

## **5.0 SANTA ROSA AND SAN JACINTO MOUNTAINS TRAILS PLAN: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **5.1 Introduction and Summary of Alternatives**

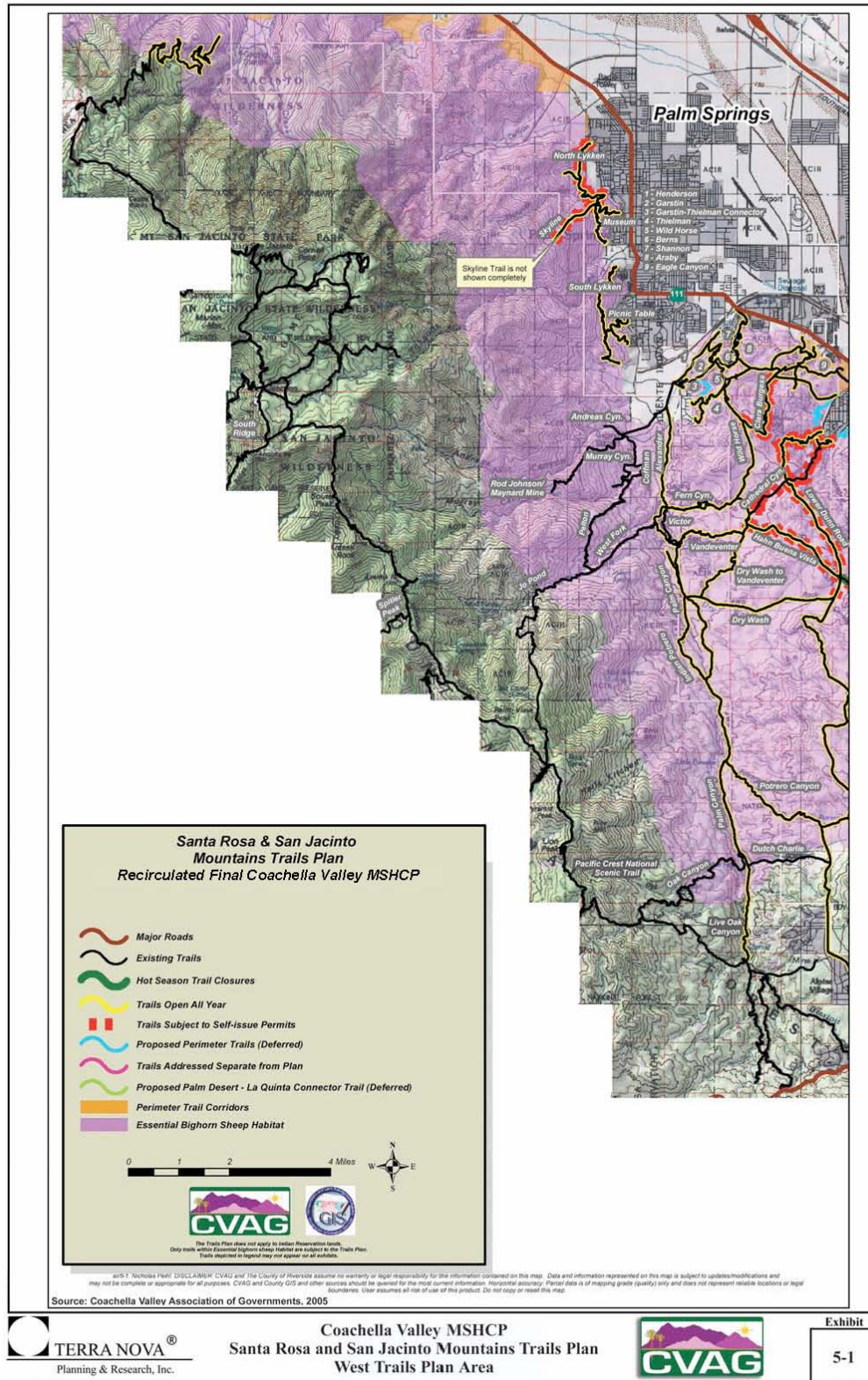
As noted in Section 2, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan (Trails Plan) comprises a recreation network for access and use within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. Trails cross lands owned by the state, federal, local, and tribal governments, as well as privately owned land. The proposed Trails Plan, including the proposed perimeter trail system and the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail, is a Covered Activity on non-Federal land under the proposed MSHCP (Section 7.3.3.2 of the Plan). The BLM portion of the Trails Plan, while not a Covered Activity under the proposed MSHCP, is included in this analysis because the Section 7 consultation between BLM and USFWS would include this analysis.

The Trails Plan addresses the opportunities for public use of the lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area, including the development, use, and maintenance of trails and areas for hiking, equestrian, and mountain bike use. *Exhibits 5-1 through 5-5* show the various existing and planned trails addressed throughout this EIR/EIS.

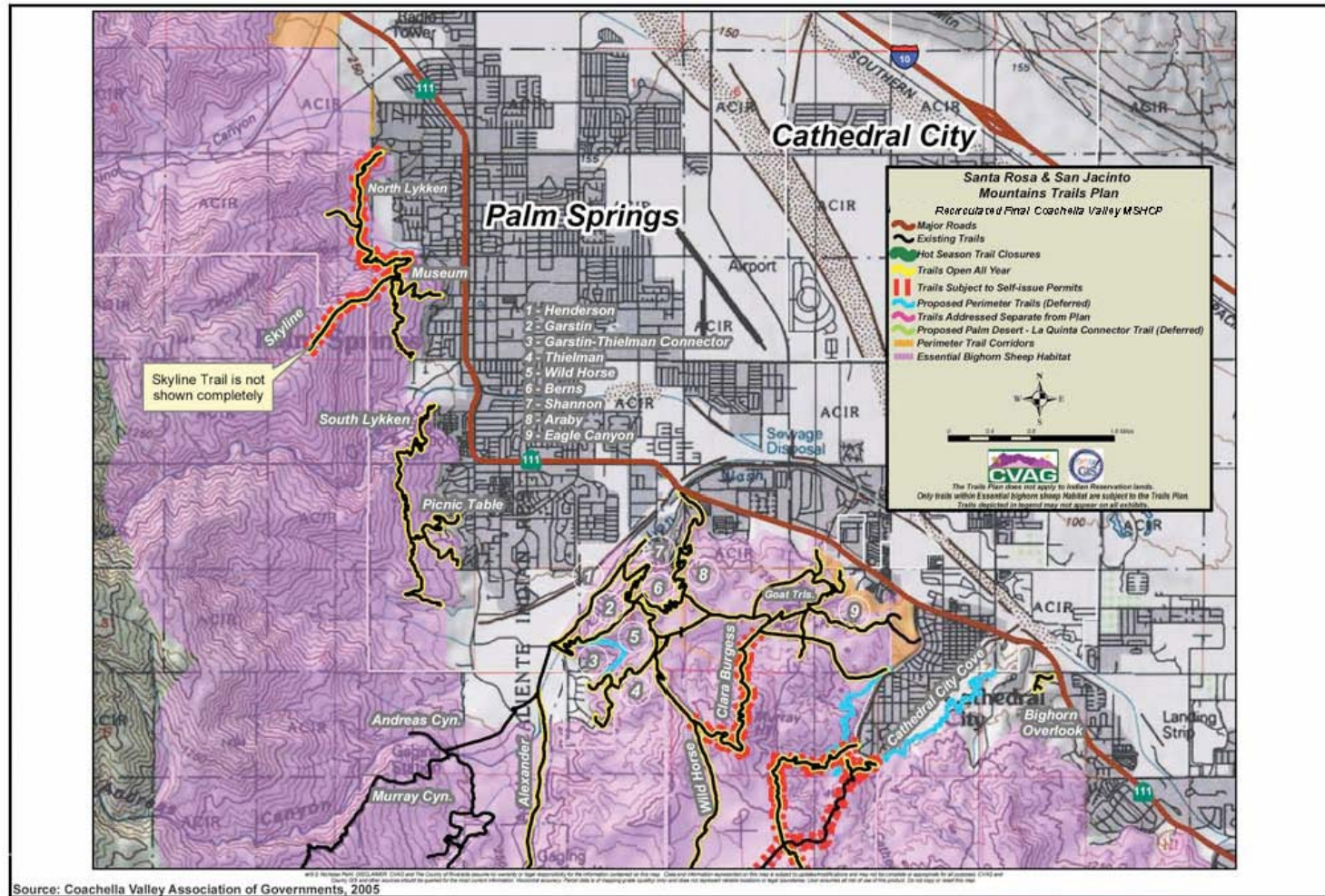
The Trails Plan was developed to address two primary goals: (1) minimize to the maximum extent Feasible the risk of potential adverse impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep from recreational activities, and (2) provide recreational opportunities throughout the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains that are consistent with recovery of bighorn sheep. These goals and the related objectives are described fully in Section 2.5.7.3 of this EIR/EIS. Appendix C provides the primary information and concepts about bighorn sheep that resulted in formulation of the Trails Plan.

