

7.0 SHORT-TERM USE VERSUS LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

Introduction

This Section of the EIR/EIS provides a discussion of the long-term effects of the proposed MSHCP by evaluating the relationship between the local short-term uses of the environment, in the present case land conservation, and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity. It should be noted that the MSHCP does not promote "short-term use", but rather in principle is designed to assure the long-term productivity of the proposed Plan Area's unique and important biological resources, especially those Covered Species and natural communities identified in the Plan.

The CEQA's NEPA Guidelines Section 1502.16 of 40 CFR that analyzes environmental consequences must include discussion of "...the relationship between short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity...." The objectives of the MSHCP involve the need to conserve biological resources in an organized and effective manner with the anticipated growth and proposed development within the Plan Area. Thus, long-term environmental productivity would be maintained through the assembly and management of a biologically sound Reserve System. Short-term uses of the environment, such as development, mining, and recreation, would be accommodated in a manner least likely to result in permanent damage to the Coachella Valley's natural resources.

Areas of impact that limit the range of beneficial uses of the environment have been given focused consideration. These include biological resources, water resources, air resources, visual resources, and recreational resources. This Section also discusses why the proposed MSHCP is appropriate for adoption and implementation at this time, rather than delaying its adoption to consider additional alternatives not addressed in this EIR/EIS.

Land Use

The proposed MSHCP is a regional conservation plan that gives weight to biological resource lands that is comparable to that given to lands planned for urban development. The proposed Plan provides for the preservation of habitat while also assuring the availability of a wide range of lands for future residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional uses. The resulting land use allocation model for the region that is produced by the MSHCP provides for both Covered Species and natural communities, as well as for continued economic development within the Plan Area.

The proposed MSHCP also results in the conservation of lands that are largely subject to substantial physical constraints, including local seismic hazards, flooding, severe wind erosion, and a lack of urban infrastructure. Important biological resources located within the various Conservation Areas that make up the Reserve System coincidentally occur within these constrained areas and their preservation complements the larger pattern of land use in the region. To the extent the Plan, which proposes a 75-year Take Permit, is a long-term conservation plan, its implementation would not result in the short-term use of land resources at the expense of long-term productivity.

Energy and Mineral Resources

The Plan would not adversely affect the near or long-term access to or availability of important energy or mineral resources that occur within the Plan Area. As discussed in Section 4.4 of the EIR/EIS, the proposed Plan would not adversely effect existing, nor preclude the development of, new windfarms in the San Geronio Pass Wind Resource Area. Neither would it preclude the continuing extraction of sand and gravel resources that are mined within the Plan Area as long as they were consistent with the Plan's Conservation Goals and Objectives. Access to long-term supplies of local energy and mineral resources would not be significantly affected by implementation of the proposed MSHCP.

Agricultural Lands

The proposed MSHCP would have a very limited impact on agricultural lands in the Plan Area. As discussed in Section 4.5 of the EIR/EIS, the maximum conservation of agricultural lands (approximately 1,200 acres) through Plan implementation would reduce available farmlands by 1.3 percent. It should be noted that due to soil conditions on these proposed conservation lands, only about half is in cultivation. The Plan would not otherwise affect agricultural lands and is not expected to result in any short-term use of such lands at the expense of long-term productivity.

Biological Resources

The implementation of the proposed MSHCP would result in the conservation of Additional Reserve lands that would contribute to the Reserve System. The conserved habitat would be included in the Conservation Areas and be subject to the Management, Monitoring, and Adaptive Management Program. The proposed MSHCP would preclude the disturbance and conversion of natural communities, would assure important Biological Corridors and Linkages, and would preserve Essential Ecological Processes that provide habitat for several proposed Covered Species. Development within the proposed Plan Area would result in the loss of natural communities and Covered Species. However, the Plan would limit the extent and location of

future habitat loss and avoids potentially significant habitat fragmentation and degradation. The Plan proposes to limit Development on lands within the Conservation Areas and would provide a mechanism to assure that permitted Development would not compromise the biological resources identified in each Conservation Area. The proposed Plan also provides Land Use Adjacency Guidelines that would reduce Edge Effects and other potentially adverse consequences associated with the development/natural lands interface.

