



TIER 1 FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
VOLUME 2



7.3 Agricultural Lands (Prime Farmland and Timberland)

7.3 AGRICULTURAL LANDS (PRIME FARMLAND AND TIMBERLAND)

7.3.1 Introduction

Agricultural lands include the nation’s farmlands and timberlands, which are unique natural resources that provide food, fiber, wood, and water. Conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses, such as a transportation use, results in the loss of these lands for agricultural purposes. This section describes agricultural lands in the NEC FUTURE Study Area (Study Area) and identifies potential impacts on agricultural lands associated with each of the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Draft EIS) Action Alternatives. Also included within this section is a qualitative evaluation of the effects on agricultural lands associated with the No Action Alternative.

Appendix E, Section E.03, provides the methodology for evaluating agricultural lands and the data supporting the analysis presented.

7.3.1.1 Definition of Resources

Agricultural lands include prime farmland soils and prime timberlands as defined below:

- ▶ **Prime farmland** is considered land underlain by soil identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) as having the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food and other agricultural crops.
- ▶ **Prime timberland** is land designated by the USDA NRCS as having the capability of growing a significant volume of timber when left in natural conditions. This designation also applies to lands that are not currently in forest but realistically could be vegetated with timber.

Appendix E, Section E.03, provides more detailed definitions of prime farmland and prime timberland.

7.3.1.2 Effects-Assessment Methodology

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) developed an effects-assessment methodology for the evaluation of agricultural lands. The effects-assessment methodology defines the resource and discloses the data sources, discloses how the Affected Environment was defined and established, and explains how the effects on the resource were evaluated and reported. Table 7.3-1 summarizes key factors associated with the effects-assessment methodology for agricultural lands.

For this chapter of the Tier 1 Draft EIS, the FRA summarized and reviewed the data to identify counties with large concentrations of agricultural lands and for which the Action Alternatives would affect a high percentage of agricultural lands within the Affected Environment of that county. Appendix E, Section E.03, provides a complete list of prime farmland and prime timberland acreages for all counties within the Affected Environment and impacts within those counties.

Table 7.3-1: Effects-Assessment Methodology Summary: Agricultural Lands

| Resource | Affected Environment | Type of Assessment | Outcome |
|--|---|---------------------|--|
| Agricultural lands (prime farmland / prime timberland) | 2,000-foot-wide swath centered along Representative Route for each Action Alternative | Quantitative: acres | Identification of agricultural lands affected by the Action Alternatives (i.e., acres of agricultural lands that lie within the footprint of the Representative Route) that may result in impacts on agricultural lands. |

Source: NEC FUTURE Agricultural Lands Effects-Assessment Methodology, Appendix E, Section E.03, 2014

7.3.2 Resource Overview

Prime farmland and prime timberland are dispersed throughout the Study Area with larger amounts found in Maryland, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. In many instances, greater impacts on agricultural lands are associated with areas where the Action Alternatives diverge from the existing NEC right-of-way and create new segments or extend off-corridor. Notable impacts on agricultural lands as a result of the Action Alternatives, as further described in Section 7.3.4, would occur in the following areas:

- ▶ **Maryland:** Cecil and Anne Arundel Counties
- ▶ **Delaware:** New Castle County
- ▶ **New Jersey:** Mercer and Middlesex Counties
- ▶ **New York:** Westchester, Putnam, and Suffolk Counties
- ▶ **Connecticut:** New Haven, Middlesex, New London, Tolland, Windham, and Hartford Counties
- ▶ **Rhode Island:** Washington and Providence Counties
- ▶ **Massachusetts:** Worcester, Middlesex, Norfolk, and Bristol Counties

Notable impacts on agricultural lands as a result of the Action Alternatives would not occur in Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

This Tier 1 Draft EIS analysis did not identify active or specific farmland or timberland uses.

7.3.3 Affected Environment

Throughout the Affected Environment of the existing NEC and each Action Alternative, prime farmland generally consists of noncontiguous tracts that are similar in size and dispersion. High concentrations (i.e., more than 500 acres) of prime farmland exist within the Affected Environment of the following areas:

- ▶ **Maryland:** Harford and Cecil Counties
- ▶ **New Jersey:** Middlesex County
- ▶ **New York:** Westchester County
- ▶ **Connecticut:** New Haven, Hartford, New London, Tolland, and Windham Counties
- ▶ **Rhode Island:** Washington County
- ▶ **Massachusetts:** Worcester County

High concentrations of prime farmland within the Affected Environment do not exist in Washington, D.C., Delaware, and Pennsylvania.