The Trails Plan has three alternatives, one of which is the No Action Alternative. For purposes of the analysis regarding actions on federal lands, BLM considered three alternatives for the Trails Plan: the Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A/Preferred Alternative), Alternative B, and the No Action Alternative (Alternative C).

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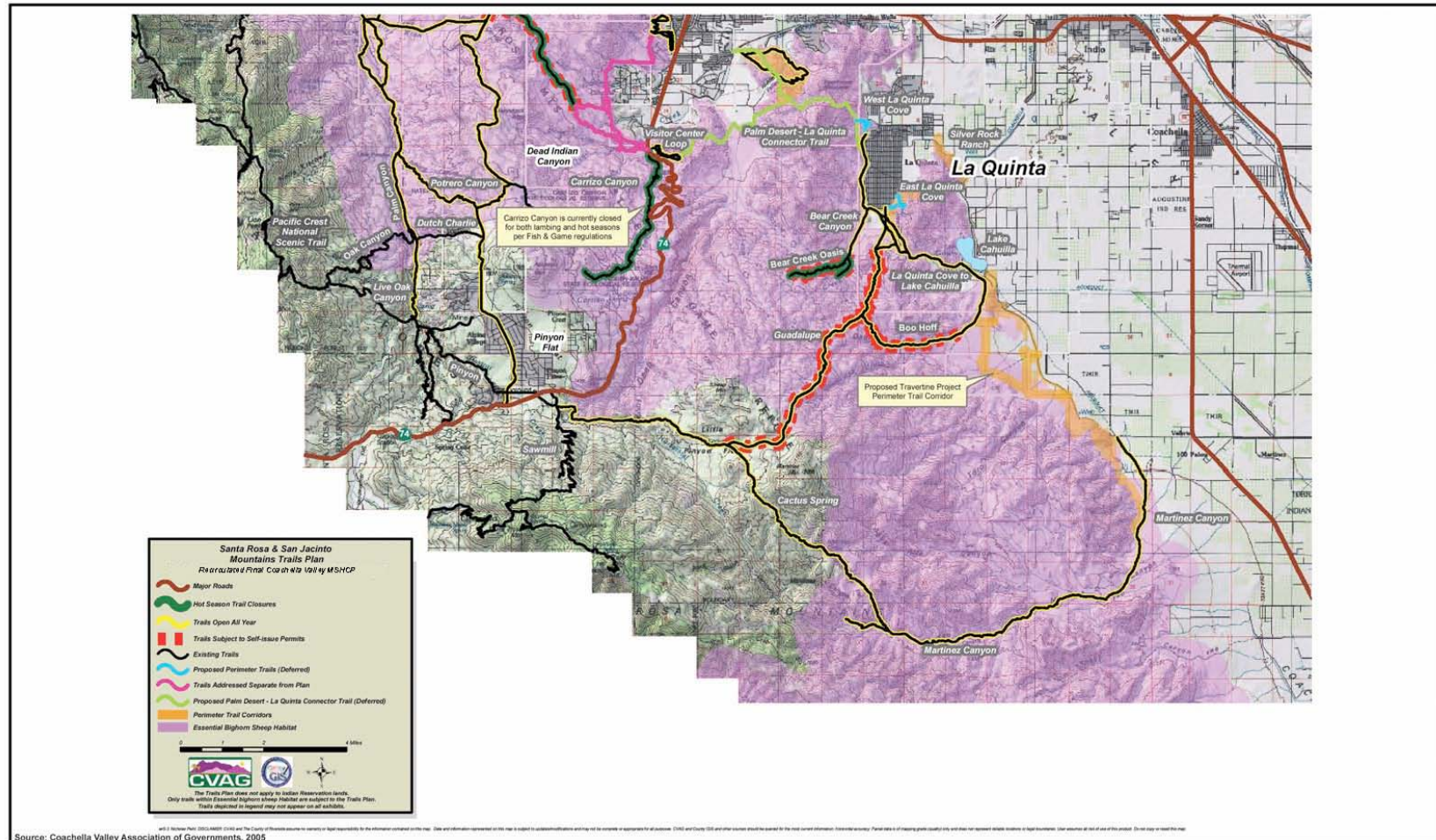


