are the sites of "scattered scent" identified as a result of the forensic canine field study described above. Based on the alert level given by the canines, these locations may only contain fragmentary or dissipated remains and/or associated burial soils. However, all participating Tribes consider burial soils, dissipated, and fragmented human remains to be as significant as an intact burial. On January 13, 2022, as part of the AB 52 consultation process all parties agreed that these sites represent Tribal cultural resources for the purposes of CEQA under PRC Section 21074.

3.1.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Thresholds of Significance/Significance Criteria

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, the project would result in a potentially significant impact on Tribal cultural resources if it would:

- disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries; or

- cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a Tribal cultural resource, defined in PRC Section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American Tribe.

Analysis Methodology

Information related to Tribal cultural resources is based on findings reported in the NAHC Sacred Lands File database search, the records search results (NCIC File Number File no. SAC-21-102 and SAC-21-150), the results of Native American consultation under AB 52, and the forensic canine field study. The analysis is also informed by the provisions and requirements of State, and local laws and regulations that apply to cultural resources.

PRC Section 21074 defines "Tribal cultural resources" as "sites, features, places, cultural landscapes, sacred places, and objects with cultural value to a California Native American [T]ribe" that are listed or determined eligible for listing in the CRHR, listed in a local register of historical resources, or otherwise determined by the lead agency to be a Tribal cultural resource.

Tribal cultural resources, which may qualify as "historical resources" pursuant to CEQA, are analyzed separately from built-environment historical resources and unique archaeological resources, which are analyzed in Section 3.2, "Cultural Resources," of this EIR.

Issues or Potential Impacts Not Discussed Further

All potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources are evaluated below.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.1-1: Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a Tribal cultural resource, including human remains.

Consultation with Wilton Rancheria, UAIC, and the SSBMI identified three Tribal cultural resources to be present within the study area and that the entire project location is sacred and sensitive for the presence of Tribal cultural resources including Native American burials. Because project-related ground-disturbing activities could result in damage to Tribal cultural resources, the project could cause a **potentially significant** impact.

As detailed above, SMUD has been in consultation with three Native American Tribes: Wilton Rancheria, UAIC, and Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. The Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribes initially asked to participate in the AB 52 consultation, but later decided they did not wish to continue in the consultation. Information obtained during consultation, combined with the record search results, and results of the forensic canine field survey, resulted in the identification of three Tribal cultural resources within the study area. The consultation also identified the entire project location as sacred and sensitive for the presence of Tribal cultural resources, including Native American burials.

California law recognizes the need to protect Native American human burials, skeletal remains, and items associated with Native American burials from vandalism and inadvertent destruction. The procedures for the treatment of Native American human remains are contained in California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 and California PRC Section 5097. Because the three Tribal cultural resources within the study area are believed to contain Native American human remains, any Native American human remains and associated objects and soils discovered would be considered part of the Tribal cultural resource.

Implementation of the project would involve ground disturbing activities (e.g., excavation) to install new electrical cable and utility vaults. The existing 12kV and 69kV lines would be abandoned in place, and new conduit containing the new lines would be installed in separate trenches. Although the study area is largely disturbed by existing underground utilities, residential, and recreational development as well as past mining and agricultural activities, research in the area has demonstrated there is high potential for the presence of subsurface cultural resources, including objects, features, and human remains that would qualify as Tribal cultural resources. Components of the project that require earth-

moving and excavation may disturb or destroy subsurface Tribal cultural resources. Therefore, the potential impact would be **potentially significant**.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1-1a: Avoid TCRs through Project Design.

During the design phase of the 69kV alignment portion of the Project, SMUD will consult with consulting Tribes on the adequacy of the plans to avoid and protect in place the identified Tribal cultural resources. The consulting Tribes will review the plans starting at 30 percent design, or a similar milestone, and will continue to be consulted with until the design plans are finalized (100 percent design). To avoid impacts and protect the Tribal cultural resources in place, a qualified archaeologist, in collaboration with consulting Tribes, will ensure that no staging, storage, or work will come within a minimum of a 15-foot protection buffer from each Tribal cultural resource. If the archaeologist and consulting Tribes find at any time that the plans do not meet the 15-foot protection buffer, the design engineers will work with the archaeologist and consulting Tribes to modify the plans. If sufficient modifications to the plans cannot be achieved to ensure a 15-foot protection buffer, additional consultation with the participating tribes will be required to develop appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures. Such measures may include creation of a treatment plan, data recovery, reburial, or additional plan redesign. The project plans will not be considered final until the archaeologist has deemed them to be adequate for the avoidance and protection in place of the Tribal cultural resources.

Mitigation Measure 3.1-1b: Prepare and implement worker cultural resources awareness and respect training program.

A cultural resources awareness and respect training program will be provided to all construction personnel active on the project site prior to the start of project implementation and to any new workers who start on the project after starting. A representative or representatives from culturally affiliated Native American Tribe(s) will be invited to participate in the development and delivery of the cultural resources awareness and respect training program in coordination with a professional archaeologist meeting the United States Secretary of Interior's qualification standards for archaeology. The program will include relevant information regarding Tribal cultural resources, including applicable laws and regulations, the consequences of violating said laws and regulations, protocols for resource avoidance, and protocols for discoveries, including who to contact in the event of a discovery and what to do upon the discovery of human remains. The program will also underscore the requirement for confidentiality and culturally-appropriate treatment of any find of significance to Native Americans and protocols, consistent to the extent feasible, with Native American Tribal values.

Mitigation Measure 3.1-1c: Implement Tribal and Archaeological Monitoring.

All ground disturbing activities, including any preparatory grading, tree removal, or vegetation clearing, within the project site will be monitored by a Tribal monitor and a qualified archaeologist. SMUD shall contact the participating Tribes a minimum of seven days prior to beginning earthwork or other ground disturbing activities to ensure a Tribal

monitor is available; construction activities will proceed if no response is received 48 hours prior to ground disturbing activities. The Tribal and archaeological monitor shall complete daily monitoring logs that describe each day's activities, including construction activities, locations, soil, and any cultural materials identified. In the event that unanticipated archaeological or Tribal cultural resources are discovered, including human remains, compliance with Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d would be required. Both the Tribal monitor and the archaeological monitor have the ability to halt work if a discovery occurs.

Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d: Halt Ground Disturbance Upon Discovery of Subsurface Tribal Cultural Resources and Evaluate Discovered Resource

If any suspected Tribal cultural resources or unique archaeological resources are discovered during ground disturbing construction activities, all work shall cease within 100 feet of the find, or a distance agreed upon by the Tribal monitor, archaeological monitor, SMUD, and the construction foreman based on the location and nature of the find and type of work occurring. The Tribal monitor shall determine if the find is a Tribal cultural resource. The Tribal monitor will make recommendations for further evaluation and culturally appropriate treatment of discovered Tribal cultural resources as necessary in consultation with the archaeological monitor.

Unless another type of treatment is recommended, resources will be preserved in place by redesigning the project; however, if project redesign is determined by SMUD, with evidence, to be technologically, regulatorily, or economically infeasible. Redesign could include modifying the route of the alignment; and route modification would remain within the boundary of the project study area. If redesign is demonstrated to be infeasible, culturally appropriate treatment would be developed in consultation with the participating Tribes. Culturally appropriate treatment may include, but is not limited to, processing materials for reburial, minimizing handling of cultural objects, leaving objects in place within the landscape, returning objects to a location within the project area where they will not be subject to future impacts from the project. Because curation of Tribal cultural resources is not considered by the participating Tribes to be appropriate or respectful, participating Tribes request that materials not be permanently curated, unless approved by the participating Tribes.

Work at the discovery location cannot resume until all necessary investigation, evaluation, and treatment of the discovery under the requirements of the CEQA, including AB 52, have been satisfied. Implementation of this mitigation measure would also satisfy State and local regulations regarding the treatment of Tribal cultural resources as well as Section 7050.5 of the Health and Safety Code and PRC 5097 regarding the treatment of human remains.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.1-1a through 3.1-1d would reduce potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources by avoiding and protecting them in place prior to the start of work to the extent feasible as defined in Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d. If avoidance is not possible, Tribally accepted and legally compliant procedures for the protection

and treatment of Tribal cultural resources would be implemented. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts to tribal cultural resources would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Impact 3.1-2: Potential for the project, in combination with other development, to contribute to a significant cumulative impact to Tribal cultural resources including human remains.

The project, in combination with other cumulative development in the region, could result in impacts to Tribal cultural resources in the area. However, with the implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.1-1a through 3.1-1d, significant impacts would not occur and the project's potential contribution to cumulative impacts would be **less than significant**.

The cumulative context for the analysis of Tribal cultural resources considers a broad regional system of which the resources are a part. The cumulative context for Tribal cultural resources is the former territory of the Valley Nisenan. As explained in Section 3.1.2, the former territory of the Valley Nisenan extended from present-day Old Sacramento to the crest of the Sierras and includes the project area.

Because all Tribal cultural resources are unique and nonrenewable members of finite classes, meaning there are a limited number, all adverse effects erode a dwindling resource base. Tribal cultural systems are represented by the total inventory of all sites and other remains in the region. As a result, a meaningful approach to preserving and managing cultural resources must focus on the likely distribution of Tribal cultural resources within a region, rather than on a single project or parcel boundary.

The historical lands of the Valley Nisenan people have been affected by development since the early 1800s as part of Spanish settlement and missionization and through the steady influx of nonnative people during the 1850s Gold Rush. Disturbance of the Nisenan lands continued after the Gold Rush through the dredging operations of the Natomas Company and expansion of their agricultural endeavors through the mid-1900s. The residential and recreational growth after World War II within the region encompassing the project area continued to perpetrate significant adverse effects on Tribal cultural resources, including Native American remains. Cumulative development in the area continues to contribute to the disturbance and loss of Tribal cultural resources.

Proper planning and appropriate mitigation can help to capture and preserve knowledge of such resources and can provide opportunities for increasing our understanding of the past environmental conditions and cultures by recording data about sites discovered and preserving them in place. Federal, State, and local laws are also in place that protect these resources in most instances. Even so, it is not always feasible to protect these resources, particularly when preservation in place would make projects infeasible, and for this reason the cumulative effects of past and present projects in the City of Rancho Cordova and along the south bank of the American River are considered to be significant.

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.1-1a through 3.1-1d and compliance with existing policies and regulations, would prevent the project, from impacting Tribal cultural resources, including Native American human remains. Because this impact would be avoided with implementation of mitigation, the project's contribution to the existing cumulative impact on Tribal cultural resources including human remains in the area would not be cumulatively considerable; this impact would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

See Mitigation Measures 3.1-1a, 3.1-1b, 3.1-1c, and 3.1-1d. No additional mitigation is required.

3.5 Cultural Resources

This section analyzes and evaluates the potential impacts of the project on known and unknown cultural resources. Although impacts related to human remains are typically analyzed in a cultural resources section, unanticipated discovery of human remains in the project area may potentially be Native American and would be considered a Tribal cultural resource. Impacts associated with Tribal cultural resources are discussed in Section 3.1, "Tribal Cultural Resources."

Cultural resources include districts, sites, buildings, structures, or objects generally older than 50 years and considered to be important to a culture, subculture, or community for scientific, traditional, religious, or other reasons. They include prehistoric resources and historic-period resources. Archaeological resources are locations where human activity has measurably altered the earth or left deposits of prehistoric or historic-period physical remains (e.g., stone tools, bottles, former roads, house foundations). Historical (or built-environment) resources include standing buildings (e.g., houses, barns, outbuildings, cabins) and intact structures (e.g., dams, bridges, roads, districts), or landscapes. A cultural landscape is defined as a geographic area (including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife therein), associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.

No comments regarding cultural resources were received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix A).

3.5.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is the nation's master inventory of known historic properties. It is administered by the National Park Service and includes listings of buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts that possess historic, architectural, engineering, archaeological, or cultural significance at the national, state, or local level.

The formal criteria (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 60.4) for determining NRHP eligibility are as follows:

1. The property is at least 50 years old (however, properties under 50 years of age that are of exceptional importance or are contributors to a district can also be included in the NRHP);

2. It retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and associations; and

3. It possesses at least one of the following characteristics:

Criterion A	Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history (events).
Criterion B	Is associated with the lives of persons significant in the past (persons).
Criterion C	Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant, distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (architecture).
Criterion D	Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history (information potential).

Listing in the NRHP does not entail specific protection or assistance for a property but it does guarantee consideration in planning for federal or federally-assisted projects, eligibility for federal tax benefits, and qualification for federal historic preservation assistance. Additionally, project effects on properties listed in the NRHP must be evaluated under CEQA.

The National Register Bulletin series was developed to assist evaluators in the application of NRHP criteria. For example, National Register Bulletin #36 provides guidance in the evaluation of archaeological site significance. If a property cannot be placed within a particular theme or time period, and thereby lacks "focus," it will be unlikely to possess characteristics which would make it eligible for listing in the NRHP. Evaluation standards for linear features (such as roads, trails, fence lines, railroads, ditches, and flumes) are considered in terms of four related criteria that account for specific elements that define engineering and construction methods of linear features: (1) size and length, (2) presence of distinctive engineering features and associated properties, (3) structural integrity, and (4) setting. The highest probability for NRHP eligibility exists in the intact, longer segments, where multiple criteria coincide.

State

California Register of Historic Resources

All properties in California that are listed in or formally determined eligible for listing in the NRHP are also listed in the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR). The CRHR is a listing of State of California resources that are significant in the context of California's history. It is a Statewide program with a scope and with criteria for inclusion similar to those used for the NRHP. In addition, properties designated under municipal or county ordinances are also eligible for listing in the CRHR.

A historical resource must be significant at the local, State, or national level under one or more of the criteria defined in the California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 15, Chapter 11.5, Section 4850 to be included in the CRHR. The CRHR criteria are tied to CEQA because any resource that meets the criteria below is considered a significant historical

resource under CEQA. As noted above, all resources listed in or formally determined eligible for listing in the NRHP are automatically listed in the CRHR.

The CRHR uses four evaluation criteria:

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

2. Is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history.

3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction; represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values.

4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.

Similar to the NRHP, a historical resource must meet one of the above criteria and retain integrity to be listed in the CRHR. The CRHR uses the same seven aspects of integrity used by the NRHP.

California Environmental Quality Act

CEQA requires public agencies to consider the effects of their actions on “historical resources,” “unique archaeological resources,” and “tribal cultural resources.” Pursuant to Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21084.1, a “project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment.” PRC Section 21083.2 requires agencies to determine whether projects would have effects on unique archaeological resources. PRC Section 21084.2 establishes that “[a] project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment."

Historical Resources

“Historical resource” is a term with a defined statutory meaning (PRC Section 21084.1; State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15064.5[a] and [b]). Under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a), historical resources include the following:

1) A resource listed in, or determined to be eligible by the State Historical Resources Commission for listing in, the CRHR (PRC Section 5024.1).

2) A resource included in a local register of historical resources, as defined in PRC Section 5020.1(k) or identified as significant in a historical resource survey meeting the requirements of PRC Section 5024.1(g), will be presumed to be historically or culturally significant. Public agencies must treat any such resource as significant unless the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is not historically or culturally significant.

3) Any object, building, structure, site, area, place, record, or manuscript that a lead agency determines to be historically significant or significant in the architectural, engineering, scientific, economic, agricultural, educational, social, political, military, or cultural annals of California may be considered to be a historical resource, provided the lead agency's determination is supported by substantial evidence in light of the whole record. Generally, a resource will be considered by the lead agency to be historically significant if the resource meets the criteria for listing in the CRHR (PRC Section 5024.1).

4) The fact that a resource is not listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the CRHR, not included in a local register of historical resources (pursuant to PRC Section 5020.1[k]), or identified in a historical resources survey (meeting the criteria in PRC Section 5024.1[g]) does not preclude a lead agency from determining that the resource may be a historical resource as defined in PRC Sections 5020.1(j) or 5024.1.

Unique Archaeological Resources

CEQA also requires lead agencies to consider whether projects will affect unique archaeological resources. PRC Section 21083.2(g) states that "unique archaeological resource" means an archaeological artifact, object, or site about which it can be clearly demonstrated that, without merely adding to the current body of knowledge, there is a high probability that it meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. Contains information needed to answer important scientific research questions and that there is a demonstrable public interest in that information.

2. Has a special and particular quality such as being the oldest of its type or the best available example of its type.

3. Is directly associated with a scientifically recognized important prehistoric or historic event or person.

Public Resources Code Section 21083.2

Treatment options under PRC Section 21083.2(b) to mitigate impacts to archaeological resources include activities that preserve such resources in place in an undisturbed state. PRC Section 21083.2 states:

(a) As part of the determination made pursuant to Section 21080.1, the lead agency shall determine whether the project may have a significant effect on archaeological resources. If the lead agency determines that the project may have a significant effect on unique archaeological resources, the environmental impact report shall address the issue of those resources. An environmental impact report, if otherwise necessary, shall not address the issue of nonunique archaeological resources. A negative declaration shall be issued with respect to a project if, but for the issue of nonunique archaeological resources, the negative declaration would be otherwise issued.

(b) If it can be demonstrated that a project will cause damage to a unique archaeological resource, the lead agency may require reasonable efforts to be made to permit any or all of these resources to be preserved in place or left in an undisturbed state. Examples of that treatment, in no order of preference, may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

(1) Planning construction to avoid archaeological sites.

(2) Deeding archaeological sites into permanent conservation easements.

(3) Capping or covering archaeological sites with a layer of soil before building on the sites.

(4) Planning parks, greenspace, or other open space to incorporate archaeological sites.

(c) To the extent that unique archaeological resources are not preserved in place or not left in an undisturbed state, mitigation measures shall be required as provided in this subdivision.

(d) Excavation as mitigation shall be restricted to those parts of the unique archaeological resource that would be damaged or destroyed by the project.

(e) In no event shall the amount paid by a project applicant for mitigation measures required pursuant to subdivision (c) exceed the following amounts:

(1) An amount equal to one-half of 1 percent of the projected cost of the project for mitigation measures undertaken within the site boundaries of a commercial or industrial project.

(2) An amount equal to three-fourths of 1 percent of the projected cost of the project for mitigation measures undertaken within the site boundaries of a housing project consisting of a single unit.

(3) If a housing project consists of more than a single unit, an amount equal to three-fourths of 1 percent of the projected cost of the project for mitigation measures undertaken within the site boundaries of the project for the first unit plus the sum of the following:

(A) Two hundred dollars ($200) per unit for any of the next 99 units.
(B) One hundred fifty dollars ($150) per unit for any of the next 400 units.
(C) One hundred dollars ($100) per unit in excess of 500 units.

(f) Unless special or unusual circumstances warrant an exception, the field excavation phase of an approved mitigation plan shall be completed within 90 days after final approval necessary to implement the physical development of the project or, if a phased project, in connection with the phased portion to which the specific mitigation measures

are applicable. However, the project applicant may extend that period if he or she so elects. Nothing in this section shall nullify protections for Indian cemeteries under any other provision of law.

Local

City of Rancho Cordova General Plan

The Cultural and Historical Resources Element of the 2006 City of Rancho Cordova General Plan seeks to identify and protect locally important sites, buildings, and memorabilia that reflect the history of the community. It also seeks to honor the people of Rancho Cordova by promoting the inclusion of cultural arts into the fabric of the community as a component that contributes to the overall quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors. The Element provides goals, policies, and actions designed recognize and preserve the history of the area and celebrate the diversity of the City's population.

GOAL CHR.1: Identify and preserve the history of Rancho Cordova for future generations.

GOAL CHR.2: Highlight, preserve, and acknowledge the cultural diversity of the community.

GOAL CHR.3: Enhance the quality of life in Rancho Cordova by promoting, preserving, and sustaining the cultural and performing arts.

Under the general plan Policy CHR.1.3 is the policy used to implement the identification of resources which are historically important to the City of Rancho Cordova.

- **Policy CHR.1.3 -**Establish review procedures for development projects that recognizes the history of the area in conjunction with State and federal laws.
    - **Action CHR.1.3.1-** Require historic resources and paleontological studies (e.g., archaeological and historical investigations) for all applicable discretionary projects, in accordance with CEQA regulations. The studies should identify paleontological, historic, or cultural resources in the project area, determine their eligibility for inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources, and provide mitigation measures for any resources in the project area that cannot be avoided.

3.5.2 Environmental Setting

Study Area

Figure 2-2 shows both the 12kV and 69kV proposed alignments, as well as the alignment of the existing underground direct-buried cable. The alignments presented on Figure 2-2 illustrate SMUD's preferred locations for cable installation; however, as needed to avoid

resources, the analysis in this EIR assumes the cable would be installed within the boundary of the study area identified in Figure 3.1-1. The study area was designed to encompass all areas within the alignment that could be subject to ground disturbing project actions. The study area also encompasses all areas proposed for staging, access, and storage within the alignment.

Regional Prehistory

The archaeology of Sacramento County is included within the broad temporal framework established by archaeologists for the California Central Valley which is presented below (SMUD 2022).

The Paleo-Indian Period (13,550 to 10,550 Before Present [BP]) saw the first demonstrated entry and spread of humans into California. The Central Valley was covered with extensive grasslands and riparian forests. The Central California Delta had not yet developed. The Central Valley was home to a diverse community of large mammals, some of which soon became extinct. Human populations were likely focused on large game hunting, although evidence remains scant, as does understanding of lifeways during this period (SMUD 2022).

The beginning of the Lower Archaic Period (10,550 to 7,550 BP) coincides with that of the middle Holocene climatic change to generally drier conditions that brought about the drying up of the pluvial lakes. Lithic assemblages from Lower Archaic sites are associated with notched and stemmed dart points, including Lake Mohave, Silver Lake, and Pinto styles. It is also during this period that the first evidence of milling stone technology appears, indicating an increased reliance on processing plants for food. Milling equipment such as handstones and milling slabs and are frequently associated with a diverse tool assemblage, including cobble-based pounding, chopping, and scraping tools commonly formed from meta-volcanic greenstone and volcanic basalts. (SMUD 2022).