In general, the loss and degradation of Habitat, and the on-going impacts of human activities to biological resources in the Plan Area would be minimized in the long-term. The proposed Plan would assure the maintenance and long-term value of Covered Species, natural communities, Essential Ecological Processes, and general biological diversity.

Water Resources

Sections 3.7, 4.7 and 4.8 of the EIR/EIS address the importance of groundwater and surface water regimes to Covered Species and natural communities. The EIR/EIS recognizes current overdraft conditions of the Whitewater River Subbasin, which serves as the main groundwater repository for the Coachella Valley, including the Plan Area.

Imported water from the Colorado River supplements the recharge of the Whitewater River Subbasin and State Water Project waters yet to be delivered to the Plan Area would also aid in addressing the overdraft conditions in the Plan Area subbasins. The water districts are also implementing water conserving technologies and measures to address the overdraft, as well as utilizing reclaimed water wherever possible. The recently adopted Coachella Valley Water District Water Management Plan is designed to assure that affected groundwater basins are recharged and that basins are maintained in long-term balance.

It should also be noted that the proposed implementation of the MSHCP could have real, direct and tangible effects on the long-term demand for groundwater resources, with a potential long-term savings of up to 62,000-acre feet per year.¹ The proposed Plan may also have the added beneficial effect of enhancing land use, water, and energy efficiencies where development does occur.

Parks, Trails, and Recreation

The proposed MSHCP would have a positive long-term effect of providing additional trails and open space recreation opportunities throughout the Plan Area. The proposed Plan provides for

¹ Final PEIR for the CVWD Water Management Plan and State Water Project Entitlement Transfer, prepared by Montgomery Watson Harza, June 2002 and personal communication with Todd Jorgensen, Domestic Water Engineer, CVWD, 10/27/03.

the year-round availability of all but three existing trails planned for hot season closure, decommissioning of few trails and facilitates the future approval and creation of others. Section 7.0 of the Plan outlines guidelines for the provision of public access to lands proposed for conservation within the Plan Area. In the short-term, the Plan proposes to control the level of trail use on three trails located within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. However, consistent with the findings of the Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program and changes in sheep populations, trail use or trail locations may vary over time.

Air Resources

As indicated in the discussion in Section 4.0 of the EIR/EIS, air quality is a non-localized issue that is influenced by various pollutants generated both locally and from areas outside the Coachella Valley. Development in the region is expected to increase the amount of pollutants emitted into the Valley's basin. Increased traffic, urban development and power and natural gas consumption would generate additional pollutants that further degrade air quality. Increased local emissions would contribute to higher concentrations of reactive organic gases and particulates. The amount of locally produced ozone is expected to rise in the future, given that ideal conditions necessary for ozone generation occur in the Coachella Valley.

Oxides of nitrogen and reactive hydrocarbons are generated by the burning of natural gas and the continued use of gasoline and diesel fuels in vehicles. These pollutants degrade local air quality to a greater or lesser extent, as determined by the rates of dispersion. Fugitive dust emissions are primarily associated with urban development.

As noted in the discussion of water resources above, the proposed Plan may have the added indirect effect of encouraging more efficient land use, as well as lower unit energy use, fewer vehicle trips per household and shorter trips. More compact and less dispersed land use patterns would be expected to emerge, which are well integrated and provide close by jobs, residences, commercial and institutional services. The net effect of these increased efficiencies would be reduced per unit pollutant emissions.

Visual Resources

The region's scenic and visual resources are created by the exceptional mountain formations and vast expanses of low-lying desert lands. The Plan Area's unique environment is responsible for drawing visitors and new residents from all over the country. The preservation of land and open space associated with the proposed Plan would serve to preserve these scenic resources for all people, and would enhance opportunities for recreation within these scenic resource areas.