High concentrations (i.e., more than 1,000 acres) or large contiguous or uniform tracts of prime timberland exist within the Affected Environment of the following areas:

- ▶ **Maryland:** Anne Arundel, Harford, and Cecil Counties
- ▶ **Delaware:** New Castle County
- ▶ **New Jersey:** Middlesex County
- ▶ **New York:** Westchester County
- ▶ **Connecticut:** Fairfield, New Haven, Middlesex, Hartford, New London, Tolland, and Windham Counties
- ▶ **Rhode Island:** Washington and Providence Counties
- ▶ **Massachusetts:** Worcester, Bristol and Norfolk Counties

High concentrations or large contiguous or uniform tracts of prime timberland do not exist within the Affected Environment of Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

Table 7.3-2 and Table 7.3-3 summarize by geography the acreages of prime farmland and prime timberland, respectively, within the Affected Environments of the existing NEC and each Action Alternative.

Table 7.3-2: Affected Environment: Prime Farmland Acreage

| Geography | Existing NEC (acres) | Alternative 1 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 2 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 3 (acres) ¹ |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| D.C. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| MD | 2,220 | 2,220 | 3,225 | 3,655 |
| DE | 185 | 185 | 195 | 205 |
| PA | 115 | 115 | 100 | 115 |
| NJ | 840 | 840 | 850 | 890 |
| NY | 4 | 4 | 5 | 410–770 |
| CT | 980 | 1,505 | 2,590 | 1,880–3,130 |
| RI | 1,080 | 1,280 | 1,360 | 1,080–1,355 |
| MA | 295 | 295 | 315 | 320–1,190 |
| TOTAL | 5,720 | 6,445 | 8,635 | 9,435–10,450 |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

¹ All Action Alternatives assume improvements to the existing NEC; therefore, the acreages presented for the Affected Environment are inclusive of the existing NEC in addition to any new route option or off-corridor route associated with each Action Alternative.

Table 7.3-3: Affected Environment: Prime Timberland Acreage

| Geography | Existing NEC (acres) | Alternative 1 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 2 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 3 (acres) ¹ |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| D.C. | 70 | 70 | 70 | 75 |
| MD | 6,545 | 6,545 | 8,070 | 9,535 |
| DE | 820 | 820 | 990 | 995 |
| PA | 465 | 465 | 450 | 475 |
| NJ | 1,770 | 1,770 | 1,805 | 1,865 |
| NY | 30 | 30 | 35 | 840–3,925 |
| CT | 5,410 | 8,860 | 15,670 | 12,250–20,195 |
| RI | 4,960 | 6,375 | 8,550 | 4,960–8,550 |
| MA | 2,865 | 2,865 | 3,100 | 3,185–8,410 |
| TOTAL | 22,930 | 27,795 | 38,740 | 39,405–48,795 |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

¹ All Action Alternatives assume improvements to the existing NEC; therefore, the acreages presented for the Affected Environment are inclusive of improvements to existing NEC in addition to any new route option or off-corridor route associated with each Action Alternative.

7.3.4 Environmental Consequences

To determine effects of the Action Alternatives, this analysis focused on identifying locations within the Representative Routes in which prime farmland and prime timberland that are not already considered developed land could be converted to transportation uses. These conversions would be required for infrastructure, new segments, or off-corridor routes and are therefore considered potential impacts for the purposes of the Environmental Consequences analysis. The following sections discuss the key findings of the Environmental Consequences analysis. Table 7.3-4 through Table 7.3-7 present the acreages of prime farmland or prime timberland that lie within the Representative Routes, and thus would be converted to transportation use.

7.3.4.1 No Action Alternative

While impacts associated with the No Action Alternative are not quantified as part of this analysis, impacts to prime farmland and prime timberland as a result of the No Action Alternative will be minimal. Most projects that fall under the No Action Alternative will occur within or adjacent to the right-of-way of the existing NEC, which is largely characterized by developed land already utilized for transportation (i.e., land that cannot again be converted to a transportation use and thus be considered an impact on prime farmland or prime timberland).

Table 7.3-4 through Table 7.3-7 present agricultural resources within the footprint of the existing NEC so that effects for each Action Alternative can be compared to a baseline.