**Coachella Valley MSHCP**  
**Palm Hills Study Area**  
**Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan**



**Exhibit**  
**5-2**

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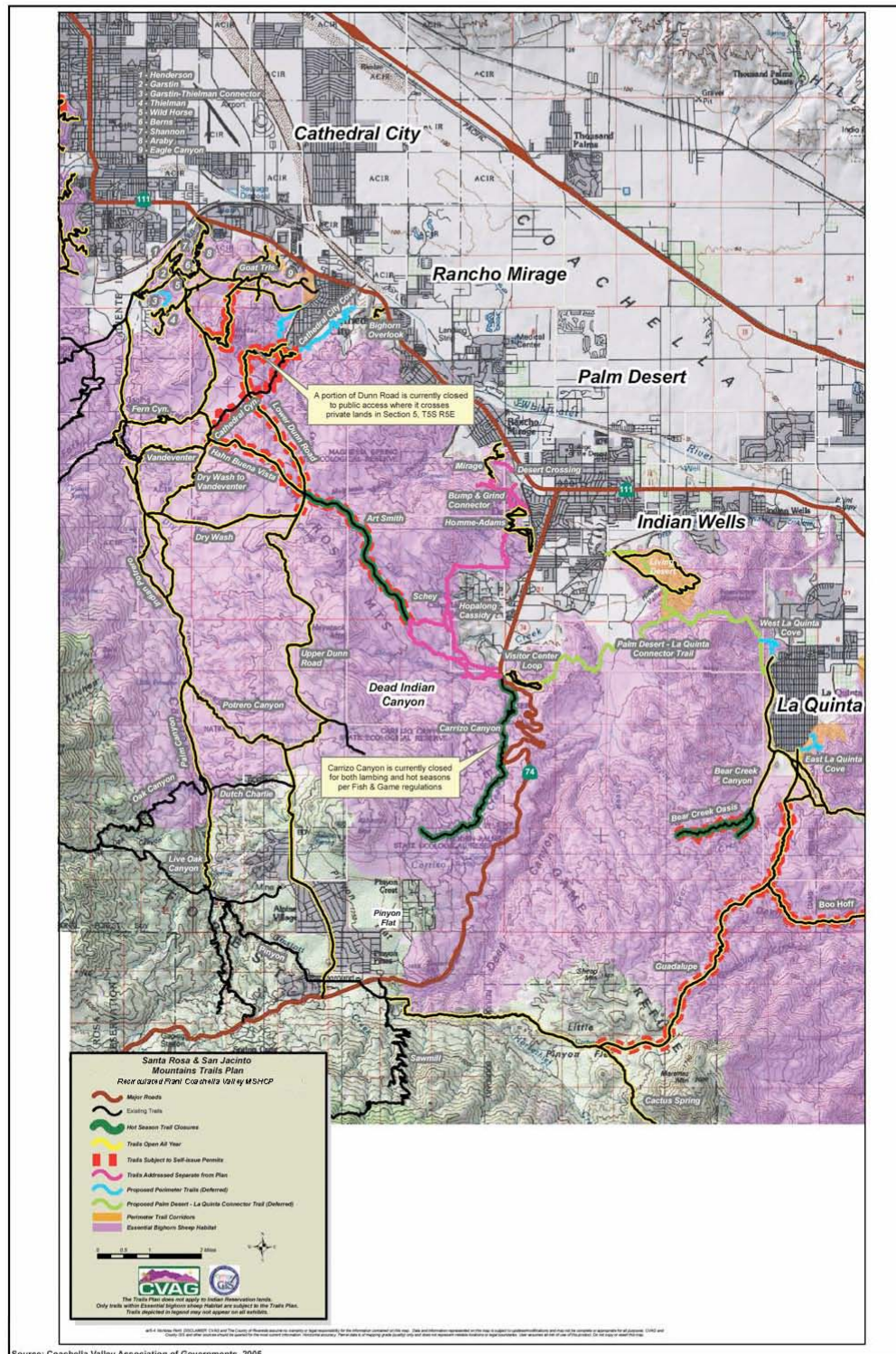


Coachella Valley MSHCP  
 Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan  
 Middle Trails Plan Area

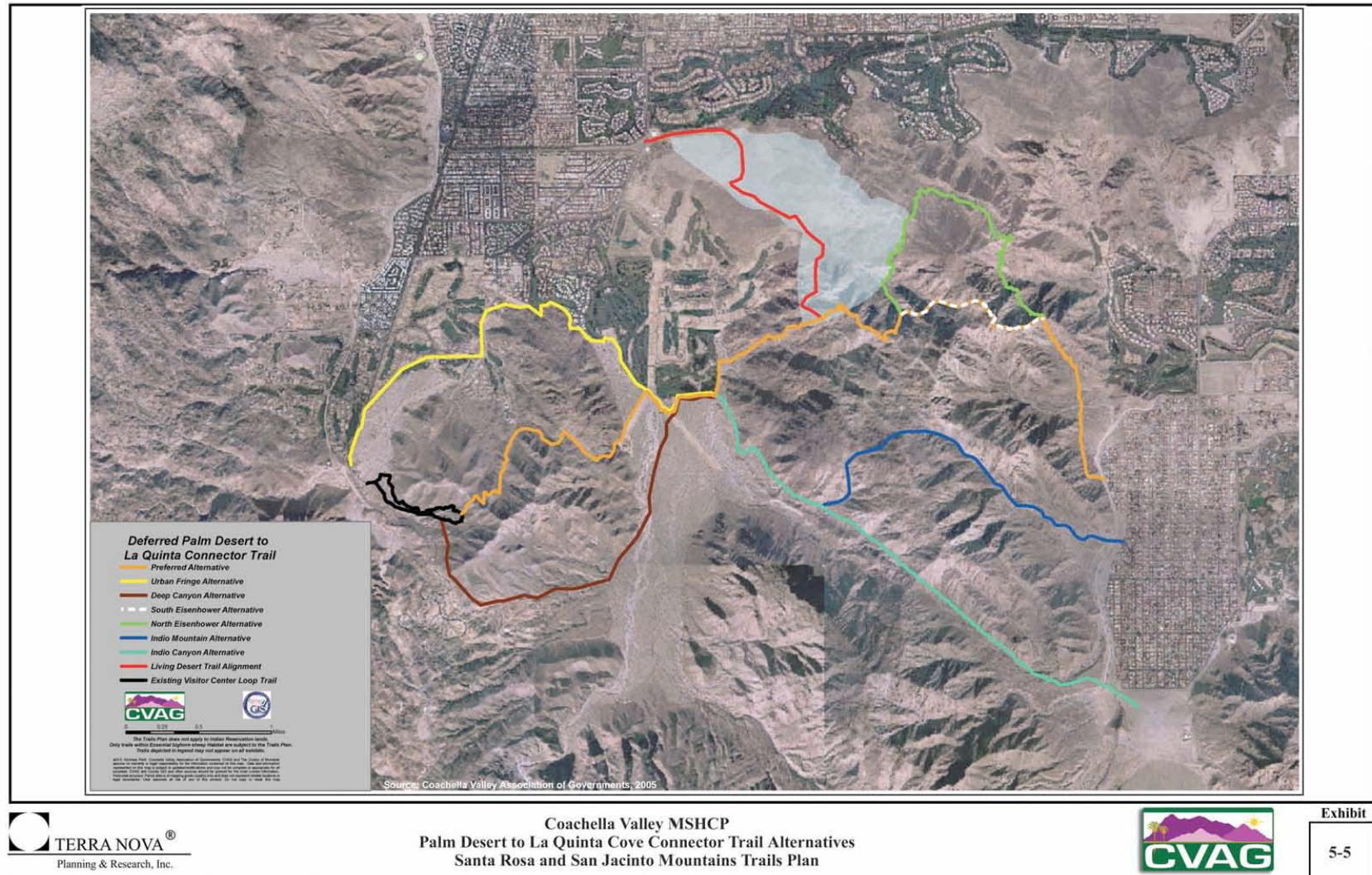


Exhibit  
 5-3

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## **Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)**

The Lead Agencies (CVAG, USFWS) worked with CDFG and BLM to address issues of sheep protection as well as concerns raised by trail users regarding restrictions on trail use and other elements of the Trails Plan. The Proposed Trails Plan incorporates aspects of the alternatives analyzed in the initial Draft EIR/EIS (November 2004). The description of the Proposed Trails Plan is presented in Section 7.3.3.2 of the Plan, and Section 2.5.7.3 of this Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS. Trails Plan alternatives are described in Section 2.11.1. (See Table 2-11 in Section 2.11.1 for a comparison of the primary elements of the three alternatives.)