The Middle Archaic Period (7,550 to 2,550 BP) began at the end of mid-Holocene climatic conditions, when the climate became similar to present-day conditions. Cultural change primarily occurred in response to environmental technological factors. Hunting remained an important source of food. Milling equipment includes handstones and milling slabs as well as mortars and pestles, which appear as early as 6000 BP in marsh and riparian settings such as the project area. This technological change in groundstone is believed to signal a more sedentary lifestyle in those environments. A general population growth and expansion occurred. The presence of numerous exotic trade goods, including obsidian from a range of sources across California, found within Middle Archaic assemblages indicates that populations were already part of a complex regional trade network. *Olivella* shell beads make their first appearance in the project area during the Middle Archaic, indicating trade with Southern California coastal groups (SMUD 2022).

Growth of sociopolitical complexity marks the Upper Archaic Period (2,550 to 900 BP). The development of status distinctions based on wealth is well documented. Group-oriented religions emerged and may have been the origins of the Kuksu religious system

at the end of the period and populations tended towards large, high-density, permanent settlements. These villages were used as hubs from which the populace roamed to collect resources, using a wide range of technologies. Economic activities focused on a broad spectrum of locally available plant and animal resources, many of which could be seasonally exploited for storage or exchange. The technical investment in tools and gear from Upper Archaic sites indicate that many were produced and used for specialized tasks, including fishing gear, such as harpoon heads and hooks, and ornamentation, such as bone awls and stone drills used to make objects such as bird bone tubes and charmstones. This period retained the large dart points in different styles but with a marked decrease in stemmed points. Milling equipment includes wooden mortars and bi-pointed and flat-end pestles as well as handstones and milling slabs, although mortars and pestles are more abundant (SMUD 2022).

Several technological and social changes distinguish the Emergent Period (900 to 300 BP). The bow and arrow were introduced, ultimately replacing dart points. Territorial boundaries between groups became well established and may closely resemble those documented in the ethnographic literature. Exchange of goods between groups became more regularized with more material, including raw materials, entering into the exchange networks. In the latter portion of this period (500 to 200 BP), exchange relations become highly regularized and sophisticated. The clam disk bead became a monetary unit for exchange and increasing quantities of goods moved greater distances. Many of the Emergent Period sites identified in the study area are located on high ground near watercourses, such as the American River. During the latter decades of this period, large-scale Euro-American-related impacts, such as illnesses, on Native American groups took place (SMUD 2022).

Historic Setting

Early Euro- American Exploration and Settlement

Although the segment of the American River in the project area was explored by American fur-trapper Jedediah Smith in 1826 to 1827, Euro-American settlement of the Sacramento area did not begin until the late 1830s and early 1840s, when entrepreneurs, such as John Sutter and Jared Sheldon obtained land grants from the Mexican government. The south side of the American River, including the project area, was granted to William A. Leidesdorff as part of the 35,521-acre *Rancho de los Americanos* land grant on October 8, 1844 (SMUD 2022).

The Natomas Company

With the discovery of gold in 1848, a surge of miners traveled up the American River from Sacramento or along the Coloma Road to Folsom and from there, into the Sierran foothills to engage in placer mining along its numerous rivers, creeks, and streams. Within less than a decade, placer mining was giving out and alternative, yet more destructive, gold extractions were employed, such as hydraulic mining. As hydraulic mining proved to be deleterious to the regions river systems, mining operations turned to dredging as next

best way to quickly extract the remaining gold bearing gravels from California's river channels and floodplains.

The Folsom Mining District was one of the largest dredge fields in California, incorporating 17,400 acres between Folsom in the north and Rancho Cordova in the south. The principal dredging outfit which operated in the district was the Natomas Company. The Natomas Company, organized in 1851 as the Natoma Water and Mining Company, initially provided water for mining interests, its water rights and land holdings allowed the company to pursue other ventures such as agriculture, hydroelectric power, aggregate processing, and real estate. From 1909 until 1962, the company dredged 13,241 acres, operating 20 dredges, as well as a shop in Natomas where dredges were designed and built. The Natomas Company is responsible for the dredge tailings seen along the lower American River, including those in the project area. Approximately one billion cubic yards of gravel were dredged by the Natomas Company over its almost 60-year history (SMUD 2022).

Agriculture

The main crops being raised in the project area during the mid to late 19th century were grain crops, such as wheat and barley, and wine grapes. The success of these endeavors was boosted by the presence of already established major transportation corridors, such as the Placerville Road, Folsom Road, Bradshaw Road, Coloma Road, and rail lines such as the Sacramento Valley Railroad. To spur additional agricultural interest in the area, the Natomas Company started their own vineyards and orchards. These crops were watered from their canals, such as the Valley Ditch. By 1885, the Natomas Company had over 2,000 acres in vineyards, 300 acres in orchards and over 800 acres in grain and hay, a large majority of which was located within what would become the City of Rancho Cordova (SMUD 2022).

Post-WWII Housing, Recreation, and the City of Rancho Cordova

Population in the project area remained sparse well into the 20th century. The opening of Mather Air Force Base and Army Airfield (Mather Field) in 1917 brought in more residents, but it was not until World War II that the population began to grow. This was largely due to the employment opportunities for both military and civilian families at Mather Field and Aerojet, a rocket and missile propulsion manufacturer, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In response to the growing population, multiple new housing developments were constructed, including the Riverview Orchard neighborhood and the Rossmoor Neighborhood in 1962. The two schools within the 69kV alignment, Mills Middle School and Cordova High School, opened in 1960 and 1961 respectively (SMUD 2022).

One of the goals of the new community was to provide and enhance recreational activities for its residents. This goal was supported by Sacramento County until Rancho Cordova was incorporated in 2003 and the city was able to form its own parks department. There are two parks located within the project area which will have project actions occur within them, the American River Parkway (namely, Rossmoor Bar Park) and Hagan Community Park. The proposed 69kV alignment within the American River Parkway intersects with

the Jedediah Smith Memorial Multi-use Trail. This trail is a "world-renowned" bike trail that stretches for 32 miles along the south bank of the American River, supposedly following the route fur-trader Jedediah Smith took within the region as the first American known to have explored the area in 1827. In 1974, this trail was listed as a National Trail making it part of an interconnected, cross-country public access trail system. Both parks and the portion of the Jedediah Smith Memorial Multi-use Trail within the project area are located on lands that once belonged to the Natomas Company. The portion of the American River Parkway in the project area and all the land for Rossmoor Bar Park were sold to the County of Sacramento by the Natomas Company in 1974 (SMUD 2022).

Records Searches and Known Resources

On August 2, 2021, a search of the study area and a one-half-mile buffer was conducted at the North Central Information Center (NCIC), at California State University, Sacramento (File no. SAC-21-150). This search expanded on an earlier record search conducted on May 20, 2021 (File no. SAC-21-102) that included a smaller segment within the project alignment.

As part of both record searches, the following information was reviewed:

- site records of previously recorded cultural resources,
- previous cultural studies,
- NRHP and CRHR listings,
- the California Historic Resources Inventory,
- Built Environment Resource Directory,
- Historical Maps (USGS Topographic and GLO Plat maps), and
- Archaeological Determinations of Eligibility.

The records search results identified that entire project is located within the boundaries of a large and complex historic-era archeological district, the Folsom Mining District (P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H). No other archaeological or built environment resources have been previously recorded in the study area. The record search results also revealed that approximately 50 percent of the study area had been previously surveyed.

Four new historic-period archaeological resources and six new archaeological features and one isolate associated with the Folsom Mining District were identified within the study area as a result of archaeological survey. One built environment resource was also observed; however, as it is a functioning stormwater conveyance system in use by the City of Rancho Cordova, it will be avoided by SMUD and is not discussed further. All four newly discovered historic-period archaeological resources and the isolate of the Folsom Mining District were

determined to be not eligible for the NRHP or CRHR. Therefore, they are not historical resources or unique archaeological resources for the purposes of CEQA; they are not discussed further. The six newly discovered archaeological features associated with the Folsom Mining District were determined to be contributing elements to the Folsom Mining District. As such, they discussed further below.

Historical Resources

Not identified in the record search results but known to be present in the study area at its intersection with Rossmoor Drive is the Jedediah Smith Memorial Multi-use Trail. The trail is a National Trail and is considered part of a national public-access recreational system. However, it is neither listed in nor has it been evaluated as eligible for the NRHP or CRHR. Therefore, it is not considered a historical resource for the purposes of CEQA.

Archaeological Resources

P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H Folsom Mining District

P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H is the Folsom Mining District (District). It is defined as a historic mining district that covers a 15-mile-long by 11-mile-wide area from Folsom to the eastern boundary of Mather Airport. The District as a whole was evaluated in 1992 as eligible for the NRHP as under Criterion A for its association with the California Gold Rush, gold mining in California, and the economic development of the region as well as the role of the Chinese in the Gold Rush; Criterion B for its association with numerous individuals important to the development of the state and the local area; and Criterion D for the intact remains of mining camps, cemeteries, town sites, stores, and way stations as well as other archaeological features and deposits found throughout the District which remain intact and thus, retain their data potential. The period of significance for the District is from 1848-1962. Although the integrity of the district's design, setting, and feeling varies across its expanse due to intrusion from modern developments, its integrity is still considered to be good because overall it retains much of its materials, workmanship, location, and association (SMUD 2022). As a property eligible for the NRHP, the District is automatically listed in the CRHR.

The dominant feature of the District within the study area is a series of tailing piles resulting from the gold mining dredging operations of the Natomas Company. These tailings are located south of the American River in Rossmoor Bar Park; no features, isolates, or deposits associated with the District were identified within portions of the study area located outside of Rossmoor Bar Park (SMUD 2022). Six newly discovered archaeological features which are contributing elements to the District were identified during the archaeological survey conducted for the project. All of these features are located within the 69kV alignment study area along Rossmoor Drive. All six features are in-situ and largely intact, and all six represent water storage and distribution systems which were integral engineering structures of the dredging operation. As such, these six features are considered contributing elements to the District under NRHP and CRHR Criterion A/1 for their association with the Natomas Company and under Criterion C/3 as significant engineering features distinct to dredging operations (SMUD 2022).

3.5.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Thresholds of Significance/Significance Criteria

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, the project would result in a potentially significant impact on cultural resources if it would:

- cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5 of the State CEQA Guidelines; and

- cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Analysis Methodology

The impact analysis for archaeological and historical resources is based on the records search results (NCIC File no. SAC-21-102 and SAC-21-150). The analysis is also informed by the provisions and requirements of federal, State, and local laws and regulations that apply to cultural resources.

PRC Section 21083.2(g) defines a "unique archaeological resource" as an archaeological artifact, object, or site about which it can be clearly demonstrated that, without merely adding to the current body of knowledge, there is a high probability that it meets one or more of the following CRHR-related criteria: (1) that it contains information needed to answer important scientific research questions and that there is a demonstrable public interest in that information; (2) that it as a special and particular quality, such as being the oldest of its type or the best available example of its type; or (3) that it is directly associated with a scientifically recognized important prehistoric or historic event or person. An impact on a resource that is not unique is not a significant environmental impact under CEQA (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5[c][4]). If an archaeological resource qualifies as a resource under CRHR criteria, then the resource is treated as a unique archaeological resource for the purposes of CEQA.

For the purposes of this impact discussion, "historical resource" is used to describe built-environment historic-era resources. Archaeological resources which may qualify as "historical resources" pursuant to CEQA, are analyzed separately from built-environment historical resources and are referred to as unique archaeological resources.

Issues or Potential Impacts Not Discussed Further

All unique archaeological resources issues identified in the significance criteria are evaluated below. As described above, no historical resources were identified within the study area. Therefore, project implementation would have no impact on historical resources. This issue is not analyzed further.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.2-1: Change the significance of a known archaeological resource.

Results of the records search for the study area indicate that the project would occur entirely within the boundaries of an historic-period archaeological resource, the Folsom Mining District (P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H). Six newly-identified features which are contributing elements of the District are located within the study area. Each could be impacted by project-related ground-disturbing activities. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.

The Folsom Mining District is a significant historic-period archaeological resource. As described previously, the District covers a 15-mile-long by 11-mile-wide area from Folsom to the eastern boundary of Mather Airport. The District as a whole was evaluated in 1992 as eligible for the NRHP and therefore is a resource under CEQA. The pedestrian survey conducted for this project resulted in the identification of six newly discovered archaeological features representing water storage and distribution elements which contribute to the significance of the District. All six are located within the 69 kV alignment portion of the study area along Rossmoor Drive. Each could be impacted by project-related ground-disturbing activities. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.2-1: Establish Work Exclusion Zones to Avoid Archeological Features.

Prior to the start of operations, a 15-foot work exclusion zone (WEZ) will be established around each of the identified archeological features. The WEZ will be shown on project plans and will be installed prior to the start of work on Rossmoor Drive. The WEZ will be delineated by the installation of high visibility temporary construction fencing set 15 feet away from the edge of the feature. The installation of the WEZ fencing will be overseen by a professionally qualified archaeologist who meets the Secretary of the Interior's standards for archaeology. The archaeologist will review the WEZ location and mark the location of the WEZ on the ground prior to installation. No access, staging, storage, equipment, or personnel shall enter any portion of the WEZ.

The WEZ for each archaeological feature will remain in place until all work on Rossmoor Drive is complete.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.2-1 would ensure that each feature of the District is avoided by project activities and preserved in place. Therefore, this measure meets the requirements of PRC Section 21083.1(b) for the preservation and avoidance of unique archaeological resources in place. Implementation of this measure would reduce impacts to known archaeological resources to a **less-than-significant** level.

Impact 3.2-2: Change the significance of unknown archaeological resources.

The project area is known to have been used by Native Americans and Euro-American for settlement, mining, and agricultural activities. Project-related ground-disturbing activities could result in discovery or damage of yet undiscovered archaeological resources as defined in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.

The NCIC records search results did not reveal any known archaeological resources within the study area, beyond the Folsom Mining District (P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H). However, the study area was used by indigenous people, fur-trappers, gold mining operations, and farmers including farmers of Asian origin in the past. Therefore, there is the potential that ground disturbance during project construction could encounter previously undiscovered or unrecorded historic-period or prehistoric archaeological sites, features, and materials. These activities could damage or destroy archaeological resources. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.

Mitigation Measure 3.2-2a: Halt Ground-Disturbing Activity Upon Discovery of Archaeological Resources and Evaluate Discovered Resource.

In the event that a historic-period archaeological resource (such as concentrated deposits of bottles or bricks with makers marks, amethyst glass, ceramic or metal pipes, or other historic refuse) or a prehistoric archaeological resource (such as lithic scatters, midden soils), is uncovered during grading or other construction activities, all ground-disturbing activity within 100 feet of the discovery shall be halted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. SMUD will be notified of the potential find and a qualified archeologist shall be retained to investigate its significance. If the find is suspected to be Native American in origin, Mitigation Measure 3.1-1d shall be implemented. Any previously undiscovered resources found during construction will be recorded on appropriate California Department of Parks and Recreation 523 forms and evaluated for significance under all applicable regulatory criteria. If the archaeologist determines that the find does not meet the CRHR standards of significance for cultural resources, construction may proceed. If the find is determined to be significant by the qualified archaeologist (i.e., because the find is determined to constitute either an historical resource or a unique archaeological resource), the archaeologist shall work with SMUD to follow accepted professional standards such as further testing for evaluation or data recovery, as necessary. The results of the identification, evaluation, and/or data recovery program for any unanticipated discoveries shall be presented in a professional-quality report that details all methods and findings, evaluates the nature and significance of the resources, analyzes and interprets the results.

Mitigation Measure 3.2-2b: Implement Native American and Archaeological Monitoring.

Implement Mitigation Measure 3.1-1c.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.2-2a and 3.2-2b would reduce impacts associated with archaeological resources to a **less-than-significant** level by requiring the performance of professionally accepted and legally compliant procedures in the event of a discovery, as well as the protection of any previously undocumented significant archaeological resources.

Impact 3.2-3: Potential for the project, in combination with other development, to contribute to a significant cumulative impact to cultural resources.

The project, in combination with other cumulative development in the area, could result in impacts to cultural resources in the area. Through the implementation of project-specific mitigation measures, the contribution of the project would not be cumulatively considerable with respect to archaeological resources. Impacts would be **less than significant**.

The cumulative context for the cultural resources analysis considers a broad regional system of which the resources are a part. The cumulative context for and historic-period archaeological resources is the City of Rancho Cordova where common patterns of historic-era settlement have occurred over roughly the past two centuries. The cumulative context for prehistoric archaeological resources is the Sacramento Valley, where archaeologists have developed a taxonomic framework describing patterns characterized by technology, particular artifacts, economic systems, trade, burial practices, and other aspects of culture.

Because all significant cultural resources are unique and nonrenewable members of finite classes, meaning there are a limited number of significant cultural resources, all adverse effects erode a dwindling resource base. The loss of any one archaeological site or significant features of an archaeological site could affect the scientific value of others in a region because these resources are best understood in the context of the entirety of the cultural system of which they are a part. The cultural system is represented archaeologically by the total inventory of all sites and other cultural remains in the region. As a result, a meaningful approach to preserving and managing cultural resources must focus on the likely distribution of cultural resources, rather than on a single project or parcel boundary.

The lands adjacent to the American River in the City of Rancho Cordova have been affected by gold mining activities from 1849 to 1962. After placer mining was no longer productive, gold mining continued in the region under the Natomas Company's dredging operations. Agriculture also became a major economic activity, dominating the area within and around the city from the 1860s until after World War II when industrial jobs led to increased residential growth. By the 1960s and 1970s recreational development of former Natomas

Company lands led to the creation of both Cordova Community Park and Rossmoor Bar Park, as well as the Jedediah Smith Memorial Multi-use Trail. This development has resulted in an existing significant adverse effect on cultural resources, including historic-period and prehistoric archaeological resources. Cumulative development continues to contribute to the disturbance and loss of cultural resources in general.

Proper planning and appropriate mitigation can help to capture and preserve knowledge of such resources and can provide opportunities for increasing our understanding of the past environmental conditions and cultures by recording data about sites discovered and preserving features and artifacts found. Federal, State, and local laws are also in place that protect these resources in most instances. Even so, it is not always feasible to protect these resources, particularly when preservation in place would make projects infeasible, and for this reason the cumulative effects of past and present projects in the City of Rancho Cordova on cultural resources are considered significant.

With implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.2-1, potential adverse effects to historic-period archaeological resource Folsom Mining District (P-34-000335/CA-SAC-308H) associated with ground-disturbing construction activities would be avoided by ensuring the integrity of the contributing features is maintained during construction. With implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.2-2, potential adverse effects to previously unknown archaeological resources associated with construction-related ground disturbing activities would be avoided. Implementation of these mitigation measures would ensure that the project's contribution to cumulatively significant historic-period and prehistoric archeological resource impacts would not be cumulatively considerable by requiring construction work to cease in the event of an accidental find and appropriate treatment of discovered resources be performed, in accordance with pertinent laws and regulations. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

See Mitigation Measures 3.2-1 and 3.2-2. No additional mitigation is required.

3.3 Air Quality

This section describes the project area's existing air quality conditions and applicable air quality regulations, and analyzes potential short- and long-term air quality impacts that could result from implementation of the project.

One comment letter regarding air quality was received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix A). The letter was submitted by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD) and requested that the EIR reference SMAQMD's *Guide to Air Quality Assessment in Sacramento County*. The analysis included in this section references this document, as discussed below.

3.3.1 Regulatory Setting

The project is located in the City of Sacramento, which is within the Sacramento Valley Air Basin (SVAB). Air quality in the SVAB is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), California Air Resources Board (CARB), and Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD). SMAQMD develops rules, regulations, policies, and/or goals to comply with applicable legislation. Although EPA regulations may not be superseded, State and local regulations may be more stringent.

Federal

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPA has established National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six criteria air pollutants, which are known to be harmful to human health and the environment. These pollutants are: carbon monoxide (CO), lead (Pb), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), ozone (O_3), particulate matter (which is categorized into particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter [PM_{10}] and particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter [$PM_{2.5}$]), and sulfur dioxide (SO_2). The State of California has also established the California Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS) for these six pollutants, as well as sulfates, hydrogen sulfide (H_2S), vinyl chloride, and visibility-reducing particles. NAAQS and CAAQS were established to protect the public with a margin of safety, from adverse health impacts caused by exposure to air pollution. A brief description of the source and health effects of criteria air pollutants is provided below in Table 3.3-1.

Table 3.3-1 Criteria Air Pollutants

Pollutant	Sources	Effects
Ozone	Ozone is a secondary air pollutant produced in the atmosphere through a complex series of photochemical reactions involving reactive organic gases (ROG), also sometimes referred to as volatile organic compounds by some regulating agencies) and nitrogen oxides (NO_X). The main sources of ROG and NO_X,	Ozone causes eye irritation, airway constriction, and shortness of breath and can aggravate existing respiratory diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema.

Pollutant	Sources	Effects
	often referred to as ozone precursors, are products of combustion processes (including motor vehicle engines) and the evaporation of solvents, paints, and fuels.	
Carbon monoxide	CO is usually formed as the result of the incomplete combustion of fuels. The single largest source of CO is motor vehicle engines; the highest emissions occur during low travel speeds, stop-and-go driving, cold starts, and hard acceleration.	Exposure to high concentrations of CO reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood and can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness, and fatigue; impair central nervous system function; and induce angina (chest pain) in persons with serious heart disease. Very high levels of CO can be fatal.
Particulate matter	Some sources of particulate matter, such as wood burning in fireplaces, demolition, and construction activities, are more local in nature, while others, such as vehicular traffic, have a more regional effect.	Scientific studies have suggested links between fine particulate matter and numerous health problems, including asthma, bronchitis, and acute and chronic respiratory symptoms, such as shortness of breath and painful breathing. Recent studies have shown an association between morbidity and mortality and daily concentrations of particulate matter in the air.
Nitrogen dioxide	NO_2 is a reddish-brown gas that is a by-product of combustion processes. Automobiles and industrial operations are the main sources of NO_2.	Aside from its contribution to ozone formation, NO_2 can increase the risk of acute and chronic respiratory disease and reduce visibility.
Sulfur dioxide	SO_2 is a combustion product of sulfur or sulfur-containing fuels such as coal and diesel.	SO_2 is also a precursor to the formation of particulate matter, atmospheric sulfate, and atmospheric sulfuric acid formation that could precipitate downwind as acid rain.
Lead	Leaded gasoline, lead-based paint, smelters (metal refineries), and the manufacture of lead storage batteries have been the primary sources of lead released into the atmosphere, with lead levels in the air decreasing substantially since leaded gasoline was eliminated in the United States.	Lead has a range of adverse neurotoxic health effects.

Sources: EPA 2019
Notes: CO=carbon monoxide; NO_2= nitrogen dioxide; NO_x=nitrogen oxides; ROG-=reactive organic gases; SO_2=sulfur dioxide

State

California Air Resources Board

CARB is the agency responsible for coordination and oversight of state and local air pollution control programs in California and for implementing the California Clean Air Act (CCAA). California law authorizes CARB to set ambient (outdoor) air pollution standards (California Health and Safety Code Section 39606) in consideration of public health, safety, and welfare.

Criteria Air Pollutants

CARB has established CAAQS for sulfates, hydrogen sulfide, vinyl chloride, visibility-reducing particulate matter, and the above-mentioned criteria air pollutants. In most cases the CAAQS are more stringent than the NAAQS. Differences in the standards are generally explained by the health effects studies considered during the standard-setting process and the interpretation of the studies. In addition, the CAAQS incorporate a margin of safety to protect sensitive individuals.

The CCAA requires that all local air districts in the state endeavor to achieve and maintain the CAAQS by the earliest date practical. The act specifies that local air districts should focus particular attention on reducing the emissions from transportation and areawide emission sources, and provides districts with the authority to regulate indirect sources.

Among CARB's other responsibilities are overseeing local air district compliance with Federal and State laws, approving local air quality plans, monitoring air quality, determining and updating area designations and maps, and setting emissions standards for new mobile sources, consumer products, small utility engines, off-road vehicles, and fuels.

Toxic Air Contaminants

TACs in California are regulated primarily through the Tanner Air Toxics Act (Assembly Bill [AB] 1807, Chapter 1047, Statutes of 1983) and the Air Toxics Hot Spots Information and Assessment Act of 1987 (AB 2588, Chapter 1252, Statutes of 1987). AB 1807 sets forth a formal procedure for CARB to designate substances as TACs. Research, public participation, and scientific peer review are required before CARB can designate a substance as a TAC. To date, CARB has identified more than 21 TACs, including diesel particulate matter (PM), and adopted EPA's list of HAPs as TACs.

Once a TAC is identified, CARB then adopts an airborne toxics control measure for sources that emit that particular TAC. If a safe threshold exists for a substance at which there is no toxic effect, the control measure must reduce exposure below that threshold. If no safe threshold exists, the measure must incorporate best available control technology for toxics to minimize emissions.

CARB has adopted diesel exhaust control measures and more stringent emission standards for various on-road mobile sources of emissions, including transit buses, and off-road diesel equipment (e.g., tractors, generators). Recent milestones included the low-sulfur diesel fuel requirement and tighter emissions standards for heavy-duty diesel trucks (effective in 2007 and subsequent model years) and off-road diesel equipment (2011). Over time, replacing older vehicles will result in a vehicle fleet that produces substantially lower levels of TACs than under current conditions. Mobile-source emissions of TACs (e.g., benzene, 1-3-butadiene, diesel PM) in California have been reduced substantially over the last decade; such emissions will be reduced further through a progression of regulatory measures (e.g., low emission vehicle/clean fuels and Phase II reformulated-gasoline regulations) and control technologies.

Local

Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD) is the local agency responsible for air quality planning and development of the air quality plan in the project area. SMAQMD maintains an updated plan for achieving the State and federal ozone standards that was updated and approved by the SMAQMD Board and CARB in 2017. There are currently no plans available for achieving the federal $PM_{2.5}$ or State PM_{10} standards. The air quality plan establishes the strategies used to achieve compliance with the NAAQS and CAAQS in all areas within SMAQMD's jurisdiction. SMAQMD develops rules and regulations and emission reduction programs to control emissions of criteria air pollutants, ozone precursors (oxides of nitrogen [NO_X] and reactive organic gases [ROGs]), toxic air contaminants (TACs), and odors within its jurisdiction.

SMAQMD published the *Guide to Air Quality Assessment in Sacramento County,* which provides air quality guidance when preparing CEQA documents. This document was last updated in April 2020. SMAQMD's guide establishes thresholds of significance for criteria air pollutants that SMAQMD recommends using when evaluating air quality impacts in Sacramento County. CEQA-related air quality thresholds of significance are tied to achieving or maintaining attainment designation with the NAAQS and CAAQS, which are scientifically substantiated, numerical concentrations of criteria air pollutants considered to be protective of human health. As such, for the purposes of this project, the following thresholds of significance are used to determine if project-generated emissions would produce a significant localized and/or regional air quality impact such that human health would be adversely affected.

Per SMAQMD recommendations, air quality impacts are considered significant if the project would result in any of the following:

- NO_X emissions in excess of 85 pounds per day (lbs/day) during construction and 65 lbs/day during operations;
- ROG emissions in excess of 65 lbs/day during operations;
- PM_{10} emissions in excess of 80 lbs/day and 14.6 tons per year (tons/year) during construction and operations;
- $PM_{2.5}$ emissions in excess of 82 lbs/day and 15 tons/year during construction and operations;
- CO emissions that would violate or contribute substantially to concentrations that exceed the 1-hour CAAQS of 20 parts per million (ppm) or the 8-hour CAAQS of 9 ppm during construction and operations;

- Expose any off-site sensitive receptor to a substantial incremental increase in TAC emissions that exceed 10 in one million for carcinogenic risk (i.e., the risk of contracting cancer) and/or a noncarcinogenic hazard index of 1.0 or greater; or

- Create objectional odors affecting a substantial number of people.

In addition to these thresholds, all SMAQMD-recommended best management practices (BMPs) (and use of Best Available Control Technology (BACT) shall be implemented to minimize emission of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$. Without the application of BMPs and BACT, the threshold for PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ during construction and operations is zero pounds per day and tons per year.

Criteria Air Pollutants

SMAQMD is the primary agency responsible for planning to meet NAAQS and CAAQS in Sacramento County. SMAQMD works with other local air districts in the Sacramento region to maintain the region's portion of the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for ground-level ozone. The SIP is a compilation of plans and regulations that govern how the region and State will comply with the federal Clean Air Act requirements to attain and maintain the NAAQS for ozone.

SMAQMD has developed a set of guidelines for use by lead agencies when preparing environmental documents. The guidelines contain thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants and TACs, and also make recommendations for conducting air quality analyses.

Toxic Air Contaminants

At the local level, air districts may adopt and enforce CARB control measures. Under SMAQMD Rule 201 ("General Permit Requirements"), Rule 202 ("New Source Review"), and Rule 207 ("Federal Operating Permit"), all sources that possess the potential to emit TACs are required to obtain permits from SMAQMD. Permits may be granted to these operations if they are constructed and operated in accordance with applicable regulations, including New Source Review standards and air toxics control measures. SMAQMD limits emissions and public exposure to TACs through a number of programs. SMAQMD prioritizes TAC-emitting stationary sources based on the quantity and toxicity of the TAC emissions and the proximity of the facilities to sensitive receptors. Sensitive receptors are people, or facilities that generally house people (e.g., schools, hospitals, residences), that may experience adverse effects from unhealthful concentrations of air pollutants.

3.3.2 Environmental Setting

The project alignments are located in the City of Rancho Cordova, which is within the SVAB. The SVAB encompasses Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, Shasta, Yolo, Sacramento, Yuba, and Sutter Counties and parts of Placer, El Dorado, and Solano Counties. The SVAB is bounded on the north and west by the Coast Ranges, on the east by the southern portion of the Cascade Range and the northern portion of the Sierra Nevada, and on the south by the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin. Sacramento County is

currently designated as nonattainment for both the federal and State ozone standards, the federal $PM_{2.5}$ standard, and the State PM_{10} standard. The region is designated as in attainment or unclassifiable for all other federal and State ambient air quality standards. (SMAQMD 2021)

3.3.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Thresholds of Significance/Significance Criteria

Per Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, air quality impacts are considered significant if the project would result in any of the following:

- Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan;
- Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard;
- Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations; or
- Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.3-1: Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan.

The project would involve construction activities that would include 2.76 miles of underground cable replacement and installation of up to 13 underground utility vaults. The project does not include any land uses or operational emission sources that would result in long-term employment opportunities, new housing, or substantial increases in operational vehicle trips. Because the project is consistent with the land uses of the City's General Plan, the project would not conflict with the implementation of the SMAQMD AQAP and would not facilitate further growth. This impact would be **less than significant**.

SMAQMD has developed air quality attainment plans (AQAPs) (i.e., Sacramento Regional 2008 NAAQS 8-Hour Ozone Attainment and Reasonable Further Progress Plan), which present comprehensive strategies to reduce ROG, NO_X, PM_{10}, and $PM_{2.5}$ emissions from stationary, area, mobile, and indirect sources to achieve attainment status of the NAAQS and CAAQS. SMAQMD has not prepared a similar plan for particulate matter. The emission inventories used to develop the applicable AQAPs are based primarily on projected population and employment growth and associated VMT for the SVAB. This growth is estimated for the region, based in part, on the planned growth identified in regional and local land use plans such as general plans or community plans. Therefore, projects that would result in increases in population or employment growth

beyond that projected in regional or local plans could result in increases in VMT above that forecasted in the attainment plans, further resulting in mobile source emissions that could conflict with or obstruct implementation of the AQAP. Increases in VMT beyond that projected in the City's General Plan, Sacramento's Area Council of Governments regional VMT modeling, and SMAQMD regional AQAPs generally would be considered to have a significant adverse incremental effect on the SVAB's ability to attain CAAQS and NAAQS for all criteria air pollutants.

It is anticipated that operational activities associated with the project would include only occasional maintenance and repair; therefore, operational emissions from the project would be negligible. The project does not include any land uses or operational emission sources that would result in long-term employment opportunities, new housing, or substantial increases in operational vehicle trips considered in the AQAP Because the project is consistent with the land uses of the City's General Plan, the project would not conflict with the implementation of the SMAQMD AQAP and would not facilitate further growth. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

Impact 3.3-2: Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard.

Project construction would not generate emissions in excess of the SMAQMD thresholds for ROG and NO_X. However, the project, without the application of BMPs and BACT, would generate daily and annual emissions of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ in excess of the SMAQMD thresholds during construction activities. Therefore, this impact would be **potentially significant**.

Construction activities would result in temporary generation and emissions of criteria air pollutants and precursors. Construction-related emissions were estimated using the California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) Version 2020.4.0 computer program (CAPCOA 2021), in accordance with recommendations by SMAQMD. Modeling was based on project-specific information; reasonable assumptions based on typical construction activities; and default values in CalEEMod that are based on the project's location and land use type.

Phase 1 (12kV alignment) construction is anticipated to occur over a three-week period and could begin in summer 2022. Phase 2 (69kV alignment) construction is anticipated to begin after Phase I is complete and would occur over a twelve-month period. Construction-related activities would result in project-generated emissions of ROG, NO_X, PM_{10}, and $PM_{2.5}$ from construction activities (e.g., site preparation, trenching, conduit duct bank installation, utility vault installation, and paving), off-road equipment, material delivery, and worker commute trips. Fugitive dust emissions of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ are

associated primarily with site preparation and trenching, and vary as a function of soil silt content, soil moisture, wind speed, acreage of disturbance, and vehicle miles traveled on and off the site. Emissions of ozone precursors, ROG and NO_X, are associated primarily with construction equipment and on-road mobile exhaust. Construction activities associated with the project would likely require the use of forklifts, cranes, excavators, rubber tiered dozers, graders, and generators, as well as other diesel-fueled equipment as necessary.

It should be noted that as construction continues into the future, equipment exhaust emission rates would decrease as newer, more emission-efficient construction equipment replaces older, less efficient equipment. As such, reported emissions represent a conservative estimate of maximum daily emissions during the construction period. For assumptions and modeling inputs, refer to Appendix C.

Table 3.3-2 summarizes the modeled maximum daily emissions for all pollutants and annual emissions for particulate matter from Phase 1 and Phase 2 construction activity without the application of BMPs and BACT.

Table 3.3-2 Summary of Unmitigated Emissions Generated During Project Construction

	Maximum Daily Emissions (lbs/day)				Annual Emissions (tons/year)	
	ROG	**NO_X**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**
Phase 1	5	47	9	5	1	<1
Phase 2	5	47	9	5	1	<1
SMAQMD Threshold of Significance[a]	None	85	0	0	0	0
Exceeds Threshold?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: ROG = reactive organic gases; NO_X = oxides of nitrogen; PM_{10} = respirable particulate matter; $PM_{2.5}$ = fine particulate matter; lbs/day = pounds per day; SMAQMD = Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District

[a] Represents SMAQMD Threshold of Significance without the application of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Best Available Control Technology (BACT).

Maximum daily emissions represent overlapping construction phases. See Appendix C for details.

Source: Modeled by Ascent Environmental in 2022

As shown in Table 3.3-2, Phase 1 and Phase 2 construction would not generate emissions in excess of the SMAQMD thresholds for ROG and NO_X. However, the project, without the application of BMPs and BACT, would generate daily and annual emissions of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ in excess of the SMAQMD thresholds during construction activities. Therefore, the impact of construction activities would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.3-1: Implement SMAQMD Basic Construction Emission Control Practices.

During construction, the contractor shall comply with and implement SMAQMD's Basic Construction Emission Control Practices, which includes SMAQMD-recommended BMPs

and BACT, for controlling fugitive dust emissions. Measures to be implemented during construction include the following:

- Water all exposed surfaces at least two times daily. Exposed surfaces include, but are not limited to, soil piles, graded areas, unpaved parking areas, staging areas, and access roads.

- Cover or maintain at least two (2) feet of freeboard space on haul trucks transporting soil, sand, or other loose material on the site. Cover any haul trucks that will be traveling along freeways or major roadways.

- Use wet power vacuum street sweepers to remove any visible track-out mud or dirt onto adjacent public roads at least once a day. Use of dry power sweeping is prohibited.

- Limit vehicle speed on unpaved roads to 15 miles per hour.

- All roadways, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots to be paved should be completed as soon as possible. In addition, building pads should be laid as soon as possible after grading unless seeding or soil binders are used.

- Minimize idling time either by shutting equipment off when not in use or reducing the time of idling to 5 minutes (required by California Code of Regulations Title 13, Sections 2449[d][3] and 2485). Provide clear signage that posts this requirement for workers at the entrances to the site.

- Maintain all construction equipment in proper working condition according to manufacturer's specifications. Equipment will be checked by a certified mechanic and determined to be running in proper condition before it is operated.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of BMPs and BACT as required by Mitigation Measure 3.3-1 would result in the project generating emissions less than the SMAQMD thresholds for all pollutants, as shown in Table 3.3-3.

Table 3.3-3 Summary of Mitigated Emissions Generated During Project Construction

	Maximum Daily Emissions (lbs/day)				Annual Emissions (tons/year)	
	ROG	**NO_X**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**
Phase 1	5	47	5	4	<1	<1
Phase 2	5	47	5	4	<1	<1
SMAQMD Threshold of Significance	None	85	80	82	14.6	15
Exceeds Threshold?	No	No	No	No	No	No

Notes:

ROG = reactive organic gases; NO_X = oxides of nitrogen; PM_{10} = respirable particulate matter; $PM_{2.5}$ = fine particulate matter; lbs/day = pounds per day; SMAQMD = Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District
Maximum daily emissions represent overlapping construction phases. See Appendix A for details.
Source: Modeled by Ascent Environmental in 2022

With implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.3-1, Phase 1 and Phase 2 short-term construction emissions of criteria air pollutants and precursors would not violate or substantially contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation.

It is anticipated that operational activities associated with the project would include only occasional maintenance and repair; therefore, operational emissions from the project would be negligible and would not exceed pollutant concentrations. Because construction and operational emissions would not exceed pollutant concentrations, sensitive receptors would not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations such that adverse health impacts would occur. As discussed previously, SMAQMD developed these thresholds in consideration of achieving attainment for the NAAQS and CAAQS, which represent concentration limits of criteria air pollutants needed to adequately protect human health. Therefore, with implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.3-1, short-term project-generated construction emissions and long-term operational emissions would not be cumulatively considerable and impacts would be reduced to a ***less than significant*** level.

Impact 3.3-3: Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.

Construction-related activities would result in temporary, intermittent emissions of diesel PM, which is the primary TAC of concern. Based on emissions modeling, maximum daily emissions of exhaust $PM_{2.5}$ would not exceed SMAQMD thresholds of significance. It is anticipated that operational emissions from the project would be negligible. As a result, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Sensitive receptors are generally considered to include those land uses where exposure to pollutants could result in health-related risks to sensitive individuals, such as children or the elderly. Residential dwellings, schools, hospitals, playgrounds, and similar facilities are of primary concern because of the presence of individuals particularly sensitive to pollutants and the potential for increased and prolonged exposure of individuals to pollutants.

Construction-related activities would result in temporary, intermittent emissions of diesel PM from the exhaust of off-road, heavy-duty diesel equipment. For construction-activity, diesel PM is the primary TAC of concern. The potential cancer risk from inhaling diesel PM outweighs the potential for all other diesel PM-related health impacts (i.e., noncancer chronic risk, short-term acute risk) and health impacts from other TACs (CARB 2003). Diesel PM is highly dispersive and can be estimated to decrease by approximately 70 percent at a distance of 500 feet from the source (Zhu et al. 2002).

Both the 12kV and 69kV project alignments are generally located adjacent to sensitive receptors along the entirety of the alignments except the 69kV alignment portion that runs north to south along Rossmoor Drive. These receptors include residences along Sierra

Madre Court, Trails Court, Ambassador Drive, and two school sites, Cordova High School and Mills Middle School. Construction activities would only occur close to any sensitive receptor over a short time period based on the incremental construction activities along a linear plan. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that Phase 1 construction would generally progress at a rate of approximately 198 feet per day and Phase 2 would progress at a rate of approximately 43 linear feet per day, based on the length of the construction period and the linear length of the 12 kV and 69kV alignments. Considering that construction activities would move along the proposed alignments, no individual receptor would be exposed to diesel exhaust emissions from construction equipment for more than a few days at a time. Thus, in accordance with OEHHA guidance and due to uncertainties in evaluating cancer risk from very short exposure periods (i.e., two months) at any one individual receptor, this project type would not result in substantial pollution concentrations of TACs at nearby receptors (OEHHA 2015).

Further, based on emissions modeling, maximum daily emissions of exhaust $PM_{2.5}$ would not exceed more than four (4) lbs per day during construction with the implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.3-1 and would be in attainment with NAAQS and CAAQS thresholds. NAAQS and CAAQS represent concentration limits of criteria air pollutants needed to adequately protect human health. As noted previously, these estimates represent a conservative analysis and would temporarily occur nearby each sensitive receptor.

It is anticipated that operational activities associated with the project would include only occasional maintenance and repair, similar to existing operations. Therefore, operational emissions from the project would be negligible.

Considering the highly dispersive properties of diesel PM, the relatively low mass of diesel PM emissions that would be generated at any single place during project construction, and the relatively short period during which diesel PM-emitting construction activities would take place near any one sensitive receptor, construction-related TACs would not expose sensitive receptors to an incremental increase in cancer risk that exceeds 10 in one million. The project would generate negligible emissions during operations, similar to baseline conditions, and would not result in long-term exposure of any sensitive receptors to TACs. As a result, this impact would be ***less than significant***.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

Impact 3.3-4: Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people.

Minor odors generated during project construction would be minor and temporary. Implementation of the project would not result in exposure of a substantial number of people to objectionable odors. Thus, this impact would be ***less than*** **significant**.

Minor odors from the use of heavy-duty diesel equipment and the laying of asphalt during project construction activities would be short-term and temporary, and would dissipate rapidly from the source within an increase in distance. These types of odor-generating activities would not occur at any single location or for an extended period of time. Activities associated with project operation would be similar to existing operations and would not generate odors. Implementation of the project would not result in exposure of a substantial number of people to objectionable odors. Thus, this impact would be ***less than significant***.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

3.4 Biological Resources

This section describes the biological resources known or with potential to occur near the project alignments. The analysis includes a description of the existing environmental conditions, the methods used for assessment, the potential impacts associated with implementing the project, and mitigation measures proposed to reduce significant and potentially significant impacts. This section also includes a brief overview of the federal, State, and local laws and regulations pertaining to the protection of biological resources in the City of Rancho Cordova (City) and Sacramento County (County).

The biological resources information presented in this section is based on review of available background reports and biological resource databases as well as reconnaissance-level surveys of the project alignment and surrounding area conducted in 2021 and 2022. Information sources reviewed include:

- Technical Report for the SMUD Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project — Biological Resources (included as Appendix D of this Draft EIR);
- Arborist Report for the SMUD Cordova Park 69kV Underground Cable Replacement Project (included as Appendix E of this Draft EIR);
- California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) records search within the Rio Linda, Citrus Heights, Folsom, Roseville, Sacramento East, Carmichael, Buffalo Creek, Florin, Elk Grove, and Sloughhouse U.S. Geological Service (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangles (CNDDB 2021);
- eBird database search within Hagan Community Park and Rossmoor Bar Area (eBird 2021);
- California Native Plant Society (CNPS), Rare Plant Program database records search within the Rio Linda, Citrus Heights, Folsom, Roseville, Sacramento East, Carmichael, Buffalo Creek, Florin, Elk Grove, and Sloughhouse USGS 7.5-minute quadrangles (CNPS 2021); and
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) project planning tool (USFWS 2022a).
- USFWS National Wetland Inventory online mapper. (USFWS 2022b).

Before conducting the field surveys, available information regarding biological resources in the vicinity of the project area was gathered and reviewed, including information on special-status plant and wildlife species with the potential to occur in the vicinity of the study area. Queries of the CNDDB, CNPS, and USFWS IPaC databases were conducted before the surveys. Lists of special-status plant and wildlife species with the potential to occur in the project area were developed based on the review of

existing information, as identified above. These lists were used to focus the area of investigation on the special-status species and associated habitats with the potential to be present within the project area.

The project includes the 69 kilovolt (kV) and 12kV alignments (see Figure 2-2 in Chapter 2, "Project Description," of this Draft EIR). The alignments presented on Figure 2-2 illustrate SMUD's proposed/preferred locations for conduit installation; however, as needed to avoid resources, the analysis in this Draft EIR section assumes the conduit would be installed within the boundary of the 330-foot wide survey area (i.e., 165-foot on each side)[1] centered over the proposed alignment routes as identified in Figure 3.4-1. The proposed conduit trench would be approximately 3 feet wide and between 5-7 feet deep. The utility vaults would be 8 feet wide x 14 feet long x 8 feet deep inside, requiring an excavation area of approximately 15 feet x 20 feet x 15 feet, and would generally be spaced evenly throughout the alignment to allow for cable pulling, splicing and maintenance. The survey area was designed to encompass all areas within the alignment that could be subject to ground disturbing project actions. The survey area also encompasses all areas proposed for staging, access, and storage within the alignment.

Biological resources within the survey area were identified through field reconnaissance-level surveys, habitat assessment surveys, and an arborist survey conducted in 2021 and 2022. Surveys were conducted on May 25, May 26, and December 7, 2021, and January 26, February 2, and February 3, 2022. The surveys were conducted by walking the survey area on foot, and recording existing habitat types, plants, and wildlife species within and adjacent to these areas. Plant communities and wildlife habitats were identified using aerial photo interpretation and field reconnaissance. Before the field surveys, special-status species characteristics and habitat requirements were reviewed to aid in field recognition of suitable habitats. During the surveys, habitats were evaluated for their potential to support special-status species and the presence of any other biologically sensitive resources such as wetlands, riparian habitat, or drainages.

Sensitive biological resources are protected and/or regulated by federal, State, and/or local laws and policies. Sensitive biological resources include special-status species and sensitive natural communities, and other resources under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and USFWS.

One comment letter pertaining to biological resources was received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix A). The letter was submitted by CDFW and related to impacts to wildlife and riparian habitat. These comments are addressed herein as appropriate. The NOP and comments received during the public review period are included as Appendix A of this Draft EIR.

[1] The survey area for the arborist survey includes a 40-foot buffer on each side of the alignment for a total width of 80 feet. Please see Figures 3a through 3i in the Arborist Report, included as Appendix E to this Draft EIR.

3.4.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal

Federal Endangered Species Act

Pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), USFWS has authority over projects that may affect the continued existence of federally listed (threatened or endangered) species. Section 9 of ESA prohibits any person from "taking" an endangered or threatened fish or wildlife species or removing, damaging, or destroying a listed plant species on federal land or where the taking of the plant is prohibited by State law. Take is defined under ESA, in part, as killing, harming, or harassing. Under federal regulations, take is further defined to include habitat modification or degradation where it results in death or injury to wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

Section 10 of the ESA applies if a non-federal agency is the lead agency for an action that results in incidental take and no other federal agencies are involved in permitting the action. Section 7 applies if a federal discretionary action is required (e.g., a federal agency must issue a permit), in which case the involved federal agency is required to consult with USFWS if the action may affect federally listed species.

Clean Water Act

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) requires project proponents to obtain a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) before performing any activity that involves any discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands. Fill material is material placed in waters of the United States where the material has the effect of replacing any portion of a water of the United States with dry land or changing the bottom elevation of any portion of a water of the United States. Waters of the United States include navigable waters of the United States, interstate waters, tidally influenced waters, and all other waters where the use, degradation, or destruction of the waters could affect interstate or foreign commerce, tributaries to any of these waters, and wetlands that meet any of these criteria or that are adjacent to any of these waters or their tributaries. Many surface waters and wetlands in California meet the criteria for waters of the United States.

In accordance with Section 401 of the CWA, projects that apply for a USACE permit for discharge of dredged or fill material must obtain water quality certification from the appropriate regional water quality control board (RWQCB) indicating that the action would uphold State water quality standards.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 U.S.C. Section 703, et seq.), first enacted in 1918, provides for protection of international migratory birds and authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to regulate the taking of migratory birds. The MBTA provides that it shall be unlawful, except as permitted by regulations, to pursue, take, or kill any migratory bird, or

any part, nest, or egg of any such bird. This prohibition includes both direct and indirect acts, although harassment and habitat modification are not included unless they result in direct loss of birds, nests, or eggs. The current list of species protected by the MBTA can be found in Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 10.13. The list includes nearly all birds native to the United States.

State

California Endangered Species Act

Pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), a permit from CDFW is required for projects that could result in "take" of a species State listed as threatened or endangered. Section 2080 of CESA prohibits take of State listed species. Under CESA, take is defined as any activity that would directly or indirectly kill an individual of a species. The definition does not include “harm” or “harass” as in the federal act. As a result, the threshold for take under CESA is higher than under ESA (i.e., habitat modification is not necessarily considered take under CESA). The take of State-listed species incidental to otherwise lawful activities requires a permit, pursuant to Section 2081(b) of CESA. The State has the authority to issue an incidental take permit under Section 2081 of the California Fish and Game Code or to coordinate with USFWS during the federal process, so the federal permit also would cover State-listed species.

California Native Plant Protection Act

In addition to CESA, the California Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA; California Fish and Game Code Section 1900 et seq.) provides protection to endangered and “rare” plant species, subspecies, and varieties of wild native plants in California. The NPPA was enacted in 1977 and allows the California Fish and Game Commission to designate plants as rare or endangered. Sixty-four species, subspecies, and varieties of plants are protected as rare under the NPPA. The act prohibits take of endangered or rare native plants but includes exceptions for agricultural and nursery operations; for emergencies; and, after proper notification of CDFW, for vegetation removal from canals, roads, and other building sites, changes in land use, and other situations. When CESA was enacted in 1984, it expanded on the original NPPA and enhanced legal protection for plants. CESA established threatened and endangered species categories and grandfathered all rare animals—but not rare plants—into the act as threatened species. Thus, three listing categories for plants are used in California: rare, threatened, and endangered.

Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act

Under the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Porter-Cologne Act), waters of the State fall under the jurisdiction of the appropriate RWQCB. The study area is within the Central Valley RWQCB. Each of the nine RWQCBs in California must prepare and periodically update water quality control plans (basin plans) pursuant to the Porter-Cologne Act. Each basin plan sets forth water quality standards for surface water and groundwater, as well as actions to control nonpoint and point sources of pollution to achieve and maintain these standards. The RWQCB’s jurisdiction includes federally protected waters as well as areas that meet the definition of “waters of the State.” Waters

of the State are defined as any surface water or groundwater, including saline waters, within the boundaries of the State. Projects that affect waters of the State must meet waste discharge requirements of the RWQCB, which may be issued in addition to a water quality certification under Section 401 of the CWA.

California Fish and Game Code

Section 1602—Lake and Streambed Alteration

All diversions, obstructions, or changes to the natural flow or bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake in California that supports wildlife resources are subject to regulation by CDFW under Section 1602 of the California Fish and Game Code. Under Section 1602, it is unlawful for any person, governmental agency, or public utility to do the following without first notifying CDFW:

- substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of, or substantially change or use any material from, the bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake; or

- deposit or dispose of debris, waste, or other material containing crumbled, flaked, or ground pavement where it may pass into any river, stream, or lake.

The regulatory definition of a stream is a body of water that flows at least periodically or intermittently through a bed or channel that has banks and supports fish or other aquatic life. This definition includes watercourses with a surface or subsurface flow that supports or has supported riparian vegetation (California Code of Regulations [CCR] Title 14, Section 1.72). CDFW regulatory authority within altered or artificial waterways is based on the value of those waterways to fish and wildlife. A lake and streambed alteration agreement must be obtained for any diversion or alteration that would substantially adversely affect a fish or wildlife resource in a river, stream, or lake.

Fully Protected Species

Protection of fully protected species is described in Sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515 of the California Fish and Game Code. These statutes prohibit take or possession of fully protected species and do not provide for authorization of incidental take. CDFW has informed nonfederal agencies and private parties that their actions must avoid take of any fully protected species.

Protection of Birds and Their Nests

Section 3503 of the California Fish and Game Code states that it is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird. Section 3503.5 specifically states that it is unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any raptors (e.g., hawks, owls, eagles, and falcons), including their nests or eggs.

Local

Central Valley Flood Protection Board

Portions of the project are within the designated floodway of the American River. Under CCR Title 23, Division 1 (Title 23), an encroachment permit from the Central Valley Flood Protection Board (CVFPB) may be needed for work within a designated floodway.

Sacramento County American River Parkway Plan 2008

The American River Parkway Plan is the guiding management document for the Parkway. The plan guides land use decisions, including those related to recreation and other human uses. According to the Parkway Plan Concept, the American River Parkway is a unique regional facility which shall be managed to: a) preserve naturalistic open space and protect environmental quality within the urban environment, and b) contribute to the provision of recreational opportunities in the Sacramento area.

The Parkway Plan Goals are:

- To provide, protect, and enhance for public use a continuous open space greenbelt along the American River extending from the Sacramento River to Folsom Dam.
- To provide appropriate access and facilities so that present and future generations can enjoy the amenities and resources of the Parkway.
- To preserve, protect, interpret, and improve the natural, archaeological, historical, and recreational resources of the Parkway, including an adequate flow of high-quality water, anadromous and resident fishes, migratory and resident wildlife, and diverse natural vegetation.
- To mitigate adverse effects of activities and facilities adjacent to the Parkway.
- To provide public safety and protection within and adjacent to the Parkway.

American River Parkway – Natural Resources Management Plan (in preparation)

The Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) is a guide for implementation of a multifaceted natural resource management program for the Parkway. It integrates ecological resource management and conservation with cultural resources protection, recreational use and impacts, and other human uses in the Parkway. The NRMP informs the management, conservation, and rehabilitation of Parkway land and natural resources, and helps to ensure compliance with environmental laws and regulations. Utilizing an adaptive management approach, the effectiveness of natural resource management efforts in the Parkway will be reevaluated and the NRMP will be updated periodically.

The purpose of the NRMP is to establish resource management guidelines to minimize the impact of human uses on the Parkway and the environment. The NRMP includes goals and objectives designed to maintain natural communities located within the

Parkway and identifies projects for implementation to accomplish goals and objectives. The NRMP takes an integrative approach to planning for ecological resources, cultural resources, and human use. However, it is important to note that the emphasis of the NRMP is to manage human uses in a manner that minimizes impacts to natural and cultural resources while maintaining recreational access. Sacramento County plans to adopt it in October 2022.

City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code

Although the project is geographically within the City of Rancho Cordova, regulations from other jurisdictions may apply in certain areas. City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code regulations would be applicable for those areas of the project that are within Mills Middle School, Cordova High School, Hagen Community Park, and Ambassador Drive.

Chapter 19.04 – Protection of Public Trees

Chapter 19.04 of the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code (Protection of Public Trees) establishes regulations pertaining to the planting, maintenance, protection, and preservation of all public trees growing on public property. A public tree is defined as a tree or shrub whose trunk is planted in a street, planting easement, public premises, public sidewalk, median, traffic island, or any other right-of-way owned or controlled by the city through an easement, license, fee title, or other permissive grant of use and maintained by the city. A public tree permit shall be required before any person shall plant, transplant, move, separate, trim, prune, cut above or below the ground, disrupt, alter, or do surgery upon any public tree.

Chapter 19.12 – Preservation and Protection of Private Trees

Chapter 19.12 of the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code (Preservation and Protection of Private Trees) establish regulations for the protection, removal, and preservation of landmark trees and protected trees within the city. A landmark tree is defined as any trees designated by council through resolution as a vital and historical part of the city's landscape such that the trees need to be designated as landmarks for protection and preservation. Protected trees are defined as:

1. Native oak – *Quercus lobata*, valley oak; *Quercus wislizenii*, interior live oak; *Quercus douglasii*, blue oak; or *Quercus morehus*[2], oracle oak – having a trunk diameter of at least six inches or greater; or

2. Any tree species other than a native oak having a trunk diameter of at least 12 inches or greater on nonresidential property; or

3. Any tree species other than a native oak having a trunk diameter of at least 24 inches or greater on residential property; or

[2] *Q. morehus* is a hybrid of *Q. wislizeni* and *Q. kelloggi* and is not recognized as a species by *The Jepson Manual: Vascular Plants of California* (Second Edition) (Baldwin et al. 2012).

4. Any tree planted as a requirement tree for site development, tree permit condition, landscape plan removal replacement, or other designated condition by the public works director or planning director.

5. "Protected tree" does not include any trees for sale within the city sold by a nursery.

Section 19.12.040 states that "no person shall trench, grade or fill within the dripline of any protected tree, or damage, kill or remove any protected tree, or perform a major trimming of any protected tree without an approved tree permit. It shall be the responsibility of the owner or lessee/tenant of the property on which the protected tree is located and the person performing tree work to have the approved tree permit and/or a copy of the conditions of permit approval at the work site."

Sacramento County Code of Ordinances

Sacramento County ordinances would be applicable for the portions of the project that are within the American River Parkway area.

Chapter 19.04

Chapter 19.04 of the Sacramento County Code of Ordinances provides for the protection, preservation, and regulation of trees on public property within Sacramento County. This includes all trees planted or maintained by the County on an easement, planting easement, street, County park, or public premises. A permit shall be required to plant, transplant, move, separate, trim, prune, cut above or below ground, disrupt, alter, or take any other action upon any tree located on public premises.

Chapter 19.12

The Sacramento County Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance (Chapter 19.12 of the Sacramento County Code of Ordinances) provides for the protection of native oak trees, including valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), interior live oak (*Q. wislizeni*), blue oak (*Q. douglasii*), and oracle oak (*Q. morehus*). Protected trees include any living native oak tree having at least one trunk of six inches or more diameter at standard height (DSH), or a multi-trunked native oak tree having an aggregate DSH of 10 inches. Chapter 19.12 states that no person shall trench, grade, or fill within the dripline of any native oak tree; or destroy, kill, or remove any native oak tree, on any property, public or private, without a tree permit.

3.4.2 Environmental Setting

The project includes the 69kV and 12kV alignments (see Figure 2-2 in Chapter 2, "Project Description," of this Draft EIR). While the 12kV alignment is within a residential neighborhood in the City of Rancho Cordova and is surrounded by developed areas, the 69kV alignment includes the property of two public schools (Mills Middle School and Cordova High School), Hagen Community Park, SMUD's Cordova Park Substation, and the American River Parkway. The zoning designations of the underlying parcels are residential or open space. The topography project alignments are flat. The northern end of

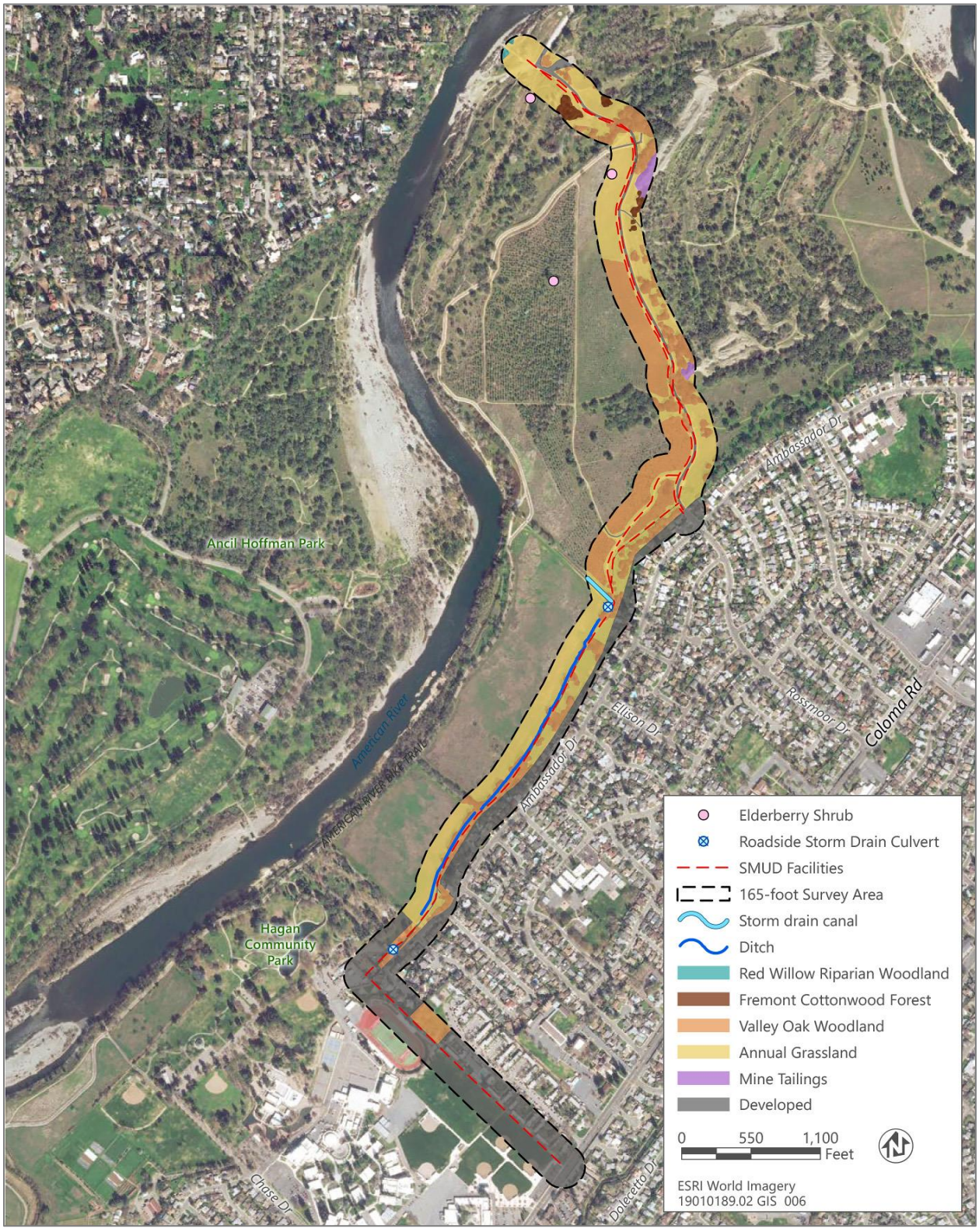
the 69kV alignment ends approximately 200 feet from the edge of the American River. The alignments presented on Figure 2-2 illustrate SMUD's proposed/preferred locations for cable installation; however, as needed to avoid resources, the analysis in this EIR section assumes the cable would be installed within the boundary of the 330-foot-wide survey area (i.e., 165-foot on each side)[3] centered over the proposed alignment routes as identified in Figure 3.4-1. The proposed cable trench would be approximately 3 feet wide and between 5–7 feet deep. The utility vaults would be 8 feet wide by 14 feet long and 8 feet deep. The survey area was designed to encompass all areas within the alignment that could be subject to ground disturbing project actions. The survey area also encompasses all areas proposed for staging, access, and storage within the alignment.

Land Cover

The 69kV alignment falls within a small portion of Mills Middle School, Cordova High School, and Hagan Community Park, with the remainder of the 69kV alignment within the American River Parkway – Rossmoor Bar Area. The 12kV alignment starts within the Cordova Park Substation and would follow Ambassador Drive for 0.6 miles northeast until it connects to existing electrical riser poles on the edge of the Parkway. Land cover types observed within the survey area include developed, valley oak woodland, annual grassland, Fremont cottonwood forest, mine tailings, and red willow riparian woodland (Figure 3.4-1). Each land cover type is described in more detail below. Vegetation types and descriptions in follow *A Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer et al. 2009 or current version; most current natural community data available at http://vegetation.cnps.org/), which is the current standard for vegetation classification in California.

The 69kV alignment on the south end falls within Mills Middle School, Cordova High School sport fields, then follows a utility right-of-way, until it reaches SMUD's Cordova Park Substation at Hagan Community Park. It then follows an existing access road/trail until it reaches Rossmoor Drive, where the 69kV alignment turns and heads north towards the American River. The 69kV alignment stays along Rossmoor Drive until its termination near the American River, where the 69kV alignment connects to existing riser poles located between the boundaries of Rossmoor Drive and the American River. Along Rossmoor Drive, the 69kV circuit would be installed beneath existing pavement or within an existing fuel break adjacent to the pavement. Land use surrounding the survey area includes Mills Middle School, Cordova High School and Hagan Park to the west, American River Parkway to the north and northeast, and private residences to the south and east.

[3] The survey area for the arborist survey includes a 40-foot buffer on each side of the alignment for a total width of 80 feet. Please see Figures 3a through 3i in the Arborist Report, included as Appendix E to this Draft EIR.



Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental 2022

Figure 3.4-1 Landcover

Valley Oak Woodland Savannah

Oak woodland habitat within the survey area is dominated by valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*), and interior live oak (*Quercus wislizeni*). Due to the proximity of residences, fruit and non-native trees are also present and include almond (*Prunus* sp.), apricot *(Prunus armeniaca*), plum (*Prunus americana*), orange (*Citrus* sp.), mulberry (*Morus* sp.), sweetgum (*Liquidambar* sp.), and silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*). The understory is composed of annual grasses, including ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), wild oats (*Avena fatua*), rye grass (*Festuca perennis*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) and Dallis grass (*Paspalum dilatatum*). Additional plants observed within the understory include blue plumbago (*Plumbago auriculata*), flat top sedge (*Cyperus* sp.), California grape (*Vitis californica*), and fig (*Ficus carica*). Due to the proximity of residential homes, there are some ornamental plants also present within the survey area including Chinese privet (*Ligustrum* sp.), bottlebrush (*Callistemon* sp.), aloe (*Aloe* sp.), prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia* sp.), calla lily (*Zantedeschia* sp.), and bear's breeches (*Acanthus mollis*).

Annual Grassland

Annual grassland habitat is dominated by nonnative grasses, including those mentioned as occurring in the understory of the valley oak woodland savannah. Other plant species observed include yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), hairy vetch (*Vicia villosa*), clover (*Trifolium* sp.), bedstraw (*Galium* sp.), crane's bill geranium (*Geranium molle*), California burclover (*Medicago polymorpha*), and wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum*).

Fremont Cottonwood Forest

This land cover type is located within the American River Parkway area in proximity to mine tailing deposits. Observed species include Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), blue oak, black walnut (*Juglans hindsii* x *regia*), and willow (*Salix* sp.), with an understory of Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*), coyote brush (*Baccharis* sp.), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), and annual grasses.

Red Willow Riparian

This land cover type was observed at the edge of the American River. It is composed of young red willow (*Salix lasiolepis*) shrubs. The membership rule for this vegetation alliance is that red willow has to have relative cover greater than 50 percent. The area was dominated by red willow over a cobble substrate with relatively sparce herb substrate and lots of bare ground.

Mine Tailings

The mine tailing deposits are remnants of historic gold mining operations. Vegetation quantity varies depending on depth of the mine tailings; some have trees growing within the mine tailings and some are bare or with very little vegetation.

Developed

The developed land cover type includes suburban single-family residential lots, residential streets, and landscaped areas. Landscaped areas support ornamental vegetation such as tall fescue (*Festuca* sp.), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), mallow (*Malva parviflora*), Chinese privet, bottlebrush, aloe, prickly pear cactus, Chinese pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*), Italian cypress (*Cupressus* sp.), tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), and Algerian ivy (*Hedera canariensis*).

Aquatic Resources

An abandoned irrigation ditch is located within the survey area north of Ambassador Drive. This irrigation ditch was previously used to irrigate the adjacent field when it was in agricultural production. However, this ditch is no longer in use. The irrigation ditch does not connect to the American River.

A concrete lined drainage canal is located a few feet east of where the drainage ditch ends. This canal is approximately 5 feet wide and may receive roadside runoff from Ambassador Drive; however, at the time of the surveys the canal was dry and showed no evidence of recent flows. The canal does not appear to be maintained, as it is overgrown with ruderal, upland plant species throughout its extent. The canal does not connect to the American River.

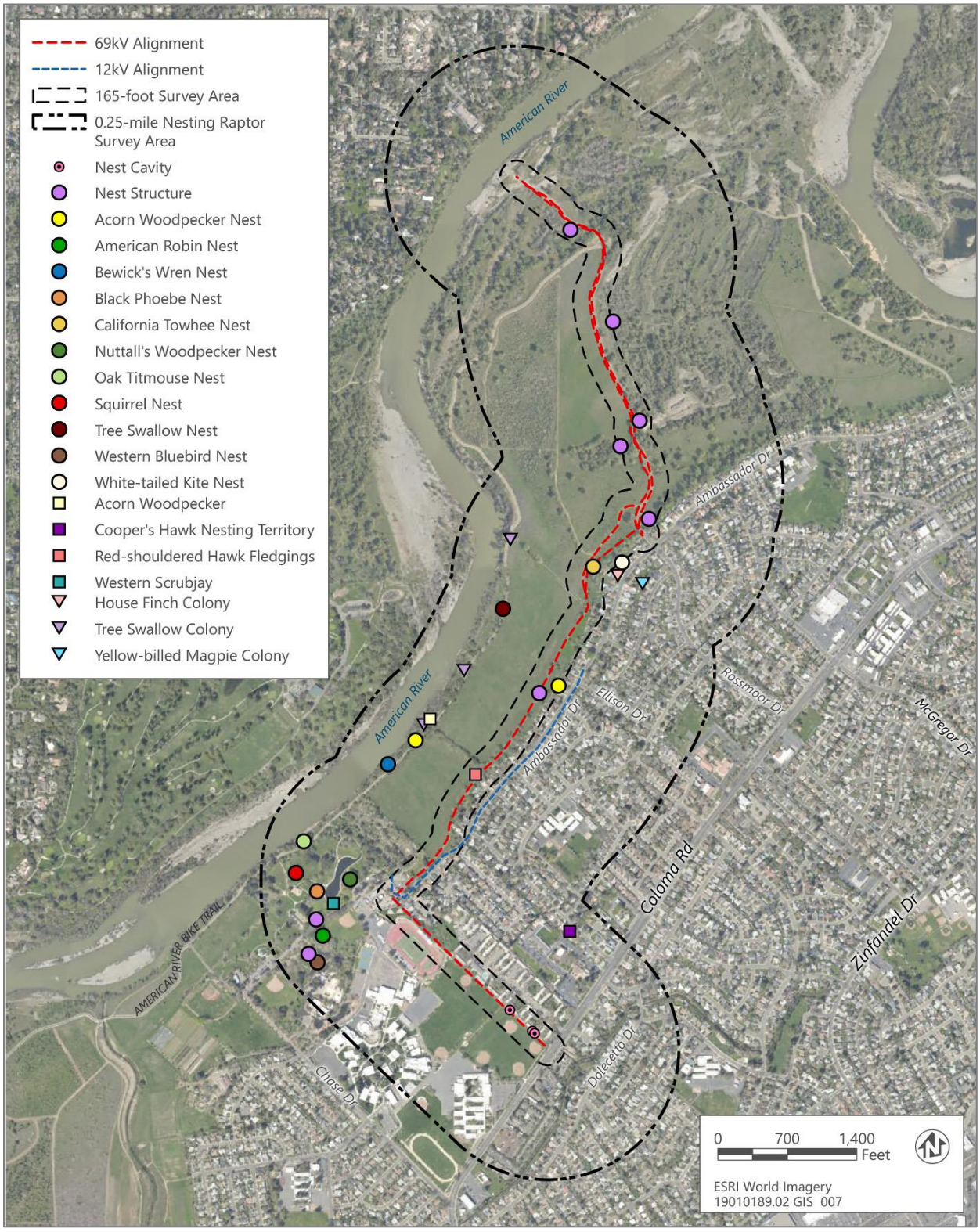
There is a culvert that daylights just east of the substation and north of the trail/access road. This culvert originates from a roadside storm drain along Ambassador Drive and it also receives runoff from adjacent residences. There is no watercourse associated with this culvert and it does not connect to the American River.

The American River is approximately 200 feet north of where the 69kV alignment connects to an existing riser pole. Based on CVFPB Best Available Maps, a portion of the 69kV alignment is within the FEMA Flood Zone AE (Area subject to 1% annual chance flood; Based Flood Elevations determined) (CVFPB 2022).

No other aquatic features were observed during the surveys. Outside of the American River, the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory does not show other aquatic resources within the survey area (USFWS 2022b).

Wildlife

The survey area contains suitable habitat for many common wildlife species, and many of these species were observed during the reconnaissance-level surveys. Wildlife species observed within the survey area are listed in Table 1 of Appendix D. Only one of the wildlife species observed during reconnaissance-level surveys is a special-status species (i.e., white-tailed kite, CDFW fully protected), as described further in “Special-Status Wildlife”, below. Figure 3.4-2 shows the general location of nests and nest structures observed during the reconnaissance-level field surveys.



Source: Data received from SMUD in 2021

Figure 3.4-2 Nest Locations

Special-Status Species

Special-status species are defined as species that are legally protected or that are otherwise considered sensitive by federal, State, or local resource agencies. Special-status species are species, subspecies, or varieties in one or more of the following categories, regardless of their legal or protection status:

- species listed or proposed for listing as threatened or endangered under ESA or candidates for possible future listing;
- species listed or candidates for listing by the State of California as threatened or endangered under CESA;
- species listed as rare under the California Native Plant Protection Act;
- species listed as Fully Protected under the California Fish and Game Code;
- species identified by CDFW as species of special concern;
- plants considered by CNPS and CDFW to be "rare, threatened, or endangered in California" and assigned a California Rare Plant Rank (CRPR). Species on these lists may meet the CEQA definition of rare or endangered. They are summarized as follows:
    - CRPR 1A - Plants presumed to be extinct in California;
    - CRPR 1B - Plants that are rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere;
    - CRPR 2A - Plants that are presumed extirpated in California, but more common elsewhere;
    - CRPR 2B - Plants that are rare threatened, or endangered in California, more common elsewhere.
- species considered a locally significant species, that is, a species that is not rare from a statewide perspective but is rare or uncommon in a local context such as within a county or region (CEQA Section15125 (c)) or is so designated in local or regional plans, policies, or ordinances (CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G); or
- species that otherwise meet the definition of rare or endangered under CEQA Section15380(b) and (d).

Preliminary lists of special-status plant and animal species known or with potential to occur in the survey area were developed based on a review of the CNDDB, CNPS, and USFWS IPaC databases. The data review preliminarily identified 14 special-status plants

species and 27 special-status wildlife species with the potential to occur within the vicinity of the survey area (CNDDB 2021, CNPS 2021, USFWS 2022a).

Special-Status Plant Species

The biological resources technical report (see Appendix D of this Draft EIR) provides a list of the special-status plants that have been documented within the nine USGS quadrangles surrounding the survey area and describes their regulatory status, habitat, and potential for occurrence in the survey area. None of the 14 special-status plant species identified during the review of existing data are expected to occur based on lack of suitable habitat (i.e., vernal pools, wetland, marsh habitat).

Special-Status Wildlife Species

The biological resources technical report included as Appendix D to this Draft EIR provides a list of the special-status wildlife species that have been documented within the nine USGS quadrangles surrounding the survey area and describes their regulatory status, habitat, and potential for occurrence. A total of 27 special-status wildlife species have been documented in the vicinity of the survey area. Of the 27 special-status wildlife species identified during the review of existing data, it was determined that three species could occur or were observed within or in proximity of the study area (Table 3.4-1): valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*), white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), and Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*). A white-tailed kite active nest was identified within the 0.25-mile survey buffer during reconnaissance surveys for the project in 2021.

Table 3.4-1 Special Status Wildlife Species Known to Occur in the Project Region and Their Potential for Occurrence in the Survey Area

Name	Federal Status[1]	State Status[1]	Habitat	Potential to Occur in the Survey Area
Invertebrates				
Valley elderberry longhorn beetle *Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*	FT	--	Riparian scrub. Occurs only in the Central Valley of California, in association with blue elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea*). Prefers to lay eggs in elderberries 2-8 inches in diameter; some preference shown for "stressed" elderberries.	**May occur:** One elderberry shrub with stems greater than 1-inch in diameter was found within the survey area. This elderberry is located 300 feet southwest of the intersection of Rossmoor Drive and the bike trail.
Birds				
Swainson's hawk *Buteo swainsoni*	--	ST	Great Basin grassland, riparian forest, riparian woodland, valley and foothill grassland. Breeds in grasslands with scattered trees, juniper-sage flats, riparian areas, savannahs, and agricultural or	**May occur:** The survey area is within the breeding range of the species. Surveys within 0.25 miles of the survey area did not result in observations of nesting Swainson's

Name	Federal Status[1]	State Status[1]	Habitat	Potential to Occur in the Survey Area
			ranch lands with groves or lines of trees. Requires adjacent suitable foraging areas such as grasslands, or alfalfa or grain fields supporting rodent populations.	hawks but this species is regularly observed in the area.
White-tailed kite *Elanus leucurus*	--	FP	Cismontane woodland, marsh and swamp, riparian woodland, valley and foothill grassland, and wetlands. Rolling foothills and valley margins with scattered oaks and river bottomlands or marshes next to deciduous woodland. Open grasslands, meadows, or marshes for foraging close to isolated, dense-topped trees for nesting and perching.	**Present:** A pair of white-tailed kites was observed nesting west of the intersection of Rossmoor Drive and Ambassador Drive.

General references: Unless otherwise noted all habitat and distribution data provided by CNDDB.

Note: CNDDB = California Natural Diversity Database

[1] Legal Status Definitions

Federal:
FT Threatened (legally protected)

State:
ST Threatened (legally protected)
FP Fully protected (legally protected)

[2] Potential for Occurrence Definitions

May occur: Suitable habitat is available in the survey area; however, there are little to no other indicators that the species might be present.
Present. Species observed within the survey area.

Source: CNDDB 2021; USFWS 2022a

Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle is federally listed as threatened. This species is endemic to the Central Valley of California and is only found in association with its host plant, elderberry (*Sambucus* spp.). The beetle spends most of its life in the larval stage, living within the stems of an elderberry plant, and feeding on pith. Frequently, the only exterior evidence of the elderberry's use by the beetle is an exit hole created by the larva just before the pupal stage. The life cycle takes one or two years to complete. Adult emergence is from late March through June, about the same time the elderberry produces flowers.

The nearest known occurrences of valley elderberry longhorn beetle include two occurrences along the banks of the American River Parkway. One occurrence includes Goethe Park (now known as River Bend Park) to the Rossmoor Bar boat ramp. This

occurrence is one of the earliest known population locations of valley elderberry longhorn beetle dating back to 1976, and last reported as present in 2013. The second occurrence is along the American River east of El Manto Drive in the vicinity of Sacramento Bar. This occurrence location also dates back to 1976 and was last reported as present in 2006.

One elderberry shrub was observed within the survey area. This shrub is located in the American River Parkway within annual grassland habitat and is approximately 300 feet southwest of the intersection of Rossmoor Drive and the bike trail (see Figure 3.4-1). This elderberry is approximately 95 feet from the edge of the fire break or 135 feet from the west lane of Rossmoor Drive. Two additional elderberry shrubs were observed outside of the survey area.

Swainson's Hawk

Swainson's hawk is State listed as threatened. Swainson's hawks typically are found in California only during the breeding season (March–September) and generally begin to arrive in the Central Valley in March. Nesting territories are usually established by April, with incubation and rearing of young occurring through June. Most Swainson's hawks leave the Central Valley by late August to mid-September to migrate to South America. Nesting pairs frequently return to the same nest site for multiple years. Sacramento, Yolo, Solano, and San Joaquin Counties support the largest concentration of nesting Swainson's hawks in California.

The nearest known nesting occurrence of Swainson's hawk is approximately 0.72 miles north of the survey area (CNDDB 2021). Swainson's hawk has been observed flying over Rossmoor Bar area on several occasions, included as recently as April 18, 2021 (eBird 2021). The survey area and vicinity contain suitable nesting trees and also contains suitable grassland foraging habitat for this species.

White-Tailed Kite

White-tailed kite is a CDFW fully protected species. The nearest active white-tailed kite nesting occurrence is in the backyard of a private residence west of the intersection of Rossmoor Drive and Ambassador Drive. The survey area and vicinity contain suitable nesting trees and suitable adjacent foraging grassland habitat. This species is known to nest frequently in the project area and adjacent trees (CNDDB 2021). The occupied nest that was observed during the May 25–26, 2021 reconnaissance-level survey could be used by white-tailed kite during future nesting seasons.

Common Raptor Species

Common raptor species, such as red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), and great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), are not considered special-status species pursuant to the definition provided above under "Special-Status Species". However, nests of these species are protected under the MBTA and Section 3503.5 of the California Fish and Game Code. Common raptor species are known to nest in the survey area.

Common Migratory Birds

A large number of common bird species are migratory and are afforded protection under the MBTA. Occupied nests of all migratory birds are protected under the MBTA, which makes it illegal to intentionally take these species or destroy their eggs. In addition, under Section 3503 of the California Fish and Game Code, it is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird, except as otherwise provided by this Code or any regulation made pursuant thereto. Section 3503.5 of the Code prohibits take, possession, or destruction of any birds in the orders Falconiformes (hawks) or Strigiformes (owls), or of their nests and eggs. Migratory non-game birds are protected under Section 3800, while other specified birds are protected under Section 3505. Common migratory bird species are known to nest in the survey area.

Protected Trees

An arborist report was prepared to document the species, size, and condition of trees within the arborist survey area. Information provided in Table 3.4-3 includes a summary of the native and non-native tree species observed in the arborist survey area. Native trees are protected under City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code Chapter 19.04 Protection of Public Trees and Chapter 19.12 Preservation and Protection of Private Trees. Detailed explanations of the results of the data collected during the tree survey are presented in the arborist report, included as Appendix E to this Draft EIR.

Table 3.4-2 Summary of Trees in the Arborist Survey Area

Tree Species	Number of Trees
Native Trees	
Quercus lobata valley oak	214
Quercus wislizeni interior live oak	98
Quercus agrifolia coast live oak	20
Fraxinus latifolia Oregon ash	16
Populus fremontii ssp. *fremontii* Fremont cottonwood	6
Non-Native Trees	
Prunus sp.	23
Juniperus sp. Juniper	2
Ligustrum lucidum glossy privet	1
Robinia pseudoacacia black locust	1
Unknown ornamental[1]	13

[1] Due to the timing of the tree survey (January and February), deciduous ornamental trees were not bearing leaves which made identification of some tree species difficult.

Federal and State Protected Aquatic Resources

A formal delineation of aquatic resources was not conducted for the survey area; however, based on the reconnaissance-level survey, potentially jurisdictional aquatic resources exist within and adjacent to the survey area. Potentially jurisdictional aquatic resources include riparian and riverine (i.e., the American River) habitats. The expected work area closest to potentially jurisdictional resources associated with the American River would be within Rossmoor Drive and within a dirt/cobble access road. The base of the power pole where work activities would end is approximately 125 feet from the nearest red willow riparian habitat and approximately 200 feet from the wet portion of the American River. Based on the Central Valley Flood Protection Board, a portion of the survey area is within the designated floodway of the American River.

The abandoned irrigation ditch and canal are man-made drainage features that do not connect to the American River. Therefore, these features would not be regulated as waters of the U.S. under the CWA. These features may be regulated as waters of the State under the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act.

No other aquatic features were observed during the surveys. Outside of the American River, the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory does not show other aquatic resources within the survey area (USFWS 2022b).

Sensitive Natural Communities

Sensitive natural communities are those native plant communities defined by CDFW as having limited distribution statewide or within a county or region and that are often vulnerable to environmental effects of projects (CDFW 2022). These communities may or may not contain special-status plants or their habitat (CDFW 2022). CDFW designates sensitive natural communities based on their State rarity and threat ranking using NatureServe's Heritage Methodology. Natural communities with rarity ranks of S1 to S3 (where S1 is critically imperiled, S2 is imperiled, and S3 is vulnerable) are considered sensitive natural communities to be addressed in the environmental review processes of CEQA and its equivalents (CDFW 2022). Many riparian plant communities qualify as sensitive natural communities based on the plant associations therein. In addition, riparian habitats are protected under Section 1602 of California Fish and Game Code and wetlands are protected under the CWA and Porter-Cologne Water Quality Protection Act.

Sensitive natural communities are generally identified at the alliance level of vegetation classification hierarchy using the Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer et al. 2009; CNPS 2022). The following sensitive natural communities are present in the survey area: red willow riparian woodland, valley oak woodland (S3) and Fremont cottonwood forest (S3). Vegetation alliances with a State rarity ranking of S3 are considered sensitive natural communities under CEQA. Refer to descriptions of these sensitive natural communities under "Land Cover", above.

Critical Habitat

The Federal Endangered Species Act requires that USFWS and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) designate critical habitat for species listed as federally endangered or threatened. Critical habitat includes areas identified under Section 4 of ESA and is described in Code of Federal Regulations Title 50 Parts 17 and 226. Federally designated critical habitat consists of geographic areas that contain physical or biological features essential to the conservation of a federally listed threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations or protection. Critical habitat may include areas that are not currently occupied by the species but that are essential for the conservation of the species. A critical habitat designation only applies to activities performed by federal agencies or that involve a federal permit, license, or funding, and that are likely to destroy or adversely affect the area of critical habitat.

A review of GIS-based habitat data for USFWS *Critical Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species* (USFWS 2022c) shows that the survey area is not located within designated critical habitat for any listed species. However, critical habitat for the following species is found within close proximity to the survey area:

- Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle
- Central Valley Spring-run Chinook Salmon Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU)
- California Central Valley Steelhead Distinct Population Segment (DPS)

USFWS designated critical habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle on September 15, 1980. The American River Parkway Zone include two separate areas. One includes the American River Parkway south bank from approximately El Manto River Access south along El Manto Drive to Ambassador Drive and its extension east to approximately to Sunriver Park. The other area includes Goethe Park (now River Bend Park), and that portion of the American River Parkway northeast of Goethe Park, west of the Jedediah Smith Memorial Bicycle Trail, and north to a line extended eastward from Palm Drive. The survey area is approximately 0.11 mile south and 0.38 mile west of the two areas designated as critical habitat.

The lower American River is designated by NMFS as critical habitat for steelhead California Central Valley DPS from the confluence of the Sacramento River to Nimbus Dam, and for chinook salmon – Central Valley spring-run ESU from the confluence of the Sacramento River to Watt Avenue Bridge. The nearest project work area is approximately 200 feet from the wetted portion of the American River.

Essential Fish Habitat

The lower American River is also designated by NMFS as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for Chinook salmon, as defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 1994, as amended. EFH refers to those waters and substrates

necessary for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity. The nearest project work area is approximately 200 feet from the wetted portion of the American River.

3.4.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Thresholds of Significance/Significance Criteria

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, the project would result in a potentially significant impact related to biological resources if it would:

- have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modification, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW or USFWS;
- have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by CDFW or USFWS;
- have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means;
- interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites;
- conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; or
- conflict with the provisions of an adopted habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan.

Analysis Methodology

Potential impacts on biological resources resulting from implementation of the project were determined by evaluating the project in relation to the habitat characteristics of the project alignments and immediate surrounding area, identifying potential loss of common and sensitive habitats, and evaluating potential effects to common and special-status species that could result indirectly from this habitat loss or directly from construction activities. As noted above, reconnaissance-level surveys were conducted in 2021 and 2022 to determine habitat conditions and potential presence of sensitive biological resources. The surveys conducted also included an assessment of potential sensitive habitat in and around the project alignments that could be affected by project implementation.

Issues or Potential Impacts Not Discussed Further

Impacts on Special-status Plants

The survey area does not support suitable habitat for special-status plant species; therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on special-status plants and this issue will not be analyzed further.

Impacts on State or federally protected wetlands

The survey area does not support State or federally protected wetlands; therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on State or federally protected wetlands and this issue will not be analyzed further.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.4-1: Result in a Substantial Adverse Effect on Riparian Habitat or Other Sensitive Natural Community

Project implementation would occur within the dripline of riparian habitat and sensitive natural communities and within the floodway of the American River. Working, trimming or removing vegetation within riparian, oak woodland habitat and sensitive natural communities could result in degradation of habitat value. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.

The survey area contains areas of riparian habitat (i.e., red willow riparian woodland and Fremont cottonwood forest) and valley oak woodland, which are considered sensitive vegetation alliances by CDFW. As discussed in Chapter 2, “Project Description,” design for both the 12kV and 69kV alignments has not yet occurred and the exact placement of the alignments within the study area will be determined based on existing utility infrastructure location, avoidance of identified environmental resources, and engineering/construction considerations. SMUD would be required to notify CDFW before commencing project activities within riparian habitat. If activities trigger the need for a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement under California Fish and Game Code Section 1602, SMUD will obtain an agreement from CDFW before project implementation. SMUD would be required to conduct construction activities in accordance with the agreement, including implementing identified measures in the agreement necessary to protect fish and wildlife resources when working within the bank of waterways that function as a fish or wildlife resource or in riparian habitats associated with those waterways or when working within the flood plain of a water body. Similarly, because a portion of the 69kV alignment is within a Designated Floodway and subject to regulation by the CVFPB. Approval by CVFPB would be required for all proposed work or uses which encroach into rivers, waterways, and floodways, within and adjacent to federal and State authorized flood control projects, Regulated Streams and within Designated Floodways that have been adopted by the Board. SMUD will be required to obtain an encroachment permit from CVFBP prior to project implementation. Because the alignments follow previously disturbed areas and would involve small areas of land that would be returned to their pre-project condition, the project would not eliminate areas of red

willow riparian woodland, Fremont cottonwood forest or valley oak woodland habitat but could affect individual trees and vegetation. As discussed in Impact 3.4-4 and Mitigation Measure 3.4-4 below, the impacts on individual trees would be minimized and removal subject to permits from Sacramento County and/or City of Rancho Cordova depending on location. Because the project would not involve the conversion of riparian habitat, a sensitive natural community or sensitive vegetation alliance, this impact would be **less than significant,** and no mitigation would be required.

Impact 3.4-2: Result in the Loss of or Disturbance of Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle and Habitat.

Project implementation would result in construction disturbances within 165 feet of an elderberry shrub. The single elderberry shrub is located in grassland habitat but near riparian habitat that is known to support valley elderberry longhorn beetle. Construction activities would occur a minimum of 100 feet from the shrub so no direct effects to this elderberry would occur. However, project construction could cause indirect effects to valley elderberry longhorn beetle and its habitat. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle is listed as threatened under the federal ESA. This species is dependent upon elderberry shrubs for egg-laying and development. Only one elderberry was found within the survey area. Although there is designated critical habitat for this species in the vicinity, the designated habitat does not occur within the survey area. The USFWS Framework for Assessing Impacts to the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus)* (Framework) (USFWS 2017) details a protocol for determining occupancy of valley elderberry longhorn beetle. Based on this protocol, any elderberry shrub within the study area is assumed to be occupied by valley elderberry longhorn beetle because of its close proximity to occupied riparian habitat. Construction activities could occur as close as 100 feet to this elderberry shrub. Direct effects to this elderberry (i.e., cutting) would be avoided but indirect effects from construction activities (i.e., dust deposition, accidental trampling or crushing by construction personnel or equipment, etc.) could occur. This impact would be considered **potentially significant**.

Mitigation Measure 3.4-2: Avoid and protect elderberry shrubs.

- The elderberry shrub and a 20-foot buffer from the dripline of the shrub shall be fenced or flagged as close to the edge of construction as feasible and avoided during construction activities.

- A qualified biologist will provide training for all contractors, work crews, and any onsite personnel on the status of valley elderberry longhorn beetle, its host plant and habitat, the need to avoid damaging elderberry shrubs, and the possible penalties for non-compliance.

- As much as feasible, all activities that could occur within 165 feet of an elderberry shrub (but outside of the 20-foot no disturbance buffer), shall be conducted outside

of the flight season of the valley elderberry longhorn beetle (the flight season typically occurs between March-July).

- Project activities such as truck traffic or other use of machinery, shall not create excessive dust on the project site, such that the growth or vigor of elderberry shrubs could be adversely affected. Establishing and enforcing a 15 miles per hour speed-limit for off-road usage and watering non-paved access roads shall be implemented as needed to minimize excessive dust.

- A qualified biologist (i.e., a biologist that holds a wildlife biology, botany, ecology, or other relevant degree from an accredited university and: 1) be knowledgeable in relevant species life histories and ecology, 2) be able to correctly identify relevant species and habitats, 3) have experience conducting field surveys of relevant species or resources, 4) be knowledgeable about survey protocols, 5) be knowledgeable about State and federal laws regarding the protection of special-status species, and 6) have experience with CDFW's CNDDB and Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS). The project proponent will review the resume and approve the qualifications of biologists.) shall monitor the work area within 165 feet of the elderberry shrub at project-appropriate intervals to ensure the avoidance and minimization measures listed above are implemented.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.4-2 would avoid disturbance to and protect valley elderberry longhorn beetle and its habitat by fencing or flagging the limits of construction, developing and providing a Workers Environmental Awareness Training to construction personnel, limiting construction activities within 165 feet of the elderberry shrub to occur outside of the flight season of the valley elderberry longhorn beetle (March-July), implementing measures to reduce excessive dust, and monitoring the construction in proximity to the elderberry to ensure that all avoidance and minimization measures are being implemented. With implementation of this mitigation measure, a **less-than-significant** impact would occur.

Impact 3.4-3: Disturbance of nesting Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, or other avian species.

Project implementation would result in construction disturbances that could cause Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, or other avian species to abandon their nests, if located nearby. Therefore, project construction could cause direct mortality of chicks and eggs. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

Two special-status birds are present or may occur within the project site (see Table 3.4-3): Swainson's hawk and white-tailed kite. While no Swainson's hawks or nests were identified during the field survey, the survey area is within the breeding range of the species and this species is regularly observed in the area. During the field survey, a pair of white-tailed kites was observed nesting west of the intersection of Rossmoor Drive and Ambassador Drive

(see Figure 3.4-2). Mature trees in the project alignments and adjacent areas provide potential nesting sites for special-status raptors, such as Swainson's hawk and white-tailed kite, and common raptors and birds, which are protected under sections 3503 and 3503.5 of the California Fish and Game Code and the MBTA. Implementation of the project, particularly construction activities proximate to trees, could result in impacts to special-status species and other common bird species if active nests are located in or near on-site construction. Construction activities, and the associated elevated noise and increased human presence, could cause Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, or other avian species to abandon their nests, if located nearby. Nest abandonment would result in direct mortality of chicks and eggs. This impact would be considered **potentially significant**.

Mitigation Measure 3.4-3: Avoid disturbance of active nests.

- For project activities, including tree trimming or removal, that begin between February 1 and September 15, a qualified biologist will conduct preconstruction surveys for Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, and other nesting birds to identify active nests on and within 0.25 mile of the alignments for Swainson's hawk and on or within 500 feet for other birds. The survey for Swainson's hawks will be conducted before the beginning of any construction activities between March 1 and September 15, following the *Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's Hawk Nesting Surveys in California's Central Valley* (Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee 2000).

- If active nests are found, a qualified biologist will establish appropriate buffers around the active nest sites identified during preconstruction bird surveys such that project-related activities are unlikely to result in nest abandonment or disruption of normal nesting activities. No project activity will commence within the buffer areas until a qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged, the nest is no longer active, or reducing the buffer would not likely result in nest abandonment. CDFW guidelines recommend implementation of 0.25-mile buffer for Swainson's hawk and white-tailed kite and 500-feet for other raptors, but the size of the buffer may be adjusted if a qualified biologist, in consultation with CDFW, determine that such an adjustment would not be likely to adversely affect the nest. Monitoring of the nest by a qualified biologist during and after construction activities will be required if the activity has potential to adversely affect the nest.

<u>Significance after Mitigation</u>

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.4-3 would avoid disturbance of active nests, consistent with the California Fish and Game Code and MBTA requirements. In addition, implementation of these mitigation measures would minimize impacts to special-status bird species by conducting vegetation removal outside of the nesting season for common and special-status bird species, and if that is not possible, by conducting pre-construction nesting surveys for nesting birds, setting no-disturbance buffers around active nests, and monitoring the project site to prevent new nests from being established during construction. With implementation of this mitigation measure, a **less-than-significant** impact would occur.

Impact 3.4-4: Conflict with provisions of the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code or Sacramento County Code of Ordinances intended to protect biological resources.

The alignments are located within the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County and are subject to the provisions of the Rancho Cordova Municipal Code and Sacramento County Code of Ordinances. Construction associated with the project may require the removal of trees, some of which could be considered protected trees under the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code and Sacramento County Code of Ordinances. Without acquisition of a permit from the City and County prior to tree removal, the project would conflict with local ordinances, which would constitute a **significant** impact.

The project survey area supports trees that meet the criteria for Public Trees and Private Trees requiring protection established by City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code Chapter 19.04 Protection of Public Trees, and Chapter 19.12 Preservation and Protection of Private Trees, and Sacramento County Code of Ordinance Chapter 19.04 and Chapter 19.12. Project construction activities could result in the removal of trees that qualify as protected trees. Depending on the final alignment with the survey area, it possible that construction activities could directly or indirectly impact up to 240 trees protected under City and/or County ordinances. Without acquisition of a permit from the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County prior to tree removal or any activities within the dripline of protected trees, conflicts with the City of Rancho Cordova Tree Preservation Ordinance and Sacramento County Code of Ordinances could occur, and impacts would be considered **significant**.

Mitigation Measure 3.4-4: Tree Protection

Prior to site disturbance, SMUD shall provide to the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County a plan for all tree work. A Certified Arborist shall approve all work plans prior to submittal to the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County. Tree planting will comply with the City of Rancho Cordova's and Sacramento County's landscaping requirements.

For those trees that will be preserved on site during project construction, the following guidelines are recommended to ensure the long-term survival and stability of the trees.

- **Educate Workers:** Educate all workers on site about tree protection guidelines and requirements prior to construction.

- **Establish a Tree Protection Zone:** Establish a tree protection zone (TPZ) around any tree or group of trees designated for retention. The TPZ should at minimum be equal to 1.5 times the radius of the dripline. The TPZ may be adjusted on a case-by-case basis after consultation with a Certified Arborist.

- **Install Fencing and Signage:** Install fencing around the TPZ of all trees or groups of trees designated for retention. The fencing should remain in place for the duration

of construction activities. Post appropriate signage to help convey the importance of the TPZ to workers.

- **Prohibit Construction Activities within the TPZ:** Prohibit construction-related activities, including grading, trenching, construction, demolition, or other work, within the TPZ. No heavy equipment or machinery should be operated within the TPZ. No construction materials, equipment, machinery, or other supplies should be stored within the TPZ. Vehicle and foot traffic should not be permitted within the TPZ. No wires or signs should be attached to any trees designated for retention.

- **Prune Selected Trees:** Prune selected trees to provide necessary clearance during construction and to remove any defective limbs or other tree parts that may pose a failure risk. All pruning should be completed by a Certified Arborist or Tree Worker and adhere to the Tree Pruning Guidelines of the International Society of Arboriculture.

- **Monitor Trees and TPZs:** Monitor the integrity of the TPZs and the health of the trees designated for retention regularly throughout the construction process. A Certified Arborist should monitor the health and condition of the protected trees and, if necessary, recommend additional mitigations and appropriate actions. This could include the monitoring of trees adjacent to project facilities to determine if construction activities (including the removal of nearby trees) would affect protected trees in the future.

- **Treat Impacted Trees:** Provide supplemental irrigation and other care, such as mulch and fertilizer, as deemed necessary by a Certified Arborist, to any trees impacted by construction. Treatment of any injuries should be performed by a Certified Arborist.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of this mitigation measure would require SMUD to acquire permits and implement the conditions of those permits in accordance with existing guidelines established by the City of Rancho Cordova for the protection of trees. Therefore, implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.4-4 would avoid any conflict with local policies/ordinances intended to protect biological resources, thereby reducing this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Impact 3.4-5: Conflict with provisions of the County of Sacramento American River Parkway Plan and the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan.

Portions of the alignments are located within the American River Parkway and subject to the provisions of the County of Sacramento American River Parkway Plan and the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan (which is in preparation). Construction associated with the project may require the trimming of vegetation, removal of trees, and construction in access roads and pedestrian trails within the American River Parkway. However, the project would be constructed within existing access/trail areas, and on either a paved road or fire break and includes project design features that are consistent with the American River Parkway Plan Goals and Policies and as such it would not conflict with the Plan. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Portions of the project alignments are within the American River Parkway and are subject to the provision of the County of Sacramento American River Parkway Plan.

The American River Parkway NRMP is still in preparation. Because the American River Parkway – NRMP is still under development and has not yet been finalized or adopted, it is uncertain whether the proposed project would conflict with the goals or policies outlined within the forthcoming NRMP. However, given that the proposed project will be constructed underground primarily within access road/trail, paved roads, or fire break within the parkway and will not result in total conversion of natural habitats, it would not conflict with the NRMP as currently drafted.

Similarly, the American River Parkway Management Plan allows for the development of facilities within the Parkway. Under Policy 3.1 “any development of facilities within the Parkway, including but not limited to building, roads, turfed areas, trails, bridges, tunnels, pipelines, *overhead electrical lines* [emphasis added], levees and parking areas, shall be designated and located such that any impact upon native vegetation is minimized and appropriate mitigation measures are incorporated into the project.”

Since SMUD is proposing a project that minimizes vegetation trimming and removal, has adopted a less damaging alternative that uses either an existing paved road and/or a fire break, and provides mitigation measures consistent with the policies within the American River Parkway Management Plan, it does not conflict with the goals and policies of the American River Parkway Management Plan. This impact would be **less than significant,** and no mitigation would be required.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

Impact 3.4-6: Interfere with Wildlife Movement or Migration or Impede the Use of Nursery Sites.

While the 69kV alignment includes areas within the American River Parkway, which provides a movement corridor and nursery sites for wildlife, the project would install underground features and would not interfere with wildlife movement in the area. This impact would be **less than significant**.

The project alignments include area within the American River Parkway, a large riparian area that provides a movement corridor and nursery sites for wildlife (City of Rancho Cordova 2006:4.10-56). Although the American River Parkway is an important wildlife movement area, construction activities would be temporary and not result in any new, substantially different, permanent structures that would interfere with wildlife movement in the area. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant,** and no mitigation would be required.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

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3.5 Transportation

This chapter includes a discussion and analysis of the transportation impacts related to the project. No comment letters related to transportation were received in response to the Notice of Preparation (see Appendix A).

3.5.1 *Regulatory Setting*

Federal

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws related to transportation are applicable to the project.

State

Senate Bill 743

Senate Bill (SB) 743, passed in 2013, required the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to develop new State CEQA guidelines that address traffic metrics under CEQA. As stated in the legislation, upon adoption of the new guidelines, "automobile delay, as described solely by LOS or similar measures of vehicular capacity or traffic congestion shall not be considered a significant impact on the environment pursuant to this division, except in locations specifically identified in the guidelines, if any."

In December of 2018, OPR published the most recent version of the *Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA* (December 2018) which provides guidance for VMT analysis. The Office of Administrative Law approved the updated State CEQA Guidelines and lead agencies had an opt-in period until July 1, 2020 to implement the updated guidelines regarding VMT. As of July 1, 2020, implementation of CCR Section 15064.3 of the updated CEQA Guidelines applies statewide.

3.5.2 *Environmental Setting*

The project involves open trenching and other construction activities within existing rights-of-way and open space, including public roads and bike/pedestrian paths. Nearly the entire 0.6-mile 12kV alignment is within Ambassador Drive. Approximately 0.8 mile of the 69kV alignment is within Rossmoor Drive, with the balance of the work occurring on school, SMUD, or American River Parkway property. Within the American River Parkway property, the 69kV alignment follows an existing unpaved path frequently used by pedestrians and bicyclists. There are no transit stops along the project alignments.

3.5.3 *Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures*

Thresholds of Significance/Significance Criteria

Based on the threshold identified in CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, the project would result in a significant transportation impact if it would:

- Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities;
- Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3(b), which pertains to vehicle miles travelled;
- Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment); or
- Result in inadequate emergency access.

Issues or Potential Impacts Not Discussed Further

All issues applicable to transportation listed under the significance criteria above, are addressed in this chapter.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.5-1: Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities.

Project construction would temporarily interfere with existing vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation as it would include temporary closures of roads, pathways, and bike lanes. Because project construction activities could affect the existing circulation system, this impact would be **potentially significant**.

Project construction would temporarily interfere with existing vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation as it would include temporary closures of roads, pathways, and bike lanes. Upon completion of construction, all facilities would be returned to their pre-project condition. Project operation would not generate additional vehicle, transit, pedestrian, or bicycle use, so there would be no conflicts with programs, plans, ordinances, or policies related to circulation. Because project construction activities could affect the existing circulation system, this impact would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.5-1: Traffic Control Plan

Prior to project construction within or adjacent to public roadways, SMUD's construction contractor shall develop a traffic control plan for the project and submit the plan to the City

of Rancho Cordova's Department of Public Works. The plan shall identify temporary lane, sidewalk, bicycle lane, and transit stop closures and provide information regarding how access and connectivity will be maintained during construction activities. The plan shall include details regarding traffic controls that would be employed, including signage, detours, and flaggers. The traffic control plan shall be implemented by the contractor during construction to allow for the safe passage of vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists along the project route.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.5-1 would reduce impacts related to the circulation system by ensuring that accessibility and connectivity are maintained during construction activities. Therefore, this impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Impact 3.5-2: Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3(b), which pertains to vehicle miles travelled.

Because the project would not change the amount of development projected for the area, would be consistent with the population growth and VMT projections in regional and local plans, and would have only a slight increase in VMT during construction, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Temporary construction activities would result in slight increases in vehicle trips associated with worker commutes and materials delivery. However, these additional trips would only occur during the construction period. During operation, no new vehicle trips would be generated as the project involves replacement of existing facilities with existing maintenance and operations activities. Because the project would not change the amount of development projected for the area, would be consistent with the population growth and VMT projections in regional and local plans, and would have only a slight increase in VMT during construction, this impact would be **less than significant**, and no mitigation would be required.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

Impact 3.5-3: Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)

Implementation of the project would not result in any changes in road geometry or use, but would require temporary closure of vehicle lanes, bicycle lanes, and pathways. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

Project operation would not result in any changes in road geometry or use. As discussed above, project construction would require temporary closure of vehicle lanes as well as pathways and bike lanes. This impact would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures

Implement Mitigation Measure 3.5-1: Traffic Control Plan

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.5-1 would reduce impacts related to traffic hazards during construction by requiring a plan to maintain access and provide safety information. As part of the plan, requirements would be established to allow for the safe, controlled passage of vehicles through the project area. Therefore, impacts related to traffic hazards would be reduced to a ***less-than-significant*** level.

Impact 3.5-4: Result in inadequate emergency access.

While project operation would not change any roadways in the area, project construction would require temporary closures of roadways used for emergency access. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

As discussed above, project operation would not change any existing roads, including areas provided for emergency access. Project construction would involve temporary lane closures, which has the potential to impact access for emergency vehicles. This impact would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures

Implement Mitigation Measure 3.5-1: Traffic Control Plan

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.5-1 would reduce impacts related to inadequate emergency access during construction by requiring development and implementation of a plan that would maintain access for emergency vehicles during construction. Therefore, impacts related to emergency access would be reduced to a ***less-than-significant*** level.

4 Other CEQA Sections

As required by Section 15126 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, this chapter presents significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented, significant irreversible environmental changes that would result from implementation of the project, and growth-inducing impacts of the project. In addition, an environmental justice evaluation is presented in this chapter.

4.1 Significant Unavoidable Impacts

Section 21100(b)(2)(A) of CEQA provides that an EIR shall include a detailed statement setting forth "in a separate section: any significant effect on the environment that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented." As discussed in Sections 3.1 through 3.5 of this Draft EIR, there are no environmental impacts that cannot be mitigated to a less-than-significant level.

4.2 Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes

Section 15126.2(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of any significant irreversible environmental changes that would be caused by the project. Section 15126.2(c) states:

> Uses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible, because a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely. Primary impacts and, particularly, secondary impacts (such as highway improvement which provides access to a previously inaccessible area) generally commit future generations to similar uses. Also, irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified.

Generally, a project would result in significant irreversible environmental changes if:

- the primary and secondary impacts would generally commit future generations to similar uses,
- the project would involve uses in which irreversible damage could result from any potential environmental accidents associated with the project,
- the project would involve a large commitment of nonrenewable resources, or
- the proposed consumption of resources is not justified (e.g., the project involves the wasteful use of energy).

Implementation of the Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project would result in the commitment of new alignment areas to underground utility-related uses. While this underground use would preclude some types of future development or use above the ground, the land above the alignments would still be available for use as roadways, open space, and pathways. Following project construction, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) would restore the project alignments to their pre-project conditions above ground.

Resources that would be permanently and continually consumed by project implementation include electricity, natural gas, and fossil fuels; however, the amount and rate of consumption of these resources would not result in significant environmental impacts related to the unnecessary, inefficient, or wasteful use of resources as stated in Section 3.7, “Energy,” and Section 3.9, “Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” of the Initial Study (IS) (included as Appendix B of this Draft EIR. Construction and operational activities related to the project would result in the irretrievable commitment of nonrenewable energy resources, primarily in the form of fossil fuels (including fuel oil), natural gas, and gasoline for automobiles and construction equipment. The use of these nonrenewable resources is expected to account for a minimal portion of the region’s resources and would not affect the availability of these resources for other needs within the region. Construction activities would not result in inefficient use of energy or natural resources. Construction contractors selected would use best available engineering techniques, construction and design practices, and equipment operating procedures. Long-term project operation would not result in substantial long-term consumption of energy and natural resources because the project would be designed using energy efficient technologies, as stated in Chapter 2, “Project Description.”

With respect to operational activities, as described in Section 3.7, “Energy,” and Section 3.9, “Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” of the IS (Appendix B of this Draft EIR), the project would generate minimal vehicle trips associated with periodic maintenance of the underground infrastructure, which would not be greater than the existing maintenance activities that currently occur to maintain the existing cables. Therefore, the project would not generate any additional greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions beyond existing conditions during operational activities. These maintenance trips and activities would be essential to ensuring that the 12 kilovolts (kV) and 69kV alignments and associated infrastructure would remain functional to transmit and supply energy to customers within the SMUD service area.

4.3 Growth-Inducing Impacts

CEQA specifies that growth-inducing impacts of a project must be addressed in an EIR (Public Resources Code Section 21100[b][5]). Specifically, the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2[d] states that the EIR shall discuss the ways in which the project could foster economic or population growth or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Included in this analysis are projects which would remove obstacles to population growth (a major expansion of a wastewater treatment plant might, for example, allow for more construction in service areas). Increases

in the population may tax existing community service facilities, requiring construction of new facilities that could cause significant environmental effects. Also, the EIR should discuss the characteristics of the project which may encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment, either individually or cumulatively. It must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.

Direct growth inducement would result if a project involved construction of new housing. Indirect growth inducement would result, for instance, if implementing a project resulted in any of the following:

- substantial new permanent employment opportunities (e.g., commercial, industrial, or governmental enterprises);

- substantial short-term employment opportunities (e.g., construction employment) that indirectly stimulates the need for additional housing and services to support the new temporary employment demand; and/or

- removal of an obstacle to additional growth and development, such as removing a constraint on a required public utility or service (e.g., construction of a major sewer line with excess capacity through an undeveloped area).

The State CEQA Guidelines do not distinguish between planned and unplanned growth for purposes of considering whether a project would foster additional growth. Therefore, for purposes of this EIR, to reach the conclusion that a project is growth-inducing as defined by CEQA, the EIR must find that the project would foster (i.e., promote or encourage) additional growth in economic activity, population, or housing, regardless of whether the growth is already approved by and consistent with local plans. The conclusion does not determine that induced growth is beneficial or detrimental, consistent with the State CEQA Guidelines 15126.2[d].

If the analysis conducted for the EIR results in a determination that a project is growth-inducing, the next question is whether that growth may cause adverse effects on the environment. Environmental effects resulting from induced growth fit the CEQA definition of “indirect” effects in the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15358(a)(2). These indirect or secondary effects of growth may result in significant environmental impacts. CEQA does not require that the EIR speculate unduly about the precise location and site-specific characteristics of significant, indirect effects caused by induced growth, but a good-faith effort is required to disclose what is feasible to assess. Potential secondary effects of growth could include consequences – such as conversion of open space to developed uses, increased demand on community and public services and infrastructure, increased traffic and noise, degradation of air and water quality, or degradation or loss of plant and wildlife habitat – that are the result of growth fostered by the project.

4.3.1 Growth-Inducing Impacts of the Project

This analysis examines the following potential growth-inducing impacts related to implementation of the project and assesses whether these effects are significant and adverse:

1. foster population growth and construction of housing;
2. eliminate obstacles to population growth;
3. foster economic growth;
4. affect service levels, facility capacity, or infrastructure demand; and
5. encourage or facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment.

Implementation of the project would minimally foster short-term economic growth within the City of Rancho Cordova as a result of new construction employment opportunities. Construction of Phase 1 could begin as soon as summer 2022 and would last for approximately 3 weeks. Phase 2 would not begin until Phase 1 is complete, though Phase 2 may not start for several years after the completion of Phase 1. During construction, the estimated peak level of construction workers at any given time is estimated to be approximately 15 workers and it would not be reasonable to expect that any construction workers would relocate to the project area for a temporary job. There would be no long-term operational employment opportunities associated with the project.

In conclusion, the project does not have the potential to stimulate the economy directly (by providing jobs) or indirectly (by creating a demand for local goods and services) in the region. Further, the project would not meaningfully affect employment or other growth in the region, given the size of the regional economy. Therefore, the project would not contribute to substantial population growth.

4.4 Environmental Justice Evaluation

4.4.1 Introduction

At present, there are no direct references to the evaluation of environmental justice (EJ) as an environmental topic in the Appendix G Environmental Checklist, CEQA statute, or State CEQA Guidelines; however, requirements to evaluate inconsistencies with general, regional, or specific plans (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15125[d]) and determine whether there is a “conflict” with a “policy” “adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect” (Environmental Checklist Section XI[b]) can implicate EJ policies. As additional cities and counties comply with Senate Bill (SB) 1000 (2016), which requires local jurisdictions to adopt EJ policies when two or more general plan elements are amended, environmental protection policies connected to EJ will become more common.

"Environmental Justice" is defined in California law as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies (California Government Code Section 30107.3[a]). "Fair treatment" can be defined as a condition under which "no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, shall bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies" (EPA 2011).

SMUD created the Sustainable Communities Initiative, which encompasses the framework of EJ, to help bring environmental equity and economic vitality to all communities in SMUD's service area with special attention to historically underserved neighborhoods. The initiative focuses on the development of holistically sustainable neighborhoods through partnerships and collaboration. The goal of this effort is to ensure the advancement of prosperity in the Sacramento region regardless of zip code or socioeconomic status by focusing on equitable access to mobility, a prosperous economy, a healthy environment, and social well-being. To support the initiative, SMUD teams are working internally and with community partners to improve equitable access to healthy neighborhood environments, energy efficiency programs and services, environmentally friendly transit modes (including electric vehicles), and energy-related workforce development and economic development prospects. To the extent these goals seek to avoid environmental impacts affecting vulnerable communities, the State CEQA Guidelines already require consideration of whether a proposed project may conflict with goals that support sustainable communities. The following analysis has been provided by SMUD, as a proactive evaluation in excess of CEQA requirements, to identify any localized existing conditions to which the project, as proposed, may worsen adverse conditions and negatively impact the local community and identifies the need for implementation of additional site or local considerations, where necessary. Environmental justice issues are being considered in this CEQA document to help inform decision makers about whether the project supports SMUD's goal of helping to advance environmental justice and economic vitality to all communities in SMUD's service area with special attention to historically underserved neighborhoods.

4.4.2 Regulatory Context

California legislation, state agency programs, and guidance have been issued in recent years that aim to more comprehensively address EJ issues, including SB 1000 (2016), SB 535 (2012) and Assembly Bill (AB) 1550 (2016), AB 617 (2017), the California Department of Justice Bureau of Environmental Justice, the California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen), and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research's (OPR's) 2020 General Plan Guidelines, Environmental Justice Element. In particular, SB 1000 has provided an impetus to more broadly address EJ; coupled with the existing requirements of CEQA, SMUD addresses significant environmental impacts in the context of EJ in its environmental documents. These other bills have also provided the necessary policy direction to address EJ under CEQA.

Senate Bill 1000

SB 1000, which was enacted in 2016, amended California Government Code Section 65302 to require that general plans include an EJ element or EJ-related goals, policies, and objectives in other elements of general plans with respect to disadvantaged communities (DACs) beginning in 2018. The EJ policies are required when a city or county adopts or revises two or more general plan elements, and the city or county contains a DAC. EJ-related policies must aim to reduce the disproportionate health risks in DACs, promote civic engagement in the public decision-making process, and prioritize improvements that address the needs of DACs (California Government Code Section 65302[h]). Policies should focus on improving the health and overall well-being of vulnerable and at-risk communities through reductions in pollution exposure, increased access to healthy foods and homes, improved air quality, and increased physical activity.

Senate Bill 535 and Assembly Bill 1550

Authorized by the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32), the cap-and-trade program is one of several strategies that California uses to reduce GHGs that cause climate change. The state's portion of the cap-and-trade auction proceeds are deposited in the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) and used to further the objectives of AB 32. In 2012, the California Legislature passed SB 535 (de Leon), directing that 25 percent of the proceeds from the GGRF go to projects that provide a benefit to DACs. In 2016, the legislature passed AB 1550 (Gomez), which now requires that 25 percent of proceeds from the GGRF be spent on projects located in DACs. The law requires the investment plan to allocate (1) a minimum of 25 percent of the available moneys in the fund to projects located within and benefiting individuals living in DACs; (2) an additional minimum of 5 percent to projects that benefit low-income households or to projects located within, and benefiting individuals living in, low-income communities located anywhere in the state; and (3) an additional minimum of 5 percent either to projects that benefit low-income households that are outside of, but within 0.5 mile of, DACs, or to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, low-income communities that are outside of, but within 0.5 mile of, DACs.

Assembly Bill 617

AB 617 of 2017 aims to help protect air quality and public health in communities around industries subject to the state's cap-and-trade program for GHG emissions. AB 617 imposes a new state-mandated local program to address nonvehicular sources (e.g., refineries, manufacturing facilities) of criteria air pollutants and toxic air contaminants. The bill requires the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to identify high-pollution areas and directs air districts to focus air quality improvement efforts through the adoption of community emission reduction programs in these identified areas. Currently, air districts review individual stationary sources and impose emissions limits on emitters based on best available control technology, pollutant type, and proximity to nearby existing land uses. This bill addresses the cumulative and additive nature of air pollutant health effects by requiring communitywide air quality assessment and emission reduction planning,

called a community risk reduction plan in some jurisdictions. CARB has developed a statewide blueprint that outlines the process for identifying affected communities, statewide strategies to reduce emissions of criteria air pollutants and toxic air contaminants, and criteria for developing community emissions reduction programs and community air monitoring plans.

California Department of Justice's Bureau of Environmental Justice

In February 2018, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra announced the establishment of a Bureau of Environmental Justice within the Environmental Section at the California Department of Justice. The purpose of the bureau is to enforce environmental laws, including CEQA, to protect communities disproportionately burdened by pollution and contamination. The bureau accomplishes this through oversight and investigation and by using the law enforcement powers of the Attorney General's Office to identify and pursue matters affecting vulnerable communities.

In 2012, then Attorney General Kamala Harris published a fact sheet titled, "Environmental Justice at the Local and Regional Level," highlighting existing provisions in the California Government Code and CEQA principles that provide for the consideration of EJ in local planning efforts and CEQA. Attorney General Becerra cites the fact sheet on his web page, indicating its continued relevance.

California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool

CalEnviroScreen is a mapping tool developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazards Assessment to help identify low-income census tracts in California that are disproportionately burdened by and vulnerable to multiple sources of pollution. It uses environmental, health, and socioeconomic information based on data sets available from state and federal government sources to produce scores for every census tract in the state. Scores are generated using 20 statewide indicators that fall into four categories: exposures, environmental effects, sensitive populations, and socioeconomic factors. The exposures and environmental effects categories characterize the pollution burden that a community faces, whereas the sensitive populations and socioeconomic factors categories define population characteristics.

CalEnviroScreen prioritizes census tracts based on their combined pollution burden and population characteristics score, from low to high. A percentile for the overall score is then calculated from the ordered values. The California Environmental Protection Agency has designated the top 25 percent of highest scoring tracts in CalEnviroScreen (i.e., those that fall in or above the 75th percentile) as DACs, which are targeted for investment proceeds under SB 535, the state's cap-and-trade program.

Governor's Office of Planning and Research's 2020 Updated EJ Element Guidelines

OPR published updated General Plan Guidelines in June 2020 that include revised EJ guidance in response to SB 1000. OPR has also published example policy language in

an appendix document along with several case studies to highlight EJ-related policies and initiatives that can be considered by other jurisdictions. Section 4.8 of the General Plan Guidelines contains the EJ guidance. The guidelines offer recommendations for identifying vulnerable communities and reducing pollution exposure related to health conditions, air quality, project siting, water quality, and land use compatibility related to industrial and large-scale agricultural operations, childcare facilities, and schools, among other things. It provides many useful resources, including links to research, tools, reports, and sample general plans.

4.4.3 Sensitivity of Project Location

Community Description

As part of its Sustainable Communities Initiative, SMUD created and maintains the Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map,[1] which reflects several data sets related to community attributes that SMUD uses to identify historically underserved communities. One of the key components of the map is the California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen Version 3.0), which identifies communities facing socioeconomic disadvantages or health disadvantages such as multiple sources of pollution. The Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map provides an analysis of current data sets to indicate areas ranging from low to high sensitivity and can be used to describe the relevant socioeconomic characteristics and current environmental burdens of the project area can be described. SMUD has determined that it will evaluate EJ effects for projects located in, adjacent to, or proximate to (e.g., within 500 feet of) a high-sensitivity area as shown on the Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map or located in a census tract with a CalEnviroScreen score of 71 percent or greater.

The project alignment is located in areas identified as low and medium sensitivity areas per the Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map (SMUD 2022). The project site is not located in an area designated as an Opportunity Zone, a Sacramento Promise Zone, a Health Equity Focus Area by the Sierra Health Foundation, or as a DAC by state SB 535, which are used as tools for targeting economic development, designated by the Healthy Sacramento Coalition as an area with consistent high rates of poor health outcomes, and designated as located in an area with a population that is highly vulnerable and susceptible to harm from exposure to a hazard, and its ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from hazards.

The proposed project is located in a census tract with a CalEnviroScreen 4.0 score of 49 percent (OEHHA 2021). Scores are calculated for all census tracts with values being 1 to 100 and based on pollution burden and population characteristics. A tract with a value of 95 indicates the area is confronted with many burdens and vulnerabilities from

[1] The Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map is available at https://usage.smud.org/SustainableCommunities/?_ga=2.265711818.475465144.1588267723-524375244.1533058938.

environmental pollutants. In the case of the census tract containing the project alignments, the score of 49 indicates that the area is not substantially burdened by vulnerabilities due to environmental pollutants.

4.4.4 Environmental Conditions

This discussion references the analysis conducted in the Environmental Checklist of the IS, as well as this EIR, and provides additional detail with respect to the current environmental conditions in the project area. The focus of this discussion is on environmental justice issues relevant to the project.

- **Aesthetics:** The visual characteristics of the project alignments are typical of a suburban environment with open space and low-rise structures. The visual characteristics of the project alignments include vegetation and open space in the American River Parkway, single- and two-story single-family and multi-family residences, school buildings, residential landscaping, and roadways. Construction activities would be visible in the area, but there would be no changes to the visual character of the area upon completion as all infrastructure would be located underground.

- **Air Quality:** The project alignments are located in a suburban area adjacent to existing schools and open space. Nearby uses are largely residential and are not considered substantial generators of toxic air contaminants to the area. Nearby receptors are located immediately adjacent to the project alignments include single- and multi-family residences and schools. The nearby structures with sensitive receptors are located at the same elevation as the project site, although individual living quarters are located above the first floor.

- **Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources:** There are known cultural resources and Tribal cultural resources immediately adjacent to and potentially within the boundaries of the project alignments (refer to Section 3.1, “Tribal Cultural Resources,” and Section 3.2, “Cultural Resources,” of this Draft EIR).

- **Energy:** The project area is served by SMUD, which offers the Greenergy program, which offers electricity generated with 100 percent renewable and carbon-free resources.

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change Vulnerabilities:** The project area would likely be subject to increased heat stress from climate change. The northern portion of the 69kV alignments is within a 100-year flood zone while the residential areas are generally protected by levees (City of Rancho Cordova 2006:4.9-6). Furthermore, climate change can exacerbate any issues with levees (Romero 2020).

- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** The project alignments and surrounding areas are not identified as a hazardous materials sites or included on the State Hazardous Waste and Substances List (“Cortese List”) compiled pursuant to Government Code 65962.5 and referenced at Public Resources Code 21092.6.

- **Noise:** Noise sources in the project area include vehicle traffic, as well as noise associated with nearby schools and parks. Multi-family residences, which are considered sensitive receptors, are located adjacent to the 69kV alignment's southern boundary.

- **Public Services:** Public services such as police and fire protection are available in the area.

- **Recreation:** Hagan Community Park is adjacent to the 69kV alignment and the Cordova Park Substation, and a large portion of the 69kV alignment is within the American River Parkway.

- **Transportation:** The project alignments include school sites, an existing electrical substation, paved roads, and unpaved recreational pathways. Most of the project alignments are generally accessible to the public, though access is controlled within school property and the substation is not open to the public. The area around the project alignments includes paved roads, recreational pathways, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes.

- **Utilities:** Existing utility service is provided by SMUD, the City of Rancho Cordova, and Sacramento County to nearby uses, including the two public schools located adjacent to the southern end of the 69kV alignment.

4.4.5 Evaluation of the Project's Contribution to a Community's Sensitivity

As noted previously, the project would involve installation of a 12kV underground cable, underground conduit duct banks to house 69kV cable, and up to 13 underground utility vaults. The existing underground cable in the area would be abandoned in place. Following installation of all project features, the new 12kV and 69kV alignments would operate in a manner substantially similar to existing conditions. The project's contributions to the community's sensitivity are as follows:

- **Aesthetics:** Implementation of the project would result in the installation of new underground infrastructure. Because project features would be at or below ground level, the project would not result in a substantial modification of the project alignments. However, construction activities would be visible during installation of the 12kV and 69kV equipment. Once construction activities have been completed, publicly accessible views would be returned to their pre-project conditions.

- **Air Quality:** Excavation and general construction activities would be required during project construction. This would result in emissions of diesel particulate matter and fugitive dust from the project alignments, as discussed in Section 3.3, "Air Quality," of this Draft EIR. Considering the highly dispersive properties of diesel particulate matter (PM), the relatively low mass of diesel PM emissions that would be generated at any single place during project construction, and the relatively short period during which diesel-PM-emitting construction activities would take place, construction-related toxic

air contaminants would not expose sensitive receptors to an incremental increase in cancer risk that exceeds 10 in one million. As also discussed in the IS, on-site construction activities would be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of Fugitive Dust Rule 403, set forth by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD), which would minimize emissions of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$. These measures would be consistent with the best management practices and best available control technology practices required by SMAQMD.

- **Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources:** As noted in Section 3.1, "Tribal Cultural Resources," and Section 3.2, "Cultural Resources," of this Draft EIR, the project would affect known cultural resources or Tribal cultural resources. However, mitigation measures identified in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 would be implemented and would reduce these impacts to a less-than-significant level.

- **Energy:** The project would not affect access to electricity because electrical service would be maintained throughout construction.

- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** The use and handling of hazardous materials during construction would be conducted in a manner consistent with existing regulations, including CCR Title 27. Upon completion of construction, no on-site operations would involve the use, transport, or disposal of potential hazardous materials.

- **Noise:** Noise would be generated during construction, but it would be temporary, conducted in compliance with the City of Rancho Cordova Noise Ordinance, and similar to other construction type noise that occurs in the Rancho Cordova area. No substantial increases in ambient noise levels at sensitive receptors in the area would occur.

- **Public Services:** As the project would involve the installation of new underground cable to replace aging infrastructure, project implementation would not interrupt or otherwise affect the provision of public services to the area.

- **Recreation:** Project construction could temporarily interfere with use of some areas of the American River Parkway. However, these effects would be temporary. Following completion of construction activities, all recreational facilities would be restored to their pre-project condition.

- **Transportation:** Project construction would temporarily affect bike lanes, but the traffic control plan required by Mitigation Measure 3.5-1 would ensure that access is maintained. Following completion of construction activities, all bike lanes and other pathways would be returned to their pre-project condition. There are no transit stops located along or near the project alignments, so the project would not affect access to transit.

- **Utilities:** The project would not adversely affect the provision of utilities to existing and future uses in the project area. The project is intended to ensure continued and reliable electrical service within the Rancho Cordova area, and no interruption or reduction in service capacity would occur as a result of the project.

As described above for each environmental resource area, the project would not contribute to the community's current sensitivity.

4.4.6 Summary of Environmental Justice Assessment

Per SMUD's Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map,[2] which reflects several data sets related to community attributes that SMUD uses to identify historically underserved communities, the project alignments are located in areas of low to medium sensitivity (SMUD 2022). The project involves the installation of new underground cable and infrastructure to replace aging equipment. These activities could affect Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation in the area, however, mitigation measures are included that would reduce the potential contribution of the project and in cooperation with tribal community members to ensure that any impacts to resources are treated appropriately and with respect to the community(ies) in question. Further, objectives of the project include providing safe and reliable electrical service to existing and proposed development in the Rancho Cordova area, which is intended to maintain or improve living conditions for residents and communities in the area. As a result, the project does not have the potential to further affect the community and/or worsen existing adverse environmental conditions. Therefore, ***no existing adverse environmental justice conditions would be worsened*** as a result of the project.

Although the project would not worsen existing environmental justice conditions, as a leader in building healthy communities, one of SMUD's Sustainable Communities goals is to help bring environmental equity and economic vitality to all communities. By investing in underserved neighborhoods and working with community partners, SMUD is part of a larger regional mission to deliver energy, health, housing, transportation, education and economic development solutions to support sustainable communities.

Sustainable Communities currently maintains two partnerships in the region encompassing the project area:

- Sierra Nevada Journeys: With an investment from SMUD's Sustainable Communities, Sierra Nevada Journeys is conducting a community needs assessment in order to develop cultural relevant education materials. This information will be shared with SMUD/other local partners and will be used to develop curriculum that is pertinent to historically marginalized communities as

[2] The Sustainable Communities Resource Priorities Map is available at https://usage.smud.org/SustainableCommunities/?_ga=2.265711818.475465144.1588267723-524375244.1533058938.

well as inclusive of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The new curriculum will be deployed through Sierra Nevada Journeys' Classroom Unleashed Program.

The mission of Sierra Nevada Journeys is to deliver innovative outdoor, science-based education programs for youth to develop critical thinking skills and to inspire natural resource stewardship. More than 50 percent of the students they serve are from low-income families and 61 percent are students of color, working with Title 1 schools in the area. In addition, Sierra Nevada Journeys strong working relationships with local Tribes.

- Sacramento Native American Health Center(s): The Sacramento Native American Health Center Inc. (SNAHC) is a non-profit, Federally Qualified Health Center, located in Midtown Sacramento. The health center is committed to enhancing quality of life by providing a culturally competent, holistic, and patient-centered continuum of care. There are no Tribal or ethnic requirements to receive care here.

  SNAHC is community-owned and operated; a Board of Directors governs the center. Since the grand opening the center staff has grown to meet the needs of the community, 26% are Native American from both local and out-of-state Tribes.

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5 Alternatives

5.1 Introduction

The California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15126.6(a) (State California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] Guidelines) requires environmental impact reports (EIRs) to describe "… a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives. An EIR need not consider every conceivable alternative to a project. Rather, it must consider a range of potentially feasible alternatives that will avoid or substantially lessen the significant adverse impacts of a project, and foster informed decision making and public participation. An EIR is not required to consider alternatives that are infeasible. The lead agency is responsible for selecting a range of project alternatives for examination and must publicly disclose its reasoning for selecting those alternatives. There is no ironclad rule governing the nature or scope of the alternatives to be discussed other than the "rule of reason." This section of the State CEQA Guidelines also provides guidance regarding what the alternatives analysis should consider. Subsection (b) further states the purpose of the alternatives analysis is as follows:

> Because an EIR must identify ways to mitigate or avoid the significant effects that a project may have on the environment (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21002.1), the discussion of alternatives shall focus on alternatives to the project or its location which are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.

The State CEQA Guidelines require that the EIR include sufficient information about each alternative to allow meaningful evaluation, analysis, and comparison with the project. If an alternative would cause one or more significant effects in addition to those that would be caused by the project as proposed, the significant effects of the alternative must be discussed, but in less detail than the significant effects of the project as proposed (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6[d]).

The State CEQA Guidelines further require that the "no project" alternative be considered (Section 15126.6[e]). The purpose of describing and analyzing a no project alternative is to allow decision makers to compare the impacts of approving a project with the impacts of not approving the project. If the no project alternative is the environmentally superior alternative, CEQA requires that the EIR "…shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives." (State CEQA Guidelines 15126[e][2]).

In defining "feasibility" (e.g., "… feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project …"), CCR Section 15126.6(f) (1) states, in part:

> Among the factors that may be taken into account when addressing the feasibility of alternatives are site suitability, economic viability, availability of infrastructure, general plan consistency, other plans or regulatory limitations, jurisdictional boundaries (projects with a regionally significant impact should consider the regional context), and whether the proponent can reasonably acquire, control or otherwise have access to the alternative site (or the site is already owned by the proponent). No one of these factors establishes a fixed limit on the scope of reasonable alternatives.

In determining what alternatives should be considered in the EIR, it is important to consider the objectives of the project, the project's significant effects, and unique project considerations. These factors are crucial to the development of alternatives that meet the criteria specified in Section 15126.6(a). Although, as noted above, EIRs must contain a discussion of "potentially feasible" alternatives, the ultimate determination as to whether an alternative is feasible or infeasible is made by the lead agency's decision-making body, here the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) Board of Directors. (See PRC Sections 21081.5, 21081[a] [3].)

No comments were received during the scoping period related to project alternatives (see Table 1-1 in Chapter 1, "Introduction," of this Draft EIR).

5.2 Considerations for Selection of Alternatives

5.2.1 Attainment of Project Objectives

As described above, one factor that must be considered in selection of alternatives is the ability of a specific alternative to attain most of the basic objectives of the project (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6[a]). Chapter 2, "Project Description," articulated SMUD's project objectives for the proposed project. The project objectives are to:

- Provide safe and reliable electrical service to existing and proposed development in the Rancho Cordova area.
- Facilitate efficient maintenance of underground cables and infrastructure.
- Maximize the use of available SMUD property and resources.
- Minimize impacts to nearby sensitive receptors.
- Minimize potential conflicts with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova.

5.2.2 Summary of Project Impacts

The Initial Study (IS) prepared for the project and included as Appendix B of this Draft EIR evaluated whether the project would result in potentially significant impacts. For several topic areas evaluated in the IS, the project would not result in any potentially significant impacts. For some topic areas, impacts were determined to be potentially significant. Accordingly, those resources determined to not result in any potentially significant impacts are not addressed further in this Draft EIR. As noted in the IS, impacts related to Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation were identified as potentially significant and are evaluated in this Draft EIR. After additional analysis conducted during preparation of the Draft EIR, some issues in these categories were determined to have a less-than-significant impact or no impact. The following impacts of the project would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with implementation of mitigation presented in this Draft EIR:

- Impact 3.1-1: Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a Tribal cultural resource, including human remains;
- Impact 3.1-2: Potential for the project, in combination with other development, to contribute to a significant cumulative impact to Tribal cultural resources including human remains;
- Impact 3.2-1: Change the significance of a known archaeological resource;
- Impact 3.2-2: Change the significance of unknown archaeological resources;
- Impact 3.2-3: Potential for the project, in combination with other development, to contribute to a significant cumulative impact to cultural resources;
- Impact 3.2-2: Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard;
- Impact 3.4-1: Result in a Substantial Adverse Effect on Riparian Habitat or Other Sensitive Natural Community;
- Impact 3.4-2: Result in the Loss of or Disturbance of Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle and Habitat;
- Impact 3.4-3: Disturbance of nesting Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, or other avian species;
- Impact 3.4-4: Conflict with provisions of the City of Rancho Cordova Municipal Code or Sacramento County Code of Ordinances intended to protect biological resources;
- Impact 3.4-5: Conflict with provisions of the County of Sacramento American River Parkway Plan and the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan;

- Impact 3.4-6: Interfere with Wildlife Movement or Migration or Impede the Use of Nursery Sites;
- Impact 3.5-1: Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities;
- Impact 3.5-3: Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment); and
- Impact 3.5-4: Result in inadequate emergency access.

For the project, the consideration of alternatives that fulfill CEQA requirements is complicated by a simple factor: the project would not result in any significant and unavoidable impacts. The significant impacts of the project are highly limited and can be clearly mitigated. Significant impacts have been identified for Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation.

Although there are no alternatives that could avoid or substantially reduce (unmitigated) significant effects of the project (because none exist), the alternatives evaluated below are presented to satisfy CEQA's requirement to identify a range of potentially feasible alternatives (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(a)). Therefore, SMUD could have prepared an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) in compliance with CEQA; public review of an MND is typically limited to 30 days prior to adoption. However, SMUD prepared an EIR, which requires more public review, to maximize public involvement in the environmental review process, not because there are any potentially significant effects of the proposed project to which alternatives must be considered.

5.2.3 Alternatives Considered but Not Evaluated Further

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(c) provides guidance for selecting a range of reasonable alternatives for the project. The range of potential alternatives for the project shall include those that could feasibly accomplish most of the basic objectives of the project and could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of the significant effects. The EIR should also identify any alternatives that were considered by the lead agency, but were rejected during the planning or scoping process, and briefly explain the reasons underlying the lead agency's determination.

Overhead Lines Alternative

The Overhead Lines Alternative was considered by SMUD but not evaluated further in this Draft EIR. Under this alternative, the entire 12kV and 69kV alignments would not be placed underground but would be installed above ground on poles (overhead) along the proposed alignments with the goal of reducing potential impacts on Tribal cultural resources. Existing subsurface cables would be abandoned in place. Due to considerations surrounding the potential interference with overhead utility lines from trees

or during storm events this alternative is not considered feasible. This alternative would require ground disturbance for installation of utility poles, which could potentially impact Tribal cultural resources. In addition, this alternative would likely require the removal or alteration of mature trees along the alignments, potentially resulting in greater impacts to biological resources as compared to underground cables. Further, this alternative would conflict with Policy ISF.2.7 of the Rancho Cordova General Plan, which requires minimization of visual impacts and physical impediments of utility sites, infrastructure, and equipment. Also, while SMUD's standards for new 69vV lines generally call for overhead placement, it is SMUD's practice to replace underground lines with new underground lines. In conclusion, the Overhead Lines Alternative would not be feasible, would not reduce environmental impacts, would not meet the project objectives, and would not be consistent with SMUD's standard practices. Therefore, this alternative was not considered in greater detail.

5.3 Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternatives evaluated in this Draft EIR are:

- **Alternative A (No Project)**, which assumes the existing 12kV or 69kV lines would not be replaced and that the existing equipment would continue to be used until it is no longer considered viable, and then abandoned in place; and
- **Alternative B (Existing Cable Alignment)**, which assumes the 12kV and 69kV alignments would be reoriented to follow the existing cable alignment; and,
- **Alternative C (Ambassador Drive Alignment)**, which assumes that the 69kV alignment between the substation and Rossmoor Drive would be within Ambassador Drive.

Each of these alternatives is described in more detail and analyzed below. The degree of impact relative to the proposed project is noted in parentheses at the conclusion of each resource area analysis to facilitate the comparison of alternatives presented in Section 5.4, "Comparison of Alternatives."

5.3.1 Alternative A (No Project)

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(1) requires that the no project alternative be described and analyzed "to allow decision makers to compare the impacts of approving the project with the impacts of not approving the project." The no project analysis is required to discuss "the existing conditions at the time the notice of preparation is published…as well as what would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services" (Section 15126.6[e][2]).

Under this alternative, the existing 12kV and 69kV lines would continue to be used until they are no longer considered viable and then abandoned in place, without replacement.

Under this alternative, SMUD would not be able to provide reliable and safe electrical service to existing and proposed development in the Rancho Cordova area.

This alternative would not meet any of the objectives identified in Section 5.2.1, "Attainment of Project Objectives."

Environmental Analysis

Tribal Cultural Resources

Under Alternative A, existing 12kV and 69kV cables would continue to operate until such time that they are no longer viable. The lines would eventually be abandoned in place. Because there would be no ground disturbance associated with the installation of new underground cables, Alternative A would avoid impacts on Tribal cultural resources. *(Less Impact)*

Cultural Resources

Under Alternative A, existing 12kV and 69kV cables would continue to operate until such time that they are no longer viable. The lines would eventually be abandoned in place. Because there would be no ground disturbance associated with the installation of new underground cables, Alternative A would avoid impacts on cultural resources. *(Less Impact)*

Air Quality

Under Alternative A, there would be no construction as the existing cables would continue to be used and abandoned in place without replacement until they are no longer viable. Because there would be no construction activities, this alternative would not result in any air pollutant emission and there would be no air quality impacts. *(Less Impact)*

Biological Resources

Under Alternative A, there would be no ground disturbance as the existing cables would remain in use until they are no longer viable, at which time they would be abandoned in place. Because no construction would occur, there would be no impacts to biological resources under Alternative A. *(Less Impact)*

Transportation

Under Alternative A, there would be no ground disturbance as the existing cables would remain in use until they are no longer viable, at which time they would be abandoned in place. This alternative would not include any construction activities. Because there would be no construction on the project alignments under Alternative A, there would be no potential impacts on transportation. *(Less Impact)*

Source: adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2022

Figure 5-1. Project Alternatives

5.3.2 Alternative B (Existing Cable Alignment)

Under this alternative, new 12kV and 69kV cable lines would be installed along the existing alignment that extends from Coloma Road to SMUD's Cordova Park Substation and through the American River Parkway (see Figure 5-1). Existing direct-buried cable would be abandoned in place and the new cables would be installed within 40 feet of the existing cable alignment. While the southern portion of this alternative (from Coloma Road to the substation) would be identical to the proposed project, it would differ in that the 12kV line would be installed in the same alignment as the 69kV alignment within the open space of the American River Parkway. From the substation, the alignment would extend approximately 0.70 mile east where it would then turn north and run through the open space of the Parkway. This alternative would not include any construction activities within roadway rights-of-way as all work would occur within school property, SMUD property, or open space.

This alternative would achieve most of the project objectives but not to the degree of the project. It would potentially conflict the City of Rancho Cordova's the tree preservation ordinance, indicating that this alternative would not meet the objective of minimizing potential conflicts with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova.

Environmental Analysis

Tribal Cultural Resources

Under the project, there would be potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources, but these would be reduced to a less-than-significant impact with implementation of mitigation. Alternative B seeks to reduce potential impacts to nearby sensitive receptors (one of the project objectives) by locating construction activities further from residences, but would likely increase the potential for impacts to Tribal cultural resources by including construction activities in closer proximity to known resources in open space areas. It should be noted that this alignment was not surveyed by forensic canines, so there is the potential for additional, as-yet-undiscovered resources in the area. *(Greater Impact)*

Cultural Resources

Alternative B would locate construction activities more distant from sensitive receptors by following the alignment of existing underground cable. This alternative seeks to maximize use of SMUD's existing property and resources (e.g., SMUD's existing easement), and reduce potential impacts to nearby sensitive receptors by locating construction within the open space to the maximum extent possible. However, there are known archaeological resource sites within the open space. Because Alternative B would place the alignment in the open space instead of staying along established pathways or paved roadways, this alternative could have a greater impact on archaeological resources, particularly as a large portion of the existing alignment has not been surveyed. *(Greater Impact)*

Air Quality

Under Alternative B, the length of the project alignment would likely be slightly shorter than the proposed 69kV alignment because the alternative would not extend to Rossmoor Drive and would instead turn and cross the open space of the American River Parkway. The existing alignment is estimated to be approximately 1.96 miles while the proposed 69kV alignment is 2.12 miles. Thus, Alternative B would result in a reduction of approximately 0.16 miles of construction activities, which would result in lower emissions as compared to the project. *(Less Impact)*

Biological Resources

Under Alternative B, project construction would require greater ground disturbance within the American River Parkway and would route the 69kV alignment through an area densely populated by native tree species that were planted as part of a mitigation effort. By routing the 69kV alignment through this heavily-treed area, Alternative B would have greater impacts on biological resources as compared to the proposed project. *(Greater Impact)*

Transportation

Under Alternative B, construction activities would take place exclusively within school, park, and SMUD property, which would cause temporary disruption to pedestrian and bicycle users in the American River Parkway. Because no work would take place within public roadways, this alternative would not interfere with vehicle movement on Ambassador Drive or Rossmoor Drive, including evacuation routes or emergency access. *(Less Impact)*

5.3.3 Alternative C (Ambassador Drive Alignment)

Under this alternative, both the 12kV and 69kV alignments would be placed within Ambassador Drive as shown in Figure 5-1. For the 12kV alignment, this is the same as the proposed project. For the 69kV alignment, this alternative would change the location of the alignment between SMUD's Cordova Park Substation and Rossmoor Drive. Instead of the 69kV alignment crossing through open space behind homes facing Ambassador Drive, that portion of the 69kV alignment would instead be located within Ambassador Drive.

This alternative would achieve most of the project objectives but not to the degree of the project. By locating both alignments within Ambassador Drive instead of the open space of the Parkway, Alternative C would not maximize the use of available SMUD property and easements and would not minimize impacts to nearby sensitive receptors as it would entail additional work within roadways used by local residents and would place noise-generating construction equipment closer to residences.

Environmental Analysis

Tribal Cultural Resources

Alternative C would avoid potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources within the open space of the Parkway, but would conduct additional work in areas that were not able to be evaluated by forensic canines due to existing pavement. While this area of Rancho Cordova is known to be sensitive for Tribal cultural resources, work within Ambassador Drive would be in areas of existing development, including underground infrastructure, and less likely to contain Tribal cultural resources because of previous disturbance. *(Less Impact)*

Cultural Resources

Alternative C would avoid potential impacts to archaeological resources within the open space of the American River Parkway. Because of the developed nature of Ambassador Drive, including existing underground utility infrastructure that serves the surrounding neighborhood, it is unlikely that construction in this area would impact undiscovered archaeological resources. *(Less Impact)*

Air Quality

Under Alternative C, the alignment would not be within the open space of the American River Parkway but would follow Ambassador Drive until its intersection with Rossmoor Drive, then the alignment would continue north along Rossmoor Drive. The mileage of this alignment would be similar to the proposed project length, so air emissions associated with construction activities would likely be similar to the proposed project. *(Similar Impact)*

Biological Resources

Under this alternative, no work would occur in the open space of the American River Parkway, though there would be construction within and directly adjacent to Rossmoor Drive as it traverses the Parkway towards the American River. Alternative C would include more work within the developed area of Ambassador Drive, so this alternative could affect landscaping on private properties, which could affect nesting birds. Mitigation Measure 3.4-1 requires SMUD to avoid disturbance of nesting birds, which would also be required under Alternative C. Thus, impacts to nesting birds under this alternative would be similar to those of the project. *(Similar Impact)*

Transportation

Under Alternative C, additional construction would occur within Ambassador Road, as compared to the proposed project. Also, work within Ambassador Drive would occur at greater depths than anticipated for just the 12kV alignment (i.e., the proposed project). Because installation of the 69kV alignment within Ambassador Drive would have a wider and deeper footprint than the proposed project, interruptions to regular traffic patterns along Ambassador Drive would be extended beyond those anticipated under the proposed project. Thus, this alternative could result in impacts greater than the project. *(Greater Impact)*

5.4 Comparison of Alternatives

Table 5-1 summarizes the environmental analyses provided above for the evaluated alternatives to the Cordova Park Underground Cable Replacement Project.

Table 5-1 Comparison of the Environmental Impacts of the Alternatives in Relation to the Project

Resource Area	Project	Alternative A (No Project)	Alternative B (Existing Cable Alignment)	Alternative C (Ambassador Drive Alignment)
Tribal Cultural Resources	LTS/M	Less	Greater	Less
Cultural Resources	LTS/M	Less	Greater	Less
Air Quality	LTS/M	Less	Less	Similar
Biological Resources	LTS/M	Less	Greater	Similar
Transportation	LTS/M	Less	Less	Greater

Notes: LTS – Less-than-significant impacts; LTS/M – Less-than-significant impacts with mitigation incorporated.
Source: Compiled by Ascent Environmental in 2022

5.5 Environmentally Superior Alternative

CCR Section 15126.6 suggests that an EIR should identify the "environmentally superior" alternative. "If the environmentally superior alternative is the 'no project' alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives." As stated above in Section 5.2.2, the consideration of alternatives that fulfill CEQA requirements, in the instance of the project, is complicated by a simple factor: the project would not result in any significant and unavoidable impacts. The significant impacts of the project, which would be to Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation, can be clearly mitigated.

When considering objectives, the proposed project would best meet the project objectives, as stated in Chapter 2, "Project Description." In contrast, Alternative B, by keeping all project construction out of existing roadways, could conflict with existing planning efforts within the City of Rancho Cordova, specifically the tree preservation ordinance. Similarly, Alternative C, by moving the 69kV alignment from the open space of the American River Parkway to within Ambassador Drive, would increase impacts to nearby sensitive receptors.

Consistent with State CEQA Guidelines (CCR Section 15126.6 [e][2]), because the environmentally superior alternative was identified as the No Project Alternative, another environmentally superior alternative shall be identified. Based on the environmental analysis contained in this Draft EIR, Alternative C would result in lesser impacts compared to the project. However, and as noted above, Alternative C could still result in potential impacts on Tribal cultural resources, cultural resources, air quality, biological resources, and transportation. Therefore, the environmental impact differences between the project and Alternative C are not substantial enough that one is clearly superior over the other.

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6 List of Preparers

Sacramento Municipal Utility District (Lead Agency)

Emily Bacchini ..... Environmental Services

Rob Ferrera ..... Environmental Services

Ammon Rice ..... Environmental Services

Ascent Environmental (EIR preparation)

Heather Blair ..... Principal

Cori Resha ..... Project Manager

Alta Cunningham ..... Cultural Resources

Emilie Zelazo ..... Archaeologist/Architectural Historian

Alyssa Way ..... Air Quality and Noise Specialist

Dimitri Antoniou ..... Senior Air Quality Specialist

Carlos Alvarado ..... Biologist

Linda Leeman ..... Principal Biologist

Joshua Boldt ..... Arborist

Phi Ngo ..... GIS Specialist

Gayiety Lane ..... Production Specialist

Michele Mattei ..... Production Specialist

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