Table 7.3-4: Environmental Consequences: Representative Route – Prime Farmland

| Geography | Existing NEC (acres) | Alternative 1 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 2 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 3 (acres) ¹ |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| D.C. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MD~+ | 40 | 40 | 95 | 235 |
| DE~+ | 5 | 5 | 10 | 25 |
| PA | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| NJ± | 30 | 30 | 35 | 130 |
| NY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 35–55 |
| CT+ | 65 | 100 | 180 | 125–210 |
| RI+ | 65 | 90 | 90 | 65–95 |
| MA+ | 15 | 15 | 20 | 45–55 |
| TOTAL | 215 | 275 | 430 | 680–790 |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

¹ All Action Alternatives assume improvements to the existing NEC; therefore, the acreages presented include the Environmental Consequences inclusive of improvements to existing NEC and any new option or off-corridor route associated with each Action Alternative.

~ = State contains large and contiguous tract(s) of prime farmland along the Representative Route.

+ = State or metropolitan planning organization area(s) within that state have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of farmlands and rural lands.

Table 7.3-5: Environmental Consequences: Representative Route of Alternative 3 Route Options – Prime Farmland

| Geography | Existing NEC (acres) | Alternative 3 | | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | | D.C. to NYC (acres) ¹ | New York City to Hartford | | Hartford to Boston | |
| | | | via Central Connecticut (acres) ¹ | via Long Island (acres) ¹ | via Providence (acres) ¹ | via Worcester (acres) ¹ |
| D.C. | 0 | 0 | — | — | — | — |
| MD~+ | 40 | 235 | — | — | — | — |
| DE~+ | 5 | 25 | — | — | — | — |
| PA | 1 | 5 | — | — | — | — |
| NJ± | 30 | 130 | — | — | — | — |
| NY | 0 | — | 55 | 35 | — | — |
| CT+ | 65 | — | 70 | 75 | 140 | 70 |
| RI+ | 65 | — | — | — | 95 | 65 |
| MA+ | 15 | — | — | — | 45 | 55 |
| TOTAL | 220 | 395 | 125 | 110 | 280 | 190 |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

¹ All Action Alternatives assume improvements to the existing NEC; therefore, the acreages presented include the Environmental Consequences inclusive of improvements to existing NEC and any new route option or off-corridor route associated with each Action Alternative.

— = Not applicable within that alternative/route option.

~ = State contains large and contiguous tract(s) of prime farmland along the Representative Route.

+ = State or metropolitan planning organization area(s) within that state have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of farmlands and rural lands.

Table 7.3-6: Environmental Consequences: Representative Route – Prime Timberland

| Geography | Existing NEC (acres) | Alternative 1 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 2 (acres) ¹ | Alternative 3 (acres) ¹ |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| D.C. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| MD~+ | 215 | 215 | 330 | 840 |
| DE~ | 35 | 35 | 65 | 145 |
| PA | 10 | 10 | 10 | 40 |
| NJ | 65 | 65 | 75 | 260 |
| NY~ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 75–280 |
| CT~+ | 315 | 540 | 1,140 | 765–1,385 |
| RI~ | 345 | 525 | 630 | 345–635 |
| MA~ | 200 | 200 | 250 | 510–595 |
| TOTAL | 1,185 | 1,595 | 2,500 | 2,985–4,185 |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

¹ All Action Alternatives assume improvements to the existing NEC; therefore, the acreages presented include the Environmental Consequences inclusive of improvements to existing NEC and any new route option or off-corridor route associated with each Action Alternative.

~ = State contains large and contiguous tract(s) of prime timberland along the Representative Route.

+ = State or metropolitan planning organization area(s) within that state have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of timberlands, forest, and woodlands.

Table 7.3-7: Environmental Consequences: Representative Route of Alternative 3 Route Options – Prime Timberland

| Geography | Existing NEC (acres) | Alternative 3 | | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | | D.C. to NYC (acres) ¹ | New York City to Hartford | | Hartford to Boston | |
| | | | via Central Connecticut (acres) ¹ | via Long Island (acres) ¹ | via Providence (acres) ¹ | via Worcester (acres) ¹ |
| D.C. | 0 | 5 | — | — | — | — |
| MD~+ | 215 | 840 | — | — | — | — |
| DE~ | 35 | 145 | — | — | — | — |
| PA | 10 | 40 | — | — | — | — |
| NJ | 65 | 260 | — | — | — | — |
| NY~ | 0 | — | 280 | 75 | — | — |
| CT~+ | 315 | — | 520 | 455 | 855 | 370 |
| RI~ | 345 | — | — | — | 635 | 345 |
| MA~ | 200 | — | — | — | 595 | 510 |
| TOTAL | 1,185 | 1,290 | 800 | 530 | 2,085 | 1,225 |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

¹ All Action Alternatives assume improvements to the existing NEC; therefore, the acreages presented include the Environmental Consequences inclusive of improvements to existing NEC and any new route option or off-corridor route associated with each Action Alternative.