## **Rationale for Proposed Trails Plan**

The approach to trails management is one of Adaptive Management, where research and monitoring is placed as the highest priority. The Proposed Trails Plan emphasizes research on the effects of trail use on bighorn sheep and monitoring of human use on trails and bighorn sheep populations.

The Proposed Trails Plan will initially focus on multi-agency scientific data gathering to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep health, behavior, habitat selection, and long-term population dynamics. The overarching goal of this research program is to obtain empirical data from the Plan Area to guide trails management. Under the Proposed Trails Plan, trails will remain open all year, with the exception of three trails which will be closed during the hot season. As part of the research program some of the trails may be subject to manipulation of trail use levels, including increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether, to determine the effect of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep. The focus of the research program will be on certain trails, the use of which may affect bighorn sheep lambing habitat; this list of trails may be adjusted as the research study design is developed.

The initial Draft EIR/EIS presented analysis that indicated trails designated as open all year would not have a potentially significant adverse affect on bighorn sheep populations, even though year-round access to trails in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat may result in some disturbance to sheep. An essential part of the Proposed Trails Plan, which serves to help avoid potentially significant impacts to bighorn sheep, is a research program that evaluates effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat. The Proposed Trails Plan incorporates measures which have been identified to address potential impacts to bighorn sheep. In light of the revisions to the Trails Plan which allow most trails to remain open all year in order for the research program to be carried out, these measures are designed to avoid or minimize impacts to bighorn sheep. Some of the measures, for example the reroute of the Art Smith and Mirage Trails, have been approved and implemented separate from

the Trails Plan to mitigate specific, immediate concerns related to bighorn sheep habitat. The other measures were identified in the initial Draft MSHCP, including monitoring, research, and annual review. The Proposed Trails Plan provides additional detail on these measures, including the addition of specific criteria to respond to declines in ewe group numbers in a given area. The Proposed Trails Plan also includes an improved discussion of how the research and monitoring data will be integrated, as they become available, into the trails management program. These measures are consistent with the Adaptive Management approach that is applied in the Proposed Trails Plan and include:

1. an intensive monitoring program that measures human use levels and bighorn sheep distribution, abundance, recruitment, survival, and cause-specific mortality;
2. establishment of thresholds for ewe group numbers with corresponding management actions to address potential declines;
3. annual review of the public use and trails management program to address potential concerns;
4. management actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery, including reroutes, fencing, and other measures associated with the Art Smith and Mirage Trails; these actions have been approved and implemented separate from the Trails Plan; and
5. undertaking other actions as part of the trails management program that would benefit or enhance Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat, e.g., removal of tamarisk in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains to make additional water sources available for use by wildlife.

These management actions are described in Section 7.3.3.2 of the Plan.

The scope of the following analysis is based upon the environmental issues determined to be relevant and potentially associated with the implementation of the Proposed Santa Rosa San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan and alternatives. These issues have been identified through the preparation of the CEQA Initial Study and Notice of Preparation (NOP), the NEPA Notice of Intent (NOI), comments received on same, subsequent environmental analysis conducted in preparing the initial Draft EIR/EIS (November 2004) and initial Final EIR/EIS (February 2006), and environmental analysis conducted in preparing this Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS. Issue areas identified as warranting impact analysis include Land Use Compatibility; Biological Resources; Cultural Resources; Parks, Trails and Recreation; and Visual and Scenic Resources.

The issue areas of Transportation, Traffic, and Circulation; Soils and Geology; Mineral, Energy, and Timber Resources; Agricultural Lands and Activities; Hydrology and Water Quality; Air

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Quality; Noise; Utilities/Public Services and Facilities; Socio-Economic Resources; Environmental Justice and Children; Hazardous and Toxic Wastes; Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (a BLM designation); Wilderness; and Wild and Scenic Rivers were considered in the NOP, NOI, and Section 3 of this EIR/EIS. These issue areas did not warrant further analysis because impacts would be negligible or the issue area is not applicable to the Trails Plan.

Currently, trails and trail use restrictions are imposed through a variety of permits and agreements entered into by the agency managing these lands. Conditions these agencies have imposed include: restriction of motorized off-road vehicles, keeping dogs on a leash and prohibiting them from certain areas, restrictions on certain types of uses, and limiting access during sensitive periods or seasons.

*Table 2-11* in Section 2.11.1 highlights the major elements of each of the three Trails Plan alternatives developed for consideration and analysis. *Table 5-1* below presents a side-by-side comparison of management prescriptions for specific trails where there is a difference between alternatives. Specific trails that would be managed the same under all alternatives (i.e., open year-round) are not addressed in the table. Where applicable, limitations on trail use between January 1 and June 30 coincide with the lambing season for bighorn sheep. Where applicable, limitations on trail use from June 15 through September 30 coincide with the hot season when bighorn sheep require access to water sources.

For the ease of the reader, Trail Alternative names have been changed as follows:

<b>Initial EIR/EIS Alternative Name</b>	<b>Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS Alternative Name</b>
Alternative A	Deleted
Alternative B	Deleted
Revised Alternative B	Alternative A, (Proposed Trails Plan/ Preferred Alternative)
Alternative C	Alternative B
Alternative D	Alternative C

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**TABLE 5-1**  
**Comparison of Management Prescriptions for Specific Trails**

<b>Trail Name</b>	<b>Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Alternative B</b>	<b>No Action Alternative (Alternative C)</b>
<b>West of Palm Canyon</b>			
North Lykken	Open year-round; permit required year-round north of Desert Riders Park	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Skyline	Open year-round; permit required year-round	Closed January 1-June 30	Open year-round
South Lykken	Open year-round	Closed January 1-June 30	Open year-round
<b>South Palm Springs</b>			
Araby	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Shannon	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Berns	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Garstin	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Clara Burgess	Open year-round; permit required year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Hahn Buena Vista	Open year-round; permit required year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Goat Trails (excluding portion on Indian Reservation)	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Eagle Canyon (excluding portion on Indian Reservation)	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Wild Horse	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Thielman	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Dry Wash	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30 east of Vandeventer connector; open year-round west of connector	Open year-round
Upper Dunn Road (Pinyon to Dry Wash)	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
<b>Cathedral City / Rancho Mirage</b>			
Lower Dunn Road <sup>2</sup>	Open year-round; permit required year-round from second BLM gate to Dry Wash	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Cathedral Canyon	Open year-round; permit required year-round south of two legs intersection	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round

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**TABLE 5-1 (cont.)**

<b>Trail Name</b>	<b>Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Alternative B</b>	<b>No Action Alternative (Alternative C)</b>
Mirage (Bump and Grind) <sup>3</sup>	Open year-round; closure and removal of segment above intersection with Hopalong Cassidy Trail	Closed June 15-September 30 within Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve	Closed June 15- September 30 within Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve
<b>Palm Desert / Indian Wells</b>			
Art Smith	Open year-round east of intersection with Hopalong Cassidy Trail; permit required on remaining segment October 1-June 14; closed west of Hopalong Cassidy Trail intersection June 15- September 30	Open year-round east of intersection with Hopalong Cassidy Trail; remaining segment closed January 1- September 30	Open year-round, except segment within Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve closed June 15-September 30
<b>La Quinta</b>			
Bear Creek Canyon	Open year-round north of intersection with Bear Creek Oasis Trail; permit required south of intersection October 1-June 14; closed south of intersection June 15- September 30	Open year-round north of Section 13/24 boundary; closed south of Section 13/24 boundary January 1- September 30	Open year-round
Bear Creek Oasis	Permit required October 1- June 14; closed June 15- September 30	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Boo Hoff	Open year round; permit required year-round except La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla segment	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
Guadalupe	Open year-round; permit required year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round
La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla	Open year-round	Closed January 1-September 30	Open year-round

- Number of available permits for 11 trails or trail segments identified in this column as subject to the permit system would be unlimited. All trails under the Proposed Trails Plan would be subject to manipulations of use—increases, decreases, or prohibitions altogether—as part of the research program, though initial focus of the research program would be on the 11 trails or trail segments subject to the permit system, plus the Goat Trails and Eagle Canyon Trail.
- A portion of Lower Dunn Road is currently closed to public access where it crosses private lands in Section 5, T5S R5E; permits would not be issued for use of this segment.
- Closure and removal of the upper segment of the Mirage Trail is at the discretion of California Department of Fish and Game, and not subject to decisions made through the Trails Plan.

## **5.2 Land Use Compatibility for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan**

### **5.2.1 Introduction and Background**

For a discussion regarding background information relevant to the analysis of Land Use, please refer to Section 4.2.1.

### **5.2.2 Thresholds of Significance/Criteria for Determining Significance for CEQA Analysis**

The Trails Plan alternatives would have a significant effect on land use and planning if they:

- (a) Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the proposed Plan (including but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.
- (b) Possibly conflict with the objectives of federal, regional, state, local or tribal land use plans, policies or controls.
- (c) Physically divide an established community.
- (d) Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan (see Section 4.9 of this EIR/EIS).

### **5.2.3 Land-Use-Related Project Impacts**

#### **Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)**

The Proposed Trails Plan is consistent with the Final Recirculated MSHCP and provides a consistent process and guidelines for the development of new trails and associated facilities. The Proposed Trails Plan does not conflict with any plans adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect. The Proposed Trails Plan includes new trails, which are in proximity to private, developed lands. To avoid conflicts with any applicable land use plans, these trails have been carefully sited to largely stay within public lands and/or rights of way.

Both the identified alignments and corridors associated with the proposed Perimeter Trail system have been designed to take into account and to accommodate existing and planned Development. Beneficial impacts associated with the proposed perimeter trail system include improved access for residents in the vicinity to this trail system that would extend from Palm Springs to La Quinta

and the vicinity of Martinez Canyon. To avoid conflicts with any applicable land use plans, these trails have been carefully sited to largely stay within public lands and/or rights of way.

The development of the Proposed Trails Plan has involved close coordination with local jurisdictions and state and federal agencies to assure that the Proposed Trails Plan is consistent and compatible with the objectives of local, state, regional, federal agencies and tribal land use plans, policies, and controls for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. For example, BLM and CDFG would apply the prescriptions of the Proposed Trails Plan to their lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. Based upon the coordinated and integrated nature of the Proposed Trails Plan, impacts to federal, state, regional, local, or tribal land use plans, policies, or controls are considered to be less than significant.

The Proposed Trails Plan also does not result in the physical separation of a community. Most of the trail alignments within the Proposed Trails Plan are outside currently developed areas and do not intrude into existing or planned urban development.

This Proposed Trails Plan does not conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan.

Proposals to construct perimeter trails and other new trails will be deferred until the initial phase of the monitoring and research program has been completed. This deferral will ensure that trail conditions (e.g., use levels) are as consistent as possible once the research and monitoring programs are initiated. The Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail would be dependent upon results of research about the effects on PBS, including the impacts on captive bighorn sheep. If impacts to native and/or captive breeding populations could result as determined through the research program described in Element 2 and Feasible mitigation measures cannot be implemented to reduce this impact, then all or a portion of this trail will not be constructed. At the end of the research program, the best available science will be used to make the determination as to the potential for impacts. Subsequent CEQA and/or NEPA analysis of the connector trail will also be conducted.

In consultation and coordination with affected jurisdictions, a preferred alignment has been identified for the Palm Desert to La Quinta (PDLQ) Connector Trail. This preferred alignment would begin at the interpretive loop trail southeast of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center and traverse to the northwest portion of La Quinta Cove. The trail would largely remain below ridgelines. The trail alignment was delineated and refined to take advantage of intervening terrain to minimize visibility between the trail and sheep pens at the Bighorn Institute.

The alignment passes south of the Canyons at Bighorn gated community and CVWD reservoirs serving this development. The alignment proceeds easterly and descends onto the west side of the Deep Canyon Wash, south of another CVWD reservoir. The trail then proceeds northeasterly along a CVWD flood control levee and easterly along the southern edge of the Ironwood Country Club golf course development. At the foothills the trail proceeds north and then easterly directly into the foothills along the "South Eisenhower Mountain" alignment, until it reaches the east-facing mountains and foothills in the northwest portion of the La Quinta Cove. The final leg of this alignment runs southerly along the east-facing slope and descends onto flood control lands located along the toe of slope. The Proposed Trails Plan also identifies a preliminary trail alignment and corridor for an intermediate access trail beginning on Portola Avenue in Palm Desert just north of *The Living Desert*.

The Proposed Trails Plan (Section 7 of the Draft MSHCP) includes alternative alignments for the PDLQ Trail (see Figure 5-5 for a depiction of these alignments). The Urban Fringe Alignment of the PDLQ trail from the Visitor Center interpretive loop trail to Deep Canyon could result in a significant impact because it could physically divide an established community for CEQA analysis purposes. This alignment proceeds north from the Visitor Center along the northern edge of Dead Indian Wash and the conservation buffer for the Bighorn Institute. The alignment passes through residential areas, the golf course, and private open space portions of the Canyons of Bighorn. The trail would then proceed north along the west-facing slope of the foothills and also adjacent to golf course and residences, then along a local drainage and east along the toe of slope, where it would pass behind and through residential development areas of Ironwood Country Club. The trail would then proceed southeast through planned and current development under construction on the extreme southern portion of the Ironwood property, to the CVWD protective levee. This alignment passes through at least two private gated communities, with golf course improvements. It would also require a public easement across private lands, private roads, and possibly golf courses to complete an alignment. This alignment would have a significant adverse impact on land use for CEQA analysis purposes.

The Deep Canyon alignment proceeds south from the Visitor Center interpretive loop trail, then east and north through UC lands in Deep Canyon, utilizing substantially more University lands than the preferred alignment. Public access to these lands is not allowed in order to provide an undisturbed setting for scientific research. Development of a trail on these lands would conflict with the prohibition of access and could adversely affect ongoing research. Hence, this alignment could have a significant adverse impact on land use for CEQA analysis purposes.

### **Trails Plan Alternative B**

Same as the Proposed Trails Plan.

### **Trails Plan Alternative C (No Action Alternative)**

Similar to Alternatives A and B, the No Action Alternative does not involve any impacts to land use due to nature of existing trails.

#### **5.2.4 Land-Use-Related Mitigation Measures**

While the impacts associated with the proposed perimeter trail system and the preferred alignment for the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail are determined to be less than significant, construction will only proceed after further research on sheep/trail user interactions is completed and additional environmental review is conducted. The only potentially significant adverse impacts for land use for CEQA analysis purposes would result from the Urban Fringe and Deep Canyon alignments of the new PDLQ Trail. No feasible mitigation has been identified for these impacts. The Urban Fringe alignment crosses golf course and residential development within the Canyons at Bighorn private gated community. This poses significant and potential compatibility and security issues. Impacts associated with the Deep Canyon alignment are unavoidable except by rerouting the trail to substantially reduce encroachment. The preferred alignment addresses and avoids these impacts.

#### **5.2.5 Levels of Significance after Mitigation for CEQA Analysis**

The only potentially significant adverse impacts for CEQA analysis purposes for land use would result from the Urban Fringe and Deep Canyon alignments of the new PDLQ Trail. As no feasible mitigation has been identified for these impacts, the level of significance would be the same as described in Section 5.2.2.

### **5.3 Biological Resources and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan**

#### **5.3.1 Introduction and Background**

The primary biological concern of trail use is the potential disturbance in Essential Peninsular bighorn sheep Habitat. The discussion below primarily addresses potential impacts to bighorn sheep; a brief discussion of potential impacts to the desert slender salamander is also included. In certain trail areas, low densities of desert tortoises are known or could be expected. Site-specific surveys for tortoise prior to construction of new trails or rerouting of existing trails would be required (see Section 4.4 of the Plan). Significant impacts to other proposed Covered Species addressed in the MSHCP are not anticipated from trail construction or use.

### **5.3.2 Thresholds of Significance/Criteria for Determining Significance for CEQA Analysis**

The Trails Plan and the Alternatives would have a significant effect on biological resources from a CEQA analysis standpoint if they:

- a. Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or indirectly, or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a Covered Species or candidate, sensitive, or special status species (including species listed as threatened or endangered) in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFG or USFWS.
- b. Have a substantial adverse effect on any wetlands, riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations or by the CDFG or the USFWS.
- c. Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means.
- d. Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites
- e. Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance.
- f. Conflict with the provisions of any adopted habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, or other approved local, regional or state habitat conservation plan.

### **5.3.3 Biological-Resource-Related Project Impacts**

#### **5.3.3.1 Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)**

##### **Trails Management Program Element 1: Trails Open All Year**

Certain trails within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would be available for year-round non-motorized use subject to annual review and modification as described in Element 7 below. As part of the research program, some of these trails may be subject to manipulation of trail use levels—including increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether—to determine the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep. Selected trails that would be the initial focus of the research program are listed in Element 2 of the Proposed Trails Plan.

*Exhibits 5-1 through 5-5* depict the elements of the Proposed Trails Plan. These figures show the Trails Plan area—the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area—in sections from the west (*Exhibit 5-1* in the Palm Springs area) to east (*Exhibit 5-4* in the La Quinta area). *Exhibit 5-5* depicts the preferred and alternate alignments of the deferred Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail. The figures include Peninsular bighorn sheep Essential Habitat, the existing trails that would be open all year, and new trails that would be approved under the Plan. *Exhibits 5-1, 5-2, 5-3, and 5-4* depict trails that would be subject to the self-issue permit program described in Element 3—these are also trails that would be the focus of the research program described in Element 2 (although as noted in Section 2.5.7.3, all trails could be subject to the research program)—and trails that would be subject to the hot season closure described in Element 4. *Exhibit 5-4* depicts trails that were subject to actions undertaken separate from the Trails Plan (reroutes, new trail construction, trail closures) and located between the Art Smith trailhead in Palm Desert and the lower Mirage Trail in Rancho Mirage (see also Figure 7-15 in the Plan). As previously indicated, these specific management actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery have already been initiated.

A clear cause-and-effect link between trail use and reduced bighorn sheep fitness (defined as survival and reproduction) and population levels has not been established by the current body of research and analysis. Studies of appropriate duration and design have not been attempted such that they could conclusively establish this link. Nonetheless, the scientific literature does provide some support for the premise that recreational use of sensitive bighorn sheep habitat (particularly during lambing and hot seasons) may negatively affect bighorn sheep (Horesji 1976; Graham 1980; Stemp 1983; Miller and Smith 1985; Etchberger et al. 1989; Krausman et al. 2001; Papouchis et al. 2001). Researchers have determined that, under certain circumstances, human recreation may temporarily displace bighorn sheep, disrupt foraging which may reduce nutrient acquisition, and cause uncertain levels of stress. However, uncertainty remains where the long-term effects on bighorn sheep populations are concerned. In light of this lack of a causative link, the Proposed Trails Plan emphasizes research and monitoring programs to evaluate the impacts of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep, and proposes standards to reduce any potential future impacts to below a level of significance for CEQA analysis purposes.

The initial Draft EIR/EIS presented analysis indicating that trails designated as open all year would not have a potentially significant adverse affect on bighorn sheep populations, even though year-round access to trails in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat may result in disturbance to sheep. An essential part of the Proposed Trails Plan is a research program to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat. The research program will focus on evaluation of the extent to which disturbance impacts bighorn sheep, particularly for those trails which affect lambing areas. This research will address the proximate response of bighorn sheep to recreation disturbance as well as broader questions about

the population-level effects and impacts to long-term persistence of bighorn sheep. As described in Section 5.1, the Proposed Trails Plan also incorporates management actions which have been identified to address potential impacts to bighorn sheep. These actions include an intensive monitoring program that measures human use levels and bighorn sheep populations, thresholds for ewe group numbers, annual review of the public use and trails management program, actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery, including reroutes, fencing, and other measures associated with the Art Smith and Mirage Trails, and other actions as part of the Management Program to benefit or enhance Peninsular bighorn sheep Habitat.

There are water sources in the vicinity of several trail segments proposed for year-round access, but sheep access to these water sources may not be impeded as long as hikers remain on these trails. Dogs would not be allowed on these trails; therefore, no disturbance from dogs would occur. In the event monitoring of trail use near water sources determines significant impedance of sheep use of these water sources, the use of these trails may be modified to assure that impedance from access to water remains less than significant. As described in Section 2.5.7.3 under Element 8, trails would be rerouted around existing wildlife water sources.

Sheep in the vicinity of some trails may occasionally delay their movement to and from habitat areas. It is not certain whether this occasional hindrance to access to Habitat areas results in habitat fragmentation. In the event monitoring of trail use determines significant impedance of sheep use of important Habitat, the use of these trails may be modified to assure that impedance from access to these Habitat areas remains less than significant. Other trails open all year are located below the toe of slope and outside documented lambing areas and water sources. Use of these trails, therefore, would have low potential for disturbance to bighorn sheep.

The use of trails on Forest Service lands is subject to existing regulations, policies and land management plans. All Forest Service trails are outside Essential bighorn sheep Habitat and no impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep would occur from their use.

## **Trails Management Program Element 2: Research Program**

The research program would evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains, and would be initiated during Plan implementation in year one, if this program has not already been initiated. This research would address the proximate response of bighorn sheep to recreation disturbance as well as broader questions about the population-level effects and impacts to long-term persistence of bighorn sheep. An element of the research program would also focus on the effects of recreational trail use on captive bighorn sheep.

This research program may require manipulation of use levels on trails. Manipulation could include increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether on one or more trails, while simultaneously monitoring responses of bighorn sheep. Manipulated trail use would be based on a research study design focused on addressing specific research questions related to the impacts of trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (see MSHCP Section 8.5.1). The research study design would determine which trails, if any, may be subject to manipulation of use levels. Data gathered from this research program would be used as the basis for future trails management decisions. Implementation of the research program would be coordinated with the Trails Management Subcommittee.

Upon completion of the research program, study results and management recommendations would be integrated into a revised public use and trails management program, using best available science, professional judgment, and wildlife management principles where study results may be less than definitive. This process will include a review of the status of the species at that time, evaluation of the scientific literature, and other available data. The initial trails research would be carried out during an approximately five-year period. The implementation of the trails research program will be initiated in Plan year one with development of a problem analysis and request for proposals. Field research may not actually begin until Plan year two. Some elements of the research may not require five years to complete. It is anticipated that interim feedback from the bighorn sheep research would also be available via annual reports which would be provided to the various management committees and the CVCC for their use. Additional description of the research program is provided in Section 8.5.1 of the MSHCP.

The subject research program set forth in Element 2 of the Proposed Trails Plan acknowledges that more information is needed about the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep populations. It will provide empirical data to inform decisions about future trails management program actions that complement Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery and provide a safety net for the trail use provided for in the Proposed Trails Plan. The program provides for the development and evaluation of specific trail use scenarios that will allow the testing of hypotheses regarding trail use and sheep response. The program also provides for annual reporting of interim research results and consideration by the Trails Management Subcommittee, the RMOC, and the CVCC, of alternative trails management actions that protect sheep and their habitat from potentially significant adverse impacts from trail use for CEQA analysis purposes. Therefore, assuming that the components of the research program are designed to preclude potentially significant adverse effects, they can be viewed as a mitigation strategy of adaptive management for potential adverse effects from trail use. Therefore, the implementation of Element 2 in conjunction with the other Trails Plan elements will reduce potential impacts below levels of significance for CEQA analysis purposes.

### **Trails Management Program Element 3: Monitoring of Trail Use and Peninsular Bighorn Sheep Population**

Element 3 would focus on evaluation of the use of recreational trails by hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers as it relates to habitat use by bighorn sheep. Among questions the Monitoring Program would address is, “*What are current year-round levels of human use on recreational trails in bighorn sheep habitat with an emphasis on use during the lambing season?*” The intent of this effort would be to increase the currently available data and information on the levels of use on various trails within the first two years of Plan implementation if this monitoring has not already been conducted or where this additional monitoring appears warranted. This monitoring effort will use a statistically valid protocol to determine human use levels (see MSHCP Section 8.8.2).

A mandatory self-issue permit system would be implemented on the trails or trail segments listed in Element 2 to provide data for the human use monitoring program. These self-issue permits would be required of all trail users on a year-round basis. They would be designed to be as user-friendly as possible and would not be limited in number. One permit would fulfill the permit requirement for groups of trail users; however, the number of individuals in the group must be recorded in the appropriate location on the permit, and the group must remain together throughout the duration of the activity on the trail(s) subject to the permit requirement. If it is anticipated that the group will separate into subgroups along the trail, a separate permit must be obtained by each subgroup. The permits would likely be available at trailhead kiosks but may also be available online and at other convenient locations, as appropriate. The permits would provide an opportunity to educate trail users about trail use rules, conservation of bighorn sheep, and safety recommendations for desert hiking. Failure to have a permit in possession when using the applicable trails may result in issuance of a citation. Compliance with the mandatory self-issue permit system, hot season closures, and other trails management prescriptions would be assessed as part of the Monitoring Program.

To date, CDFG has been conducting ongoing population surveys of Peninsular bighorn sheep on an biannual basis in cooperation with the Bighorn Institute. Population level monitoring of bighorn sheep for the Plan would increase the level and detail of information for the first seven to nine years of Plan implementation, or until the revised public use and trails management plan is implemented, to obtain data on the distribution, abundance, recruitment, survival, and cause-specific mortality of bighorn sheep in the Plan Area. Intensive monitoring would continue until the results from the research described in Element 2 are complete and the trails management plan is revised to incorporate the results and recommendations from the research. Monitoring of bighorn sheep would be a cooperative effort involving CDFG, USFWS, BLM, CVCC, and other partners, with funding provided primarily by CDFG, to the extent possible, and CVCC. This

more intensive monitoring during the initial research phase would be necessary for the Trails Management Subcommittee's annual review of bighorn sheep data (see Trails Plan Element 7). All data used in decisions regarding the public use and trails management plan would be available to the CVCC and appropriate committees, including the Trails Management Subcommittee.

The Monitoring Program is outlined in Section 8.4.7.1.1 of the MSHCP.

The monitoring program would include a mandatory self-issue permit system on selected trails covered by the Proposed Trails Plan. The self-permitting system would, in conjunction with other monitoring activities described in Element 3, provide detail on the levels and type of trail use in the study area. It would also provide information that can be used to educate and sensitize trail users to their potential impacts on sheep and sheep Habitat. The program would provide periodic documentation of trail use, provide ongoing population surveys of Peninsular bighorn sheep on an annual basis, and other data for consideration by the Trails Management Subcommittee that could result in trails management actions to protect sheep and their Habitat from significant impacts. Therefore, as part of the trails management program, the monitoring program is designed to preclude potentially significant adverse effects for CEQA analysis purposes and can be viewed as a strategy to mitigate potential adverse effects from trail use.

#### **Trails Management Plan Element 4: Hot Season Trail Closures**

Compliance with the hot season closures would be evaluated as part of the monitoring described in Element 3.

Hot season closures avoid significant impacts to sheep and their access to essential water sources during the hottest and driest times of the year. Therefore, the impacts associated with the implementation of this element are beneficial to biological resources, especially bighorn sheep, that might otherwise avoid important water sources during this period of greatest need.

#### **Trails Management Plan Element 5: Construction of New Trails**

The construction and use of new perimeter trails described in Element 5 of the Proposed Trail Plan will be a Covered Activity unless research results indicate that these trails would adversely affect bighorn sheep. Current analysis indicates that these perimeter trails would not substantially impact Peninsular bighorn sheep populations, nor result in Take. The element provides for additional research through Element 2 (described above) to further analyze impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep from recreational trail use, thereby confirming and expanding upon previous impact assessments. Proposals to construct perimeter trails and other new trails, including the

Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail, would be deferred until the initial phase of the monitoring and research program has been completed. This deferral would ensure that trail conditions (e.g., use levels) are as consistent as possible once the research and monitoring programs are initiated. Construction of these new trails could be initiated as soon as feasible, depending on funding availability and acquisition of easements or other authorizations, and completion of applicable NEPA and CEQA requirements and upon results of research and the effect upon PBS.

Future proposals for new trails on Reserve Lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area, other than the identified trails described herein, would be addressed on a case-by-case basis, subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. Such future trail proposals would require a Minor Amendment to the Plan with Wildlife Agency concurrence.

Impacts associated with deferring the construction of new trails are expected to be less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

### **Trails Management Plan Element 6: Public Awareness and Education Program**

The implementation of Element 6 of the Proposed Trails Plan will serve as a mitigation program that will further limit or reduce potential impacts of trail use on bighorn sheep. Informed and educated users will be better equipped to utilize trail facilities in a manner consistent with the conservation goals of the MSHCP. The education program will also enhance cooperation and participation in the self-permitting program of the Proposed Trails Plan by vesting users in the monitoring and management of trail use. Therefore, the implementation of Element 6 of the Proposed Trails Plan is expected to have a beneficial effect on conservation of bighorn sheep and their Habitat.

### **Trails Management Plan Element 7: Review of Trails Program**

Impacts associated with implementation of Element 7 of the Proposed Trails Plan are virtually the same as those associated with Elements 2 (research) and 3 (monitoring). Annual review and reporting of trail use and sheep effects will facilitate evaluation of progress and development of management recommendations (Adaptive Management). Compliance with and effectiveness of the hot season closures, mandatory self-issue permits, and other trail management prescriptions will also be tracked, and other new data will be evaluated. The sheep population thresholds would trigger monitoring and adaptive management actions affecting trail use and/or sheep and habitat management, consistent with the Recovery Plan. As with Elements 2, 3, and 4 of the Proposed Trails Plan, Element 7 provides a safety net whereby wildlife managers will track trail

use and sheep impacts, and incorporate thresholds that could trigger immediate action to further limit adverse effects if they occur. The implementation of this element may therefore have a beneficial effect on conservation of bighorn sheep.

### **Trails Management Plan Element 8: Rerouting and Decommissioning of Trails**

Impacts associated with deferring the rerouting, decommissioning, and removal of trails will be less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes. Evaluation would occur after the initial phase of the monitoring and research program has been completed, ensuring that trail use levels remain as consistent as possible. Rerouting and decommissioning of trails would occur following approval of a specific project by the appropriate project lead agency and these actions would have to meet NEPA and CEQA requirements. Actions regarding trails on BLM lands would not be a Covered Activity under the MSHCP, and BLM would undertake its own approval process for rerouting trails on lands it administers. Actions regarding the rerouting of trails on CDFG lands would require authorization from CDFG and would also be subject to CEQA review.

Trail rerouting would be designed to protect sensitive resource values (e.g., cultural resources, wildlife habitat, soils) where feasible. Redundant trails would be removed to reduce current impacts in these areas. Trails and trail segments on certain State lands would also be decommissioned and removed, thereby reducing trail use impacts in sensitive Habitat areas. Trails not listed as approved in the Trails Plan are unauthorized. The Trails Management Subcommittee will evaluate whether unauthorized trails will be decommissioned and removed or may be considered as potential new trails. These actions (decommissioning, rerouting and/or authorized for use) may have their own environmental consequences and will be subject to CEQA and or NEPA review before action can be taken.

### **Other Public Access Issues and Uses on Reserve Lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area**

Implementation of the Proposed Trails Plan will not have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or indirectly, or through habitat modifications, on Peninsular bighorn sheep, any other Covered Species or candidate, sensitive, or special status species (including species listed as threatened or endangered) in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFG or USFWS.

The Proposed Trails Plan will not have a substantial adverse effect on any wetlands, riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations or by the CDFG or the USFWS. The Proposed Trails Plan will also not have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean

Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means. Neither will the Proposed Trails Plan interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites.

The Proposed Trails Plan will not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance. Neither will the Proposed Trails Plan conflict with the provisions of any adopted habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, nor other approved local, regional or state habitat conservation plan.

### **Other Public Access Issues**

#### ***Cross-Country Travel***

Biological impacts would be less than significant because they would prevent potential interference with Peninsular bighorn sheep. This would result in fewer impacts than Alternative C, the No Action Alternative.

#### ***Camping***

Biological impacts would be less than significant due to camping restrictions during sensitive Peninsular bighorn sheep seasons. This would result in fewer impacts than Alternative C, the No Action Alternative.

#### ***Dogs***

Biological impacts would be less than significant due to proposed dog restrictions which would reduce potential impacts on Peninsular bighorn sheep activities.

#### ***Bicycle Restrictions***

Bicycle restrictions in sensitive areas as outlined in the Trails Management Program would result in less than significant impacts to biological resources.

#### ***Pack Stock***

Biological impacts would be less than significant due to limitations on types of pack stock. Impacts would be less than under Alternative C which would allow all types of pack stock including llamas and goats.

***Murray Hill Facilities***

Picnic tables and equestrian hitching posts at the summit of Murray Hill will be retained and are not expected to result in significant adverse impacts on biological resources in this area.

***Non-commercial, Noncompetitive Organized Group Activities***

A permit is not required for non-commercial, noncompetitive organized groups. The requirements for use of BLM lands by such groups are incorporated into the Proposed Trails Plan.

***Non-motorized Commercial Recreation Activities***

CVCC and CDFG and USFWS will develop a permit system on non-federal lands to address biological resource impacts related to these activities. Permit requirements are already in place on Federal lands to address these impacts.

***Competitive Recreation Events***

CVCC and CDFG and USFWS will develop a permit system on non-federal lands to address biological resource impacts related to these activities. Permit requirements are already in place on Federal lands to address these impacts.

***Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails***

Motorized vehicles would be prohibited as part of the Proposed Trails Plan except for maintenance and/or construction activities. Therefore, there would be less than significant impacts to biological resources.

**5.3.3.2 Trails Plan Alternative B**

**Trails Open All Year**

The following trails in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat are available for year-round non-motorized use. See Section 5.3.3.1 for an analysis of impacts regarding trails open all year.

**West of Palm Canyon**

- Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
- Museum Trail
- Picnic Table Trail

South Palm Springs

- Henderson Trail
- Alexander Trail
- Fern Canyon Trail
- Vandeventer Trail
- Dry Wash Trail west of the Dry Wash to Vandeventer Trail connector
- Dry Wash to Vandeventer Trail connector
- Palm Canyon Trail
- Indian Potrero Trail
- Potrero Canyon Trail

Cathedral City / Rancho Mirage

- Bighorn Overlook Trail
- Mirage (“Bump and Grind”) Trail below its intersection with the Hopalong Cassidy Trail

Palm Desert / Indian Wells

- Eisenhower Mountain Trail (access through *The Living Desert*)
- Art Smith Trail east of its intersection with the Hopalong Cassidy Trail
- Hopalong Cassidy Trail

La Quinta

- Bear Creek Canyon Trail in Section 13, T6S R6E

Southern Santa Rosa Mountains

- Cactus Spring Trail
- Martinez Canyon Trail

U.S. Forest Service lands

The use of trails on Forest Service lands would be subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans.

Perimeter and other new trails

Once constructed, new trails approved by the Plan would be available for year-round use

**Trails with Seasonal Limits on Use: Seasonal Trail Program**

The Seasonal Trail Program is composed of five elements: (1) prohibition of use on selected trails during the lambing season from January 1 through June 30; (2) prohibition of use on selected trails during the “hot season” from July 1 through September 30; (3) implementation of

a public awareness and education program; (4) annual review of the effectiveness of the Seasonal Trail Program and other trail management prescriptions, including results of monitoring and research; and (5) research designed to ascertain bighorn sheep response to, and any significant adverse impacts from, recreational trail use in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains.

**(1) Seasonal Trail Program Element 1: Trail Closures – Lamb Rearing Habitat**

This alternative would prohibit use of certain trails as identified in Table 10 of *Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges, California* (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2000) during the lambing season from January 1 through June 30. Human use would be significantly reduced during this period. Alternative B would avoid potential impacts to bighