

4.9 EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

4.9.1 Soils and Geology

As discussed in detail in Section 3.4, the Plan Area encompasses a region that is geologically unique and dynamic. The Coachella Valley is the northern extension of a broad structural depression known as the Salton Trough, which is the northwestern-most extension of the Gulf of California and the East Pacific Rise spreading zone. The San Andreas Fault Zone is the major structural fault system that accommodates the stress generated by this crustal spreading zone.

As a result of these forces, a low lying "sink" has formed through the extension and subsidence of the valley floor. At the same time, tectonic forces have also been raising mountains that now ring and establish the geomorphic boundaries of the Plan Area. The region is subject to such geotechnical forces as ground rupture, strong ground acceleration, ground subsidence and liquefaction, and rockfalls and landslides.

Soil formation is rapid in the dry and climatically extreme environment of the desert floor, and the wetter surrounding mountains and hillsides of the Plan Area. Seasonal storms transport large volumes of sand and silt, and have deposited thick layers of material onto the valley slopes and floor. Finer sands and soils are also transported by strong prevailing westerly winds. Soil profiles in the Plan Area vary from rocky outcroppings and boulder fields on alluvial fans, to very fine silts on the lower valley floor.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The Proposed Plan/Preferred Alternative would not have an adverse effect on geology or soils. The proposed Plan does not promote or in any way allow Development that would otherwise not be permitted in areas where geologic hazards occur. Existing General Plans, zoning ordinance, building code, and environmental review policies, standards, and requirements would remain in effect under the proposed Plan to ensure that any Development in Conservation Areas would assess potential hazards and impacts and enforce relevant laws and regulations. The Plan would not expose people or structures to potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault; strong seismic ground shaking; seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction; or landslides. Overall, the Plan would reduce people's exposure to geologic hazards by limiting Development in potentially hazardous areas by acquiring these lands for conservation.

Again, because existing General Plan, zoning ordinance, building code, and environmental review policies, standards, and requirements would remain in effect under the Plan to ensure that any Development in Conservation Areas would assess potential soils-related impacts and enforce relevant laws and regulations, the Plan would not result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil. The proposed Plan is not a project that would be located on, nor does it permit projects on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property, or on soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water.

Public Lands Alternative

For the same reasons as with the Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative, this alternative would not have an adverse effect on geology or soils.

Core Habitats With Ecological Processes Alternative

For the same reasons as with the Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative, this alternative would not have an adverse effect on geology or soils.

Enhanced Conservation Alternative

For the same reasons as with the Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative, this alternative would not have an adverse effect on geology or soils.

No Action/No Project Alternative

This alternative does not result in any Plan being implemented; therefore, this alternative would not have an adverse effect on geology or soils.

Conclusion

No significant impacts would occur under the Preferred Alternative or any other Alternatives and, thus, no mitigation is required.

4.9.2 Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns

As a Federal action, this Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS is subject to Secretarial Order No. 3206 issued by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce pursuant

to the Federal ESA. The order directs that the Departments shall carry out their responsibilities under the Act in a manner that harmonizes the Federal trust responsibility to tribes and the statutory missions of the Departments. The order also directs the Departments to strive to ensure that Indian tribes do not bear a disproportionate burden for the conservation of listed species, so as to avoid or minimize the potential for conflict between interests.

Cultural resources and Native American concerns have been represented in and are integral to the design of the MSHCP. Representatives of the three major tribes with traditional use and reservation lands in the Plan Area were invited to participate in the MSHCP planning process. Tribal representatives attended numerous regularly held meetings of the MSHCP Project Advisory Group, of which they are members, as well as focus sessions on a wide range of common interests. The Agua Caliente Band, with the closest relationship to the Plan, have also been involved in numerous coordination and technical meetings with CVAG.

The USFWS participated extensively in many of the meetings with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and was also involved in ongoing consultation and coordination. Opportunities to harmonize Native American interests to those of the MSHCP were developed throughout the process. Sensitivity to Native American culture, religion and spirituality is demonstrated in this Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS. In addition, USFWS corresponded with the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, 29 Palm, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians, and Santa Rosa tribes and transmitted copies of the MSHCP, MSHCP Appendices, IA, and EIR/EIS.

Cultural Resources

Many of the trails in the Plan Area were created by the Cahuilla Indians and their ancestors or predecessors. Artifacts such as pottery shards and flaked stone occur along some of the trails and provide physical evidence of the prehistoric origins of the trails. Grinding slicks and mortars may be found on bedrock outcrops adjacent to trails. Habitation and temporary camp sites may also be located adjacent to trails. The recollections of Cahuilla elders and early non-Indian settlers speak to the ancient origins of the trails (Barrows 1900; Bean, Vane, and Young 1991; Patencio 1943; Quinn 1977; Strong 1929). Many trails are documented on the General Land Office survey maps from the late 1800's as "Indian Trails". The following trails, or portions of trails, are believed to have been established by the Cahuilla Indians or their predecessors. This list was developed from information available in ethnographic records and on file in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management.

Bear Creek	Boo Hoff	Carrizo Canyon	Cactus Spring
Dead Indian	Dry Wash	Fern Canyon	Guadalupe
Indian Potrero	Martinez Canyon	Palm Canyon	Potrero Canyon
Skyline	Vandeventer		

The trails would have been used for travel and trade between villages, hunting, access to resource gathering locations, or for ceremonial purposes. Many of the trails were later used for ranching and recreation. Because the trails lend themselves to an understanding of the broad patterns of our history and have the potential to yield information important in prehistory or history, they may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under criteria (a) and (d). Trails associated with the Cahuilla would be treated as historic properties for the purpose of this analysis. Trails other than those listed may have prehistoric origins; additional research is needed.

Some of the above trails may have been altered from their original course to accommodate modern hikers and equestrians. Alteration of the trails may have compromised the integrity of the trails. In addition, numerous trails have been constructed by groups such as Desert Riders. Desert Riders has been constructing and maintaining trails in the plan area since the 1920's. The significance of trails constructed by Desert Riders has not been addressed.

The trails were used to connect villages, ceremonial sites, mines, ranches, communities, and other occupation or use areas. These locations may themselves be significant sites eligible for inclusion in the NRHP. According to information currently on file at the Bureau of Land Management, Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, 56 archaeological sites have been recorded within 50 meters of existing trails analyzed in this plan. Few of these sites have been formally evaluated for NRHP eligibility. The majority of the sites are associated with the prehistoric period. Common site types include bedrock mortars and grinding slicks, limited use or temporary camp sites, and concentrations of pottery fragments (sherds).

Inventory and evaluation has been proposed for trails within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. To date, there has not been a comprehensive effort to inventory trails for cultural resources. Trails issues would be further examined during development of the National Monument Strategic Recreation Management Plan and Cultural Resources Management Plan.