— = Not applicable within that alternative/route option.

~ = State contains large and contiguous tract(s) of prime timberland along the Representative Route.

+ = State or metropolitan planning organization area(s) within that state have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of timberlands, forest, and woodlands.

7.3.4.2 Alternative 1

About 60 percent of the impacts of Alternative 1 would occur in Washington County, RI, and New London County, CT. These impacts would occur as a result of the addition of the Old Saybrook-Kenyon segment in Alternative 1. In addition, although Middlesex County, CT, does not have large concentrations (i.e., more than 500 acres) of prime farmland within its Affected Environment, Alternative 1 would affect a relatively high percentage (approximately 9 percent) of the prime farmland within the Affected Environment of that county. Alternative 1 would also affect a relatively high percentage (approximately 8.4 percent) of the prime timberland within the Affected Environment of Washington County, RI.

7.3.4.3 Alternative 2

Where Alternative 2 proposes new segments, some of the highest prime farmland impacts would occur in Cecil County, MD (approximately 75 acres) and Tolland County, CT (approximately 40 acres). Where Alternative 2 runs parallel to the existing NEC right-of-way, New London County, CT (approximately 40 acres) and Washington County, RI (approximately 65 acres) would also be subject to relatively high prime farmland impacts; this indicates the presence of concentrations of prime farmland adjacent to the existing NEC right-of-way in these counties. In addition, although Providence County, RI, does not have high concentrations of prime farmland within the Affected Environment (i.e., more than 500 acres), Alternative 2 would affect a relatively high percentage (approximately 9 percent) of the prime farmland within the Affected Environment of that county.

Some of the highest prime timberland impacts of Alternative 2 would occur where new segments exist in Cecil County, MD (approximately 225 acres); Tolland County, CT (approximately 275 acres); Windham County, CT (approximately 325 acres); Washington County, RI (approximately 340 acres); and Providence, RI (approximately 230 acres). In addition, Alternative 2 would affect a relatively high percentage (approximately 10 percent) of the prime timberland within the Affected Environment of Hartford County, CT.

7.3.4.4 Alternative 3

Washington, D.C. to New York City

Within the Washington, D.C. to New York City portion of Alternative 3, Cecil County, MD, would contain the highest acreages of impacts to prime farmland (approximately 135 acres) and prime timberland (approximately 345 acres). This portion of Alternative 3 contains segments that lie off the existing NEC right-of-way in Cecil County, MD. Middlesex County, NJ would contain the second-highest acreages of impacts to prime farmland (approximately 100 acres) associated with this portion of Alternative 3. While this portion of Alternative 3 runs parallel to the existing NEC right-of-way in Middlesex, NJ, the relatively high proportion of impacts in this county's Affected Environment (16 percent) indicates the presence of concentrations of prime farmland adjacent to the existing NEC. This percentage represents the highest percentage of impacts within the Affected Environment of any county for this portion of Alternative 3, and the majority of these impacts would be attributed to new infrastructure.

Other counties within the Washington, D.C., to New York City portion of Alternative 3 for which approximately 10 to 16 percent of the acres of prime farmland within the Affected Environment would be affected include Anne Arundel County, MD; New Castle County, DE; and Mercer County, NJ. Although none of these counties has high concentrations (i.e., more than 500 acres) of prime farmland within its Affected Environment, this portion of Alternative 3 would affect a relatively high percentage of the prime farmland within the Affected Environment of those counties.

Counties with the highest percentage of affected acres of prime timberland within the Affected Environment (approximately 15 to 20 percent) include Anne Arundel County, MD; Baltimore City, MD; New Castle County, DE; and Middlesex County, NJ. All of these counties, with the exception of Baltimore City, MD, contain high concentrations of prime timberland (more than 1,000 acres). While this portion of Alternative 3 runs parallel to the existing NEC or otherwise proposes slight modifications in these counties, the relatively high proportion of impacts within the Affected Environments of these counties indicates concentrations of prime timberland adjacent to the existing NEC.

New York City to Hartford

Via Central Connecticut

Within the New York City to Hartford via Central Connecticut route option, which includes a route off the existing NEC, Westchester County, NY, and New Haven County, CT, would contain the highest acreages of prime farmland and prime timberland impacts, at approximately 35 acres and 215–285 acres, respectively. Putnam County, NY, would contain the highest percentage of affected prime farmland and prime timberland acres within the Affected Environment. Along the existing NEC, Middlesex County, CT, would contain a relatively high percentage of affected prime farmland acreage within the Affected Environment.

Via Long Island

Within the New York City to Hartford via Long Island route option, which includes a route off the existing NEC, Suffolk County, NY, and New Haven County, CT, would contain the highest acreages of prime farmland impacts (35–40 acres). New Haven County, CT, would contain the highest acreages of prime timberland impacts at 205 acres. Hartford County, CT, would contain the highest percentage of affected prime farmland and prime timberland acreages within the Affected Environment. Along the existing NEC, Middlesex County, CT, would contain a relatively high percentage of affected prime farmland acreages within the Affected Environment.

Hartford to Boston

Via Providence

Within the Hartford to Boston via Providence route option, which includes a route off the existing NEC generally from Hartford to northeast of Providence, RI, the highest impacts for prime farmland (approximately 65 acres) would occur along the existing NEC in Washington County, RI. The highest acreages of prime timberland impacts along the new route would occur in Windham County, CT, and Norfolk County, MA (325–345 acres). Along the existing NEC, Washington County, RI, would also contain 340 acres of prime timberland impacts. Norfolk County, MA, would contain the

highest percentage of affected prime farmland and prime timberland acreage within the Affected Environment for this Alternative 3 route option.

Via Worcester

Within the Hartford to Boston via Worcester route option, which includes a route off the existing NEC, approximately 35 acres of prime farmland impacts would be in Worcester County, MA. The 35 acres of impacts represents about 5 percent of the total acreage of prime farmland within the Affected Environment of that county. The highest prime timberland impacts within the new route would also be in Worcester County, MA. The approximately 240 acres of impacts represents about 5 percent of the total acreage of prime timberland within the Affected Environment of that county. In addition, although Hartford County, CT, and Middlesex County, MA, would have lower acreages of prime farmland and prime timberland impacts, the Hartford to Boston via Worcester route option would affect relatively high percentages of the total acreages of prime farmland (approximately 6 percent) and prime timberland (over 8 percent) within the Affected Environment of those counties.

7.3.4.5 Stations

The Action Alternatives include continued service to existing stations along the NEC, modifications to existing stations, which may require an increase in the station footprint, and new stations. No effects on prime farmland or prime timberland would occur at existing stations where modifications are not proposed. Minimal effects would occur at stations where modifications are proposed and an increase in the station footprint overlaps with small noncontiguous tracts of prime farmland and prime timberland. Greater effects would be associated in areas where new stations are proposed and overlap with prime farmland and prime timberland. Table 7.3-8 and Table 7.3-9 identify those stations that overlap with areas of prime farmland and prime timberland. Appendix E, Section E.03, provides a list of all stations for each Action Alternative and related effects.

Table 7.3-8: Environmental Consequences: Stations – Prime Farmland

| State | County | Station ID/Type | Station Name | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 |
|-------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| DE | New Castle | 24/Modified | Newark | X | X | X |
| PA | Bucks | 53/Modified | Cornwells Heights | X | X | X |
| NJ | Middlesex | 62/New | North Brunswick | X | X | X |
| NY | Westchester | 151/New | White Plains East | | | X |
| CT | Middlesex | 120/New | Old Saybrook H.S. | X | | |
| | Fairfield | 154/New | Danbury | | | X |
| | Tolland | 165/New | Willimantic/Storrs | | X | X |
| | | 166/New | Tolland/Storrs | — | — | X |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

Note: Quantities of impacts associated with stations are not shown. Acreage has been calculated only for new stations and is provided in Appendix E, Section E.03.

X = Presence of resource within the new station footprint; effects would be subject to Tier 2 analysis.

Blank Cell = No effects identified for subject resource for listed station for specified alternative.

— = Not applicable within that alternative.

H.S. = high speed

Table 7.3-9: Environmental Consequences: Stations – Prime Timberland

| State | County | Station ID/Type | Station Name | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 |
|-------|--------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| MD | Anne Arundel | 5/Modified | Odenton | X | X | X |
| | | 6/New | BWI Airport | | | X |
| DE | New Castle | 24/Modified | Newark | X | X | X |
| | | 26/New | Newport | X | X | X |
| | | 28/New | Edgemoor | X | X | X |
| PA | Bucks | 53/Modified | Cornwells Heights | X | X | X |
| NJ | Mercer | 61/Modified | Princeton Junction | X | X | X |
| NY | Westchester | 151/New | White Plains East | X | | X |
| CT | Middlesex | 120/New | Old Saybrook H.S. | X | | |
| | | 122/Modified | Mystic | X | X | X |
| | New London | 124/New | Mystic/New London H.S. | X | | |
| | | Fairfield | 154/New | Danbury | | |
| | New Haven | 155/New | Waterbury South | | | X |
| | Hartford | 161/New | Newington | | X | |
| | Tolland | 165/New | Willimantic/Storrs | | X | X |
| | | 166/New | Tolland/Storrs | | | X |
| MA | Worcester | 174/New | Westborough | | | X |
| | | 175/New | Blue Star Hwy (I-495) | | | X |
| | Middlesex | 176/New | Southborough/Ashland | | | X |
| | | 178/New | Framingham | | | X |
| | | 181/New | Riverside (I-95) | | | X |

Source: NEC FUTURE team, 2015

Note: Quantities of potential impacts associated with stations are not shown. Acreage has been calculated only for new stations and is provided in Appendix E, Section E.03.

X = Presence of resource within the new station footprint; effects would be subject to Tier 2 analysis.

Blank Cell = No effects identified for subject resource for listed station for specified alternative.

H.S. = high speed

7.3.5 Prime Farmland and Prime Timberland Land Use Plan Review

In addition to the GIS-based analysis of effects, the FRA reviewed land use planning documents by states and federally mandated metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) to identify goals and objectives that correlate or conflict with impacts to preservation of prime farmland and prime timberland. Five of the states for which impacts are reported in Table 7.3-4 have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of farmlands and rural lands or contain MPO area(s) that have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of farmlands and rural lands. Two of the states for which impacts are reported in Table 7.3-6 have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of timberlands, forest, and woodlands or contain MPO area(s) that have set goals and objectives toward the conservation or preservation of timberlands, forest, and woodlands. Table 7.3-4 through Table 7.3-7 indicate with a "+" symbol the states that coincide with these areas and that would be affected. For example, one plan outlines the need to support resource-based industries, such as agriculture and forestry from encroachment of incompatible land uses and the promotion of economic viability of these resources. This support should include the preservation of relatively large contiguous tracts that sustain resources and

resource-based industries, such as agriculture.¹ Another plan outlines goals to reinforce existing land use policies that focus development in the region's existing developed corridors that have transportation, employment, and utility infrastructure while conserving the region's land areas that are integral for maintaining the region's agricultural heritage.²

Appendix E, Section E.03, summarizes the land use planning documents and the goals and objectives set toward the conservation or preservation of farmlands, rural lands, timberlands, forest, and woodlands that coincide with counties that would have impacts.

7.3.6 Context Area

Conditions within the Context Area are similar to the Affected Environments for both prime farmland and prime timberland. No particular agricultural resource of special concern was noted.

7.3.7 Potential Mitigation Strategies

An example of a programmatic mitigation measure for agricultural lands will include providing equipment access via rights-of-way. Where large, contiguous tracts of agricultural land might be bisected, coordination and arrangements with the landowner will occur to mitigate for access constraints. This will occur through monetary compensation or through a land swap.

During Tier 2 studies, coordination with the NRCS (as applicable under the Farmland Protection Policy Act) to perform land evaluation and site assessments will establish a farmland conversion impact rating score. This score will determine if potential adverse impacts on the agricultural land exceed the recommended allowable level. If so, then the following mitigation strategy will be considered during Tier 2 processes:

- ▶ Slightly shifting the location of the analyzed alignment when there is an occurrence where the proposed alignment runs along the edge of a large contiguous tract
- ▶ Majorly shifting the location of the proposed alignment when there is a large, contiguous tract that may be bisected

7.3.8 Subsequent Tier 2 Analysis

For the counties identified in Sections 7.3.3 and 7.3.4, more-detailed analysis and coordination with local land use and zoning agencies would be conducted during the various Tier 2 studies where agricultural lands have been identified, to further define the actual amount of agriculture lands and identify lands actively used or preserved for agricultural purposes and local land use and zoning restrictions. In addition, Tier 2 studies would include identification of farmlands of statewide importance.

¹ Maryland Department of Planning. (2011). *Plan Maryland: A Sustainable Growth Plan for the 21st Century*. Baltimore: Maryland Department of Planning.

² South Central Regional Council of Governments. (Amended 2009). *Plan of Conservation and Development – South Central Region*. North Haven: South Central Regional Council of Governments.