Cultural resources inventories of randomly selected parcels within the perimeter trails corridors were conducted as part of the analysis for the BLM's California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley. There is a high potential for cultural resources, and historic properties, to occur within the perimeter trail corridors: ethnographic data and data from

previous cultural resources inventories indicate that trails, habitation sites, resource processing locations, and other types of archaeological sites are likely to occur in the Lower Sonoran life zone where the mountain slopes and desert floor meet. Three sites identified within these sample units appear to contain qualities, which make them eligible for listing on the NRHP.

Additionally, between May 1 and October 22, 2003 archaeologists from CRM TECH carried out intensive-level cultural resources inventory of portions of the routes of proposed new trails. A 60 meter corridor was inventoried along the proposed alignments. Whenever possible, the alignments were flagged in the field and the survey corridor was centered on the marked route. The 60 meter corridor would allow flexibility in resolving final trail alignment and construction.

The purpose of the inventory was to characterize the potential for the proposed trail routes to contain cultural resources and potential historic properties. The inventory focused on those segments of the proposed routes which had not been previously inventoried and, based on topography, ethnographic data and existing inventory data, had a moderate to high potential to contain significant resources. The goal was to provide data sufficient to assess the potential for adverse effects to cultural resources from trail construction.

A pre-inventory records search indicated that nine archaeological sites had been previously recorded within the area of potential effects of the proposed trails. Four of those sites could not be located and one was determined to be outside of the study area. Two sites were located and site form updates were completed. The remaining two sites were determined to constitute one large site, which was then recorded as a new site. Six additional previously unrecorded sites were identified and recorded. One of these sites has been determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. This site consists of a segment of prehistoric trail and is eligible under criteria (a) and (d) as discussed above. Of the remaining sites, three lack the characteristics that would make them eligible to the National Register and five require additional evaluation before a determination of eligibility can be made.

Upon determination of the specific routes of new trails and prior to construction of the trails, additional cultural resources review would be required and may include additional inventory.

Native American Concerns

Federal agencies have a unique and formal legal relationship with Native American tribes. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as implemented at 36 CFR 800, and related federal regulations and guidelines direct federal agencies to consult with Indian tribes. The goal of consultation is to identify the potential for effects to properties of religious or cultural significance.

Consultation indicates that trails and their usage are issues of concern among the Cahuilla. In 1991, during consultation for the Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area, Cahuilla tribal members indicated that some trails led to sacred areas or other areas of importance. They also indicated that the trails were themselves important to Cahuilla cultural heritage.

Consultation conducted during the recent development of the management plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument indicates that trails continue to be a matter of concern. Members of the Cahuilla Bands are concerned for the welfare of the trails themselves, and for the archaeological sites that the trails may lead to.

Tribal members expressed the concern that an increase in visitors and usage of the trails may lead to an increase in intentional looting or unintentional damage to important sites. No specific locations were identified and this absence of data would need to be addressed through on-going Native American consultation and cultural resources inventory. As noted previously, trails issues would be further examined during development of the National Monument Strategic Recreation Management Plan and Cultural Resources Management Plan.

Consultation specifically related to the construction of new trails was conducted in support of this document. The Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) was contacted and a records search of their sacred lands file was requested. The NAHC reported that no Native American sacred sites were on record in the immediate vicinity of the APE for proposed trails. The NAHC also provided a list of Tribes and individuals to contact for further information. Responses were received from the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians.

Agua Caliente and Augustine have recommended that Native American monitors be present during ground-disturbing activities. Please see Appendix F for correspondence and a list of Native American Tribes who were consulted during the preparation of the MSHCP and EIR/EIS.

CEQA/NEPA Cultural Definitions

The term “cultural resources” refers inclusively to archaeological and historic resources. Cultural resources also include properties of traditional religious or cultural importance to a community, an Indian tribe, local ethnic group, or the people of the nation as a whole.

The term “historic property” refers specifically to cultural resources included in, or determined eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The National Register Criteria for Evaluation can be found at Title 36, Part 60.4 of the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 60.4). The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology,

engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

- (a) Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (b) Are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (c) Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, that represent the work of a master, that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (d) Have yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, directs federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. The implementing regulations for Section 106 are found at 36 CFR 800. Compliance with Section 106 is generally integrated into the NEPA environmental review process. If the agency official determines, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), that the undertaking does not have the potential to cause effects to historic properties, the agency has no further obligations. If the undertaking has the potential to affect historic properties, the agency shall identify historic properties within the area of potential effect and assess the effects of the undertaking on such properties.

An adverse effect is found when an undertaking may alter, directly or indirectly, any of the characteristics of a historic property that qualify the property for inclusion in the NRHP in a manner that would diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association (36 CFR 800.5). The agency official shall consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer and other consulting parties to seek ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate the adverse effects (36 CFR 800.6).

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) parallels NEPA and the NHPA in providing for consideration of effects to cultural resources. CEQA calls for consideration of the effects to historical resources and unique archaeological resources from projects undertaken or supported by public agencies. The definition of the term "historical resource" mirrors the definition of "historic property" as described above. A historical resource is a resource listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. The California Register includes historical resources determined to be significant and to meet the criteria for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (Public Resources Code SS5024.1, Title 14 CCR, Section 4852):

- (a) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history and cultural heritage;
- (b) Is associated with the lives of persons important in our past;
- (c) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic values; or
- (d) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The California Register includes resources eligible for inclusion, or listed, in the NRHP. Archaeological resources may warrant consideration as historical resources or as "unique archaeological resources". Unique archaeological resource, as defined at Section 21083.2 of the Public Resources Code, means an archaeological artifact, object, or site which:

- (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.

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5 provide guidance for determining the significance of impacts to historical and unique archaeological resources. CEQA defines "substantial adverse change in the significance" of a resource as physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of the resources would be materially impaired. The lead agency shall identify potentially feasible measures to mitigate significant adverse changes.

While state laws for the protection of cultural resources are patterned after the federal regulations, the terminology differs. Actions related to public access and use in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area / National Monument would affect federal lands and are considered federal undertakings. Therefore, federal terminology would be used in the analysis of effects of those actions.

Cultural-Resources-Related Project Impacts

This section analyses the potential for the Plan to have significant impacts or adverse effects on cultural resources within the Plan Area. This EIR/EIS does not analyze the potential impacts of Covered Activities on cultural resources, nor does it supplant other requirements that Covered

Activities might be subject to regarding environmental analysis, including cultural resource surveys, through their environmental review and approval process. Any required mitigation would be determined through that process.

All Plan Alternatives

The Preferred Alternative, as well as the other action Alternatives analyzed in this document would involve detailed conservation planning, management and monitoring within Conservation Areas. The permanent conservation of land would generally enhance the conservation of cultural resources by precluding Development that might otherwise impact those resources. Within portions of these areas, the Plan and alternatives would provide guidelines and criteria (per Section 7.3 & 7.4 of the Plan) to facilitate and regulate the development of conditionally compatible public uses. These uses include the future planning and development of trails and trailheads, as well as interpretive facilities and information kiosks.

The Plan and the action Alternatives would not, in and of themselves, generate adverse impacts on sensitive cultural resources. Section 7.4 of the Plan addresses allowable uses in the Reserve System. These include activities associated with reserve management, monitoring and scientific research, which would not result in any significant land disturbance. Other allowed uses or activities include emergency response by fire, police or rescue agencies, impacts from which are expected to be infrequent and essentially less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes. The Plan also makes provision for "emergency repairs" of public infrastructure. For Existing Uses of this type, site disturbances have already occurred and additional impacts resulting from the Plan Alternatives are not anticipated.

The No Action/No Project Alternative does not result in a Plan being implemented, and, therefore, has no impact. Individual projects that currently require assessment of impacts to cultural resources, and potential avoidance and mitigation measures, would remain subject to those requirements.

Conclusion

As discussed above, none of the MSHCP alternatives would have a significant adverse impact on cultural resources in the Plan Area for CEQA analysis purposes. With the exception of the No Action/No Project Alternative, to varying degrees the alternatives result in more or less conservation and long-term protection of lands from Development or other disturbance. While Take Authorization may be provided for Covered Activities, they would remain subject to existing applicable regulations for the assessment of potential impacts to cultural and other resources. Therefore, potential for impacts to cultural resources from the Plan alternatives would not differ from the current condition, and would result in beneficial impacts in the case of the

more conservation-oriented alternatives, where protection and documentation of biological and cultural resources would be better coordinated.

4.9.3 Parks, Trails, and Recreation

Section 3.10 of the EIR/EIS summarizes existing parks and recreation areas located within the Plan Area. As discussed in detail in that section, the Coachella Valley is one of the country's most desirable geographic areas for full or part time retirement and as a resort destination for vacationers. With the growth, expansion and diversification of the local economy, the Coachella Valley is also becoming an escape for traditional families from the more intense urban areas to the west.

As demographics have changed and the local economy has grown, the Valley has attracted a broader permanent population, representing all age groups and walks of life. The region's growing permanent population also results in an increase in tourism, inducing visits from friends and family from elsewhere. Both permanent residents and tourists constitute a growing market for a number of different types of recreational activities and attractions.

This section of the EIR/EIS assesses the potential adverse effects that the proposed Plan may have on recreational resources and opportunities for recreation. Section 5 of this EIR/EIS assesses the impacts of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan on recreational resources and opportunities for recreation especially as regards trails located in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The MSHCP provides the basis for the development of a system of local, county state and federal wildlife and habitat preserves of local and national importance. The Preferred Alternative provides guidelines for public access and recreation that would be implemented over time within various MSHCP Conservation Areas. The guidelines and the review and approval process for siting trails and other public access facilities in the MSHCP Reserve System are set forth in Section 7.4 of the Plan. They ensure that new facilities would avoid significant impacts to biological resources for CEQA analysis purposes.

The scope of public access would be planned and implemented in conjunction with management planning for each Reserve Management Unit. The potential for expanded hiking, equestrian and other "passive" recreation in the MSHCP Reserve System is a significant benefit of the Plan. In addition to trails, the Plan envisions interpretive centers, information kiosks and other facilities to enhance the open space experience the Reserve System would provide to the public.

In this regard, the MSHCP would result in significant beneficial impacts for public use, trails and recreation in the Plan Area by increasing access to open space, restoring and protecting the underlying environmental resource. The Trails Plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area and its potential impacts are analyzed in Section 5.

Public Lands Alternative

This Alternative would not impact existing trails, parks, and recreation opportunities except in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. The Trails Plan for this area and its potential impacts are analyzed in Section 5. This Alternative would not have the benefits of the other action Alternatives.

Core Habitat and Ecological Processes Alternative

The effects of this Alternative, including the benefits, differ from those for the Preferred Alternative only in that the Core Habitat and Ecological Processes Alternative provides less new conservation land, and, thus, the benefits of this Alternative could be fewer than for the Preferred Alternative.

Enhanced Conservation Alternative

The effects of this Alternative, including the benefits, differ from those for the Preferred Alternative only in that the Enhanced Conservation Alternative provides more new conservation land, and, thus, the benefits of this Alternative could be greater than for the Preferred Alternative.

No Action/No Project Alternative

Under this Alternative there would be no MSHCP, and, thus, no associated Reserve System that could be made accessible to the public by virtue of ownership and management regimes. There would be no direct impacts from this Alternative to existing parks, recreation, and trails facilities and opportunities in the Plan Area. There would also be no benefits, as there are from the Preferred Alternative.

Conclusion

As discussed in Section 4.10.3 above, none of Alternatives would have a direct significant adverse impact on parks, recreation, open space, and trails in the Plan Area. Each Alternative would generally result in either the maintenance of the status quo or an increased availability of

parks, trails and open space and recreation areas. Therefore, for CEQA analysis purposes, no mitigation is required. There would be no adverse impacts to park, trails and recreational resources. Additionally, a variety of positive effects are expected to result from the substantial opportunities for a variety of additional trail and open space experiences that may be facilitated by the Plan.

4.9.4 Air Quality

As discussed in Section 3.11 of this Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS, the project Plan Area is located within the Salton Sea Air Basin, which is regulated directly by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) and indirectly by the California Air Resources Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). The 1990 federal Clean Air Act (CAA) and the California Clean Air Act (CCAA) enacted in 1988 established minimum air pollution standards and delegate much responsibility for implementation; states are not constrained from enacting and enforcing more stringent standards. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) are also key participants in regional air quality improvement efforts.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

With the exception of the Public Lands and No Action/No Project Alternatives, all of the MSHCP project alternatives would result in the conservation of land, which could otherwise be developed and result in the generation of air pollutants. It is conservatively assumed in this EIR/EIS, however, that most or all of the Development that would not occur in the Conservation Areas under Plan implementation would be displaced to other areas in the Coachella Valley rather than not occurring at all.

There is some potential that displaced Development might occur in closer proximity to existing developed areas, which could lead to a more efficient traffic pattern and an incremental reduction in emissions; however, this is too speculative to analyze. The establishment of the MSHCP Reserve System could generate some vehicle trips on the part of persons coming to the Reserve System to recreate, and would generate some vehicle trips in conjunction with biological monitoring and land management. The latter trips would be statistically insignificant. Additionally, approximately 91.6 percent of the lands in the Conservation Areas are designated as “open space” or “very low density residential” (1 du/10ac). However, 1,021 acres designated for commercial, business park and industrial use are included in the Conservation Areas. To the extent that such development might instead occur in the more compact urban context should also yield land use and other efficiencies beneficial to long-term air quality.

As with other Covered Activities, the transportation projects listed in the Plan would receive Take Authorization under the MSHCP. However, each project will be required to complete full CEQA and NEPA review, and will be required to demonstrate their conformance with state and/or federal CAA. Under federal conformity regulations, all federal or federally funded transportation projects must conform to applicable SIPs, and must not be a cause of impeding progress toward attainment of the federal standards. The transportation projects that would receive Take Authorization under the MSHCP are needed to address significant existing and projected congestion, which is currently resulting in delays and long travel times, inefficient vehicle use and increased emissions per mile traveled.

The recreation-related trips are likely, for the most part, to be in lieu of trips to other destinations that recreationists would make if the Reserve System is not established. Some of these trips could be to closer destinations in the Plan Area where there are existing trails and open space areas; but some of them could be to destinations farther away. On balance, it is expected that the total number of recreation-related vehicle miles would not increase significantly, if at all. The Plan could also lead to the construction of facilities such as kiosks, signs, and shade structures in the Reserve System, but the amount of emissions generated in the course of constructing such facilities would be statistically insignificant. Based on the foregoing analysis, the Plan's effects on air quality are considered less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

The Plan Area occurs within the planning boundaries of the 2002 Coachella Valley PM₁₀ State Implementation Plan (SIP), which includes PM₁₀ control program enhancements to meet federal PM₁₀ standards. The MSHCP does not, in and of itself, permit, but may facilitate, future Development, especially outside proposed Conservation areas. Development shifted by the Plan would eliminate or significantly reduce site disturbances and other sources of PM₁₀. While a plan to limit the emission of ozone precursors is currently under development, the implementation of the Preferred Alternative is expected to be consistent with and to complement the goals and objectives of such a plan.

Because the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative does not result in any significant emissions, it does not violate any applicable air quality standard nor would it contribute to existing or future air quality violations. The adoption and implementation of the Preferred Alternative would have no adverse affect or result in a net increase in any local or regional contribution in pollutant emissions for pollutants for which the region is in non-attainment under either federal or state ambient air quality standards.

The adoption and implementation of the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative of the MSHCP would not result in actions that increase exposure of sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. The Plan would preserve Essential Ecological Processes, including fluvial and

aeolian transport of sand, which would maintain to some degree the natural blowsand conditions occurring within the Plan Area.

The 2002 Coachella Valley PM₁₀ State Implementation Plan recognizes these natural conditions in the Coachella Valley and the inappropriateness of including "natural event" days in threshold violation data and their limited contribution to regional air quality. Implementation of the Plan would not preclude the effective implementation of the variety of mitigation measures and activities set forth in the 2002 Coachella Valley PM₁₀ State Implementation Plan, which are designed to benefit sensitive receptors and bring the Coachella Valley into compliance with federal PM₁₀ standards. The adoption and implementation of the Preferred Alternative would have no adverse affect or result in a net increase in objectionable odors.

Public Lands Alternative

This alternative includes all lands managed for conservation under local, state, and federal agency land, and private ownership, and would require additional management prescriptions to be implemented on certain BLM and other public lands. No new areas would be acquired for Plan purposes. The local jurisdictions would contribute to the management of the existing conservation areas as mitigation for the habitat loss allowed under the Plan. Only Core Habitat, Essential Ecological Processes, and Biological Corridors and Linkages that happen to be on existing public lands managed for conservation or Private Conservation Lands would be protected.

Since no additional lands for inclusion in Conservation Areas would be secured, future development is presumed to continue and future emissions associated with stationary and mobile sources would be expected to occur over the course of building out these lands. It is uncertain whether and to what extent this Alternative and associated future Development would conflict with or obstruct implementation of applicable air quality plans.

The alternative would not, in and of itself, violate air quality standards or contribute substantially to existing or projected air quality violation or result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in a criteria pollutant. Continued urban Development, especially in the high-wind and blowsand hazard areas of the Plan Area, would probably expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations however, it is unclear whether the Alternative would hamper mitigation activities that would benefit sensitive receptors. Development would be subject to approval by jurisdictions that would be responsible for complying with applicable air quality regulations. This Alternative would not result in the generation of objectionable odors.

Core Habitat with Ecological Processes Alternative

Under this Alternative, less acquisition would occur compared to the Preferred Alternative. The Alternative would reduce the amount of land available for Development but to a substantially lesser degree than the Preferred Alternative. As with the Preferred Alternative, this Alternative is not expected to conflict with or obstruct implementation of applicable air quality plans; violate air quality standards or contribute substantially to existing or projected air quality violation; result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in a criteria pollutant; or expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations or hamper mitigation activities that would benefit sensitive receptors. This Alternative would not result in the generation of objectionable odors.

Enhanced Conservation Alternative

This Alternative would result in a substantial increase in lands in Conservation Areas beyond that of any of the other Alternatives. Additional lands would be added to a variety of broadly distributed Conservation Areas. The potential impacts associated with this Alternative are essentially the same as those associated with the Preferred Alternative. This Alternative is not expected to conflict with or obstruct implementation of applicable air quality plans; violate air quality standards or contribute substantially to existing or projected air quality violation; result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in a criteria pollutant; or expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations or hamper mitigation activities that would benefit sensitive receptors. This Alternative would not result in the generation of objectionable odors.

No Action/No Project Alternative

Under this Alternative, no Plan would be implemented; thus, there would be no impacts. To the extent that it would not require Take Authorization for Listed species, or that Take Authorization was obtained through other means, future Development is presumed to continue and future emissions associated with stationary and mobile sources would be expected to occur over the course of building out these lands; however, this would not be a Plan impact. The Alternative would not, in and of itself, violate air quality standards or contribute substantially to existing or projected air quality violation or result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in a criteria pollutant. Continued urban development, especially in the high-wind and blowsand hazard areas of the Plan Area, could increase exposure of sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. Whether the Alternative would hamper mitigation activities that would benefit sensitive receptors is also uncertain. This Alternative would not result in the generation of objectionable odors.

Summary of Air Quality Impacts for All Alternatives

Impacts associated with the various alternatives of the MSHCP are summarized in the discussions and table below.

The Preferred Alternative, the Core Habitat with Ecological Processes Alternative, and the Enhanced Conservation Alternative would not result in significant impacts from a CEQA analysis perspective to local or regional air quality. The Public Lands and the No Action/No Project Alternatives would essentially have negligible effects on future land Development and potential for quality impacts associated with same.

None of the alternatives would, in and of itself, violate air quality standards or contribute substantially to existing or projected air quality violation or result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in a criteria pollutant. The varying degrees of unencumbered future urban development, especially in the high-wind and blowsand hazard areas of the Plan Area, could increase exposure of sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. Whether any of the alternatives would hamper or impede mitigation activities that would benefit sensitive receptors is also uncertain.

As discussed in Section 4.11.3 above, none of the Alternatives would have a direct significant adverse impact on local or regional air quality, hamper or impede implementation of air quality management plans, or hamper the implementation of actions that protect sensitive receptors from impacts. No mitigation measures are required.

For all of the alternatives analyzed, the direct impacts to air quality are determined to be less than significant. Potential indirect impacts are not quantifiable and would be addressed through project-specific reviews and applicable mitigation measures.

4.9.5 Noise

As discussed in Section 3.12 of this EIR/EIS, the noise environment in the Plan Area ranges from quiet, wilderness levels (40 dBA) to urban core areas impacted by traffic with CNEL levels of 75 dBA adjacent to major arterial roadways. Portions of the Plan Area are also impacted by the noise levels generated by vehicular and railroad traffic along the US Interstate-10/UPRR corridor, which extends the entire length of the central portion of the Coachella Valley.

All Alternatives

Neither the Preferred Alternative nor any of the other alternatives considered would result in the

generation of significant noise levels as set forth in the Thresholds of Significance/Criteria for Determining Significance set forth in Section 4.13.2. The Plan itself would result in very little construction or maintenance activities that would generate significant noise impacts. Construction activities that may be a part of the Plan would be limited to minor construction projects associated with installation of fencing, and the construction of trails and trailhead facilities. All of these activities would be very limited in extent and short in duration and would be less than significant. Under the No Action/No Project Alternative, the Plan would not be implemented and none of the construction activities discussed above would be implemented. Therefore, no impacts would result from any of the MSHCP Alternatives.

Conclusion

Since none of the Alternatives would result in any potentially significant noise impacts, no mitigation measures are required from a CEQA analysis standpoint.

4.9.6 Visual/Scenic Resources

As discussed in Section 3.13, the Plan Area is distinguished by its unique arrangement of low-lying desert landscape and surrounding high terrain of the San Jacinto, San Bernardino, Little San Bernardino and Santa Rosa Mountains. These contrasting viewsheds result in an exceptional display of desert open space and mountain scenery that enhances the aesthetic quality of the area.

The mountainous portions of the Plan Area are the most visible and some of the most sensitive scenic lands. Both the desert floor and the mountain hillsides are particularly susceptible to disturbance, which can take decades or longer to revert to an appearance consistent with surrounding lands. Such substantial impacts have been evidenced by the development of access roads into the Santa Rosa Mountains, including the Dunn Road and other efforts to provide access to lots located within the foothills. Examples of such disturbance and associated visual impacts can be found in Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert.

While the higher elevation terrain of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains remain relatively pristine, their remoteness further reduces the effects of any disturbance. However, the lower elevations of the Plan Area include numerous exposed and highly visible slopes of foothills and alluvial fans. The potential for adverse effects to visual and scenic resources is greatest in these portions of the Plan Area.

The federal government has determined that the protection of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains occupy a unique and challenging position given their proximity to highly urbanized areas of the Coachella Valley, and that these mountains provide a picturesque backdrop for

Coachella Valley communities. To secure now and for future generations the opportunity to experience and enjoy these magnificent vistas, as well as other resources in these mountains, Congress established the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument on October 24, 2000. Although the National Monument consists only of federal lands and federal interests in lands located within its boundaries, it is clear that the quality of the visual resource extends beyond the federal lands. One's perception of the visual integrity of these mountains cannot be compartmentalized by land ownership. Views of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains from the Coachella Valley sweep across all jurisdictions.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative, Core Habitat With Ecological Processes Alternative, and Enhanced Conservation Alternative

Each of these Alternatives would result in the conservation of extensive areas, and would thereby protect an array of scenic resources, thereby having a positive or beneficial impact on aesthetics. The impacts potentially associated with the implementation of the MSHCP are primarily limited to those associated with the construction of new trails and interpretive facilities such as kiosks. The MSHCP provides guidelines for the planning and development of new trails and public access facilities within the MSHCP Reserve System. Guidelines that address ways to avoid and minimize impacts include initial pre-design and construction assessments to minimize impacts. The MSHCP guidelines direct future trail alignments to existing dirt roads wherever possible. Trailhead guidelines direct such facilities to areas where they would be compatible with conservation goals and objectives. These guidelines prohibit the use of off-road vehicles, cross-country travel, and motorized access by non-emergency or non-reserve management personnel. Based upon these provisions, the Preferred Alternative and other action alternatives are not expected to adversely affect and can be conditioned to effectively mitigate potential impacts to visual resources in these areas.

Fencing or other barriers may also be prescribed to restrict access to sensitive areas. The MSHCP Reserve System would be patrolled on a regular basis in order to ensure that visitors stay on trails and observe all other rules and guidelines established to protect scenic resources on site. The Plan also limits mountain bike trails to areas with low susceptibility to erosion and out of wetlands and other sensitive areas, with provisions for trail design and construction, and the implementation of a permit use system in instances where excessively heavy or problematic use is identified.

Public Lands Alternative

This Alternative conserves no new lands and thus does not provide any benefit to visual resource protection. In other respects, the impacts of this Alternative would be the same as the Preferred Alternative. Thus, there are no significant adverse impacts from the Public Lands Alternative.

No Project/No Action Alternative

This Alternative would not result in the adoption of the MSHCP. New trails proposals, whether on private, local, state or federal lands, would be subject to environmental review. Impacts to visual/scenic resources would be assessed and mitigated, as appropriate. Visual impact assessments for new trails would be conducted on a case-by-case basis when proposed. Projects that would exceed the allowable contrast as determined through the impact assessment/contrast rating process may be (a) redesigned, (b) abandoned or rejected, or (c) allowed, but with mitigation measures stipulated to reduce critical impacts.

Conclusion

Because none of the Alternatives has a significant impact for CEQA analysis purposes, no mitigation measures are required. Impacts to visual/scenic resources from the Plan would be less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

4.9.7 Utilities/Public Services and Facilities

The provision of utilities and public services, such as electricity, water, sanitary sewers, schools, libraries, and fire and police protection, is essential to the day-to-day functioning of residents, visitors, businesses and institutions in the Plan Area, and to its long-term growth and economic viability. Public services and facilities in the Coachella Valley are provided by a number of public and quasi-public agencies, which together ensure a coordinated system of services for valley residents and businesses. The following summarizes the utilities and public services that may be affected by adoption and implementation of the MSHCP. A more detailed discussion of these services and facilities, as well as those not affected by the proposed Plan, can be found in Section 3.14 of this document. Information regarding relevant Covered Activities of the Permittees is found in Section 7.3 of the Plan.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative would provide Take Authorization for public facilities operated by CVWD, IID, County Flood Control, County Parks, and County Waste, as well as by the nine cities in the Coachella Valley. This would facilitate the operation and maintenance of public facilities and the delivery of services by these Permittees. The MSHCP would provide the basis for the issuance of Take Authorization for emergency access and emergency response within the MSHCP Reserve System. The MSHCP also allows limited Development in the Conservation Areas, so that additional new public facilities are not precluded in the Conservation Areas. Non-Permittees that provide public services requiring Take Authorization could seek such Authorization under the Permits through the Participating Special Entity provisions.

SCE, which is not a participant in the MSHCP, is the primary electric service provider for Southern California, including the western Coachella Valley. Within the valley, the SCE service area generally includes the communities of Cabazon, Desert Hot Springs, Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells, and Palm Desert. SCE's facilities include high-voltage transmission lines rated between 55 and 500 kilovolts (kv). SCE's largest transmission lines pass through the Coachella Valley along an east-west trending utility corridor, which is roughly parallel to Interstate-10. In the upper valley, near Thousand Palms and southern Desert Hot Springs, these facilities cross high wind hazard zones and natural blowsand corridors. However, they are limited in their ability to obstruct blowing sand and are generally compatible with the preservation of this ecological process.

Based upon an assessment of the potential impacts of the MSHCP on electric power facilities and O&M, and the provisions of Section 7.0 of the MSHCP, the Preferred Alternative would not conflict with or obstruct construction of existing or planned facilities, including substations and above-ground and subsurface transmission facilities. Nor would the Preferred Alternative conflict with or unreasonably obstruct operation and maintenance activities.

The Plan would have a beneficial impact on electric power facilities as IID's Covered Activities could proceed and be maintained. SCE is not a Permittee under the MSHCP. However, under the provisions set forth in Section 7.5 of the MSHCP, SCE may request Take Authorization for its activities from the CVCC pursuant to the Permits as a Participating Special Entity, consistent with the terms and requirements of the Permits, the Plan, and the IA.

The Gas Company (Sempra Energy) provides natural gas services and facilities much of the Coachella Valley. Natural gas in these lines originates in Texas and is transported to the valley through three east-west trending gas lines, which cross the valley just north of Interstate-10 and continue west to Los Angeles.¹ These pipelines include one 30-inch line and two 24-inch lines, with pressures of 2,000 pounds per square inch (psi). These facilities pass through portions of both existing and proposed lands managed for conservation. Limited maintenance is associated with these lines, which are not typically served by an accompanying access road, as is the case for overhead electric transmission lines. As stated in Section 7.3.3.1 of the Plan, the MSHCP will not create additional permit requirements for emergency service providers.

High-pressure gas lines step down from regional transmission lines, are typically steel pipes with pressures greater than 60 psi, and are usually located within the rights-of-way of major streets throughout the Coachella Valley.² Medium-pressure distribution lines are fed from high pressure lines consist of plastic pipelines (although older pipes may be constructed of steel) with

¹ Art Escobedo, The Gas Company, Palm Desert Base, Personal communication. February 26, 2001.

² Ibid.

pressures less than 60 psi.³ Pressures are reduced at numerous limiting stations and regulator stations throughout the valley. There are no known new transmission facilities planned that would cross through Conservation Areas outside of existing public roadways.

Based upon an assessment of the potential impacts of the MSHCP on natural gas transmission facilities and the provisions of Section 7.0 of the MSHCP, the Preferred Alternative would not conflict with or obstruct maintenance of existing or construction of planned facilities, including substations and above-ground and subsurface transmission facilities. Nor would the Preferred Alternative conflict with or unreasonably obstruct operation and maintenance activities.

The construction of new facilities within Conservation Areas may require a Plan amendment in order to assure compatibility with applicable conservation goals. No natural gas providers are Permittees under the MSHCP. However, under the provisions set forth in Section 7.4 of the MSHCP, they may request Take Authorization for activities from the CVCC pursuant to the Permit as a Participating Special Entity, consistent with the terms and requirements of the Permit, the Plan, and the IA.

Both telephone and cable facilities and services are concentrated within the urbanized portions of the Coachella Valley. Backbone ground-based transmission lines are generally located within major transportation rights-of-way such as US Interstate 10, Union Pacific Railroad, and other highways and arterials. Based upon an assessment of the potential impacts of the MSHCP on natural gas transmission facilities and the provisions of Section 7.4 of the MSHCP, the Preferred Alternative would not conflict with or obstruct construction of existing or planned facilities, including switching stations and above-ground and subsurface transmission facilities. Nor would the Preferred Alternative conflict with or unreasonably obstruct operation and maintenance activities.

Most of the solid waste generated in the Coachella Valley is disposed of at the Edom Hill Landfill, located in the northwest portion of the Indio Hills, in the northern area of Cathedral City. The landfill lies outside but adjacent to the Edom Hill and Willow Hole Conservation Areas. The continued operation of a well site in the Willow Hole Conservation Area, which supports operations at the Edom Hill Landfill, is proposed as a Covered Activity under the Plan. Cathedral City also proposes the eventual widening of Edom Hill Road, which serves the landfill, as a Covered Activity. Edom Hill is nearing its maximum capacity, and its anticipated closure date is 2004 (although the County anticipates the continuation of compatible and related uses on this site).

³ Ibid.

Therefore, local municipalities are evaluating a number of alternative disposal sites. The Eagle Mountain Landfill and Recycling Center, which is planned for construction approximately 25 miles northeast of Chiriaco Summit, would be accessed via an existing rail line, which diverges from the UPRR line within the Dos Palmas Conservation Area and passes through the Mecca Hills/Orocopia Mountains Conservation Area. This rail facility has received Take exemption through Section 7 from the USFWS (also see Section 4.2, above). The landfill site is outside the Plan Area.

The Plan would not generate additional solid waste. Moreover, landfill related activities as referenced above would be Covered Activities under the Plan, thereby creating a beneficial impact. Therefore, the Preferred Alternative would not conflict with or obstruct continued operation of existing landfill facilities.

Police, fire and other emergency services operate under the direct authority or through a service agreement with Permittees. Section 7.4 of the MSHCP addresses allowable uses in the MSHCP Reserve System. Based upon an assessment of the potential impacts of the MSHCP, and the provision of Section 7.3 of the MSHCP, the Preferred Alternative would not conflict with or obstruct police and fire protection services. The Plan would also not have significant impacts on schools as it would not result in student increases nor the need to construct new school facilities. The Plan would not have adverse impacts on parks but instead should have a positive impact on recreation. (See Section 4.10)

It should also be noted that local, state, and federal law enforcement entities will be allowed access to the MSHCP Reserve Lands as necessary to enforce the law. Medical, rescue, fire fighting operations, and other emergency service providers will be allowed access to Reserve Lands to carry out operations necessary for the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Local law enforcement agencies and other entities such as the National Guard or Immigration and Naturalization Service operating on Reserve Lands are subject to existing state and federal laws. The MSHCP will not create additional permit requirements for these entities beyond those of existing state and federal laws.

In summary, the Plan would not conflict with or obstruct construction of new public utilities or facilities, including above ground and subsurface energy, fuel or telecommunication transmission facilities. It would not conflict with or obstruct the operation and maintenance of existing public utilities or facilities, including above ground and subsurface energy, fuel or telecommunication transmission facilities. It would not result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with or create substantial impediments to the provision of new or physically altered government facilities.

The Plan would not exceed wastewater treatment requirements of the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board, or require or result in the construction of new water or wastewater treatment facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects. Further, it does not require or result in the construction of new storm water drainage facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects.

The Plan would not involve any deficiency in sufficient water supplies available to serve the project from existing entitlements and resources, and no new or expanded entitlements are needed. The Plan could generate minor amounts of waste when trash is cleaned up from properties or exotic plant species are removed. Adequate landfill capacity exists to accommodate the project's minimal solid waste disposal needs, and the Plan complies with federal, state, and local statutes and regulations related to solid waste.

The Plan would not be expected to generate any wastewater. The Plan would not result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, or generate a need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for fire protection, police protection, schools, parks, and other public facilities.

Public Lands Alternative

This Alternative would have the same or fewer impacts than the Preferred Alternative. The Covered Activities would be the same as under the Preferred Alternative. Because it involves no new lands in Conservation Areas, however, this Alternative would pose no potential constraints to the construction of future necessary public facilities.

Core Habitat and Ecological Processes Alternative

This Alternative would have generally the same impacts as the Preferred Alternative. Because it involves setting aside less new conservation land than the Preferred Alternative, this Alternative would pose fewer potential constraints to the construction of future necessary public facilities in Conservation Areas. Because the Alternative would allow limited Development in Conservation Areas, however, these potential constraints are not significant.

Enhanced Conservation Alternative

This Alternative would have generally the same impacts as the Preferred Alternative. Because it involves more new conservation land than the Preferred Alternative, this Alternative could pose

more potential constraints to the construction of future necessary public facilities in Conservation Areas. Because the Alternative allows limited Development in Conservation Areas, however, these potential constraints are not significant.

No Action/No Project Alternative

Under this Alternative no Plan would be implemented, and hence no direct impacts to public services and facilities would occur. Absent a Plan, the current regulatory conditions in effect would continue. Significant conflicts in the future resulting from the lack of Take Authorization for Covered Activities could occur.

Conclusion

Because none of the Alternatives would have adverse impacts to utilities, service systems and public service, no mitigation measures are required for any of the alternatives.

No significant adverse impacts would result from the Preferred Alternative or any of the other Alternatives.

4.9.8 Environmental Justice and Children

A comprehensive description of the issues associated with Environmental Justice is included in Section 3.16 of this document. The following information represents a summary of that information.

Minorities and Minority Populations

Table 4-24 describes the year 2000 racial composition of the entire Plan Area, as well as that of individual cities and Census Designated Places (CDPs) within the Plan Area. The data indicate that the majority of residents in the Plan Area categorize themselves as “white.” Minority populations are generally well-integrated and dispersed geographically throughout the Coachella Valley, and there are few isolated minority neighborhoods or districts in the region.

The percentage of “Black or African Americans” in the Plan Area is approximately 2.5%. “American Indian and Alaskan Natives” represent about 0.8% of the Plan Area population. The “Asian” population accounts for 2.4% of the entire Plan Area. “Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders” account for about 0.09% of the population in the Plan Area.

Approximately 44.3% of the population in the entire Plan Area describe themselves as Hispanic or Latino, although they may be of any race. The data indicate that individuals identifying

themselves as Hispanic or Latino are well-dispersed throughout the valley, but the greatest percentage resides in the southeasterly portion of the Coachella Valley, including Indio, Coachella, and Mecca.

TABLE 4-24
Racial Composition of the Plan Area, 2000 (%)

	White	Black or African American	American Indian & Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander	Some other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic/Latino (of any Race)
Bermuda Dunes	84.2	2.1	0.6	2.7	0.1	6.9	3.4	19.5
Cathedral City	65.3	2.7	1.0	3.7	0.1	23.1	4.1	50.0
Coachella	38.8	0.5	0.8	0.3	-	56.6	3.0	97.4
Desert	68.2	6.1	1.4	2.0	0.1	16.4	5.8	40.4
Hot Springs								
Indian Wells	96.3	0.4	0.2	1.5	0.1	0.5	1.0	3.0
Indio	48.7	2.8	1.0	1.5	0.1	42.0	3.9	75.4
La Quinta	78.5	1.4	0.7	1.9	0.1	13.9	3.5	32.0
Mecca	24.1	0.1	1.0	0.7	-	70.7	3.4	98.0
Palm Desert	86.8	1.2	0.5	2.6	0.1	6.5	2.4	17.1
Palm Springs	76.3	3.9	0.9	3.8	0.1	9.8	3.1	23.7
Rancho Mirage	92.7	0.9	0.2	1.2	0.1	3.6	1.3	9.4
Thousand Palms	74.8	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.3	19.4	3.2	43.6

- represents zero or rounds to zero.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

Low Income Populations

The data indicate that there is a significant range of those in poverty within the above cited cities and communities throughout the Plan Area. The communities with the greatest percentage of households in poverty include Mecca (45.4%), Coachella (28.9%), Desert Hot Springs (27.4%) and Indio (21.5%). Plan Area communities with the lowest percentage of households in poverty include Indian Wells (3.4%), Rancho Mirage (5.9%), Bermuda Dunes (6.9%) and La Quinta (7.8%).

One particular segment of the population that may qualify as low income, and which is generally more geographically concentrated than other low income groups in the Coachella Valley, is migrant farm workers. This population generally resides in the southeasterly portion of the valley, in the vicinity of Indio, Coachella and Mecca, where agricultural lands predominate. Some workers live in the valley year-round, while others do so only on a seasonal basis.

Native American Populations

Approximately 69,578 acres physically located within the Plan Area are Native American reservation lands that are not part of the Plan and shall not be subject to its provisions. These lands include Tribal trust, allotted, and fee (privately owned) lands under the jurisdiction of the following entities: (1) the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in the Indio-Coachella area, (2) the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians in the Palm Springs, Cathedral City, and Rancho Mirage areas, and (3) the Torres-Martinez Indians in the La Quinta-Salton Sea area.

The Agua Caliente have prepared their own MSHCP (in process), and other Indian lands would be covered by the Plan only if Tribal Councils choose to adopt the Plan and Implementing Agreement. Efforts have been made to coordinate the Agua Caliente HCP and MSHCP, and both planning organizations have shared relevant data and information wherever possible.

Children

Children represent a segment of the population that could be at a disproportionately high risk for illness and other physical dangers associated with environmental hazards. The data indicate that approximately 18.7% of the population in the entire Plan Area is under the age of 18. Children are generally well-distributed geographically throughout the Plan Area.

Minorities and Minority Populations

Neither the proposed MSHCP nor any of the Alternatives are expected to result in any adverse or disproportionate impacts to minorities or minority populations. The Alternatives specifically address the conservation of open space and largely uninhabited lands, and are not known to include lands owned by minorities, nor do they include neighborhoods or other communities inhabited by substantial minority populations. The boundaries have been selected for their biological habitat and open space value, and any developmental restrictions imposed on parcels of land would be imposed without regard to the ethnic or racial characteristics of the landowner or resident.

Low Income Populations

The implementation of the Plan or any of the Alternatives is not expected to significantly impact low income populations. The conservation of lands under either the Preferred Alternative or any of the other Alternatives would not significantly affect the amount of land available within each jurisdiction for affordable housing, and therefore should not impact the jurisdictions' ability to provide affordable housing (see discussion in Section 4.15, Socio Economic Resources, above). The Plan and the Alternatives focus on areas for conservation based on biological and open

space value. Neither do the Plan nor Alternatives target agricultural land for conservation, nor are either expected to directly or indirectly affect the viability of the valley's migrant farm workers.

Native American Populations

Neither implementation of the proposed Plan nor any of the Alternatives would result in any direct impacts to concentrated Native American populations. The data indicate that individual Native Americans (and Alaskan Natives) living in the Plan Area account for an extremely small percentage of the regional population and are generally well-dispersed geographically. Implementation of the Plan or of any Alternative is not expected to disproportionately affect these individuals.

The Conservation Areas would contain known and potentially occurring Native American cultural and archaeological resources. However, implementation of the Plan or any of the Alternatives is not expected to adversely impact the protection and/or preservation of these sites. The Plan and Alternatives are focused on conservation, and imposition of development restrictions on some lands would not only preserve their biological habitat and open space value, but would also preserve the value of any cultural and/or historic resources. In this regard, the Plan and the Alternatives are expected to be respectful of sensitive Native American cultural resources.

Children

Neither the proposed Plan nor any of the Alternatives are expected to adversely or disproportionately affect children. They do not include in Conservation Areas any schools, day care centers, or other properties dedicated for use by children. The Plan is aimed at the long-term conservation of sensitive biological species and their habitats, and seeks to protect open space lands from any development or disturbance that could compromise this goal. By restricting future development on some parcels, the proposed Plan and the Alternatives are expected to contribute to long-term reductions in air, noise, water, and other sources of pollution, which may have net positive impacts on children in the region.

Public Participation and Potential Impacts to Special Populations

Since its inception, the MSHCP planning process has been open to the public in an effort to disseminate information, solicit comments, and provide opportunities for public input. Three public scoping meetings, which were fully noticed in local newspapers and mailings to public interest groups and potentially affected landowners, were held in 2000 in the western, central,

and eastern portions of the Coachella Valley. More than a dozen meetings were held by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to solicit input and feedback from special interest groups. All meetings of the Project Advisory Group (PAG), which has met once a month since 1998, have been open to the public. PAG membership includes representatives of the parties to the MOU, other public agencies, and private sector groups, and provides a forum for input from a broad spectrum of interests.

Implementation of the proposed Plan is not expected to result in disproportionately high and/or adverse human health or environmental effects on children or any minority, low income, Indian, or other special population. Nor is the Plan expected to result in the disruption of any physical or social structure in the community, as it targets largely uninhabited open spaces for conservation. Where restrictions on urban development may be imposed, they would be based on the biological habitat value of the land in question and would apply to all landowners and developers, regardless of racial, ethnic, or other cultural characteristics. The proposed Plan and Alternatives do not propose any development or land disturbance that constitutes a potential pollution or health hazard. Rather, the Plan is directed at biological and open space conservation, and the regulation of development projects that may compromise these sensitive resources. Over the long-term, the provisions of the Plan are expected to enhance the regional environment, benefiting all populations in the Coachella Valley.

The Plan Area boundary has been selected without regard to the racial, ethnic, cultural, income or age mix of human populations in the Plan Area. The primary objectives of the proposed Plan are (1) to preserve undeveloped, uninhabited open space lands, which can be used to create large, interconnected preserves for sensitive species and their habitats, and (2) to standardize mitigation/compensation measures for the covered species in a manner that satisfies applicable Federal and State laws pertaining to endangered species protection. The Plan Area includes all City and County lands believed necessary to achieve this goal, and it does not target or exclude any community or parcel of land based on demographic or income characteristics.

Conclusion

As described above, the implementation of the MSHCP is not expected to adversely impact minority, Native American or poor populations. No mitigation measures are therefore required.

No significant impacts have been identified.

4.9.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

This section addresses Plan impacts with respect to hazards and hazardous materials. As a conservation plan, the MSHCP generally does not create or expose people to any hazards or

hazardous materials. Management of the Reserve System lands is expected to involve occasional, targeted use of herbicides to control exotic plant species that have adverse impacts on the Covered Species and natural communities included in the Plan.

As discussed in section 3.17 of this EIR/EIS, issues of manufacture, transport and disposal of hazardous and toxic materials have become progressively important. Responsibility for the regulation of these materials is distributed across several county, State and Federal agencies. While the Plan area is home to only a few major distributors and users of these materials, hazardous and toxic substances have become ubiquitous and are found in homes, institutions and industries. Of particular concern in recent years has been the illegal use and disposal of such materials in remote desert areas.

The MSHCP is a conservation plan designed to conserve Covered Species and their habitats through the acquisition of land and its subsequent monitoring and management. The various Alternatives, except the No Action/No Project Alternative, involve greater or lesser amounts of land being conserved than the Preferred Alternative. The No Action/No Project Alternative involves no Plan being adopted or implemented.

Management of the Reserve System would entail the limited use of herbicides and pesticides to control exotic or invasive non-native plant and animal species identified through the Monitoring Program as adversely impacting Habitat values. Herbicides and pesticides could also be stored in secure locations within the Reserve System. Herbicides and pesticides may be used pursuant to applicable requirements is a Covered Activity, but any Take of Covered Species resulting from toxicological effects of herbicide or pesticide use is not a Covered Activity. All herbicide and pesticide use would be overseen by the appropriate RMUC and would comply with all laws and regulations regarding the proper storage, use, and disposal of these materials. The impact of this use would, therefore, be less than significant and would not pose a hazard.

Neither the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative nor any of the other Alternatives involves the transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials, other than herbicides and pesticides as discussed above. Similarly, none of the Alternatives, including the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative, would create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment. None would emit hazardous emissions or involve the handling of hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school. None would involve any structure being located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment.

None would result in a safety hazard for people residing or working within an airport land use plan area or within the vicinity of a private airstrip.

The Preferred Alternative, and each of the other Alternatives except the No Action/No Project Alternative, allows for, and does not impair, implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. Similarly, none of the Alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative, exposes people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands. By conserving significant areas that are subject to wildland fires, all the Alternatives limit Development in such areas where the risk of wildland fire is present. Where the MSHCP Reserve System is adjacent to urbanized areas or areas where residences are intermixed with wildlands, the Alternatives provide for emergency response in the event of a wildland fire; thus, there is no impact. The No Action/No Project Alternative involves no Plan being adopted and implemented, and, therefore, also does not impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan, nor expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands. However, the No Action/No Project Alternative would not provide Take Authorization for emergency response access and activities.

Conclusion

As described above, the implementation of the MSHCP is not expected to pose or create a significant threat or hazard, nor expose the public to significant hazardous or toxic materials. No mitigation measures are therefore required.

None of the Alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative, has a significant adverse impact with respect to hazards and hazardous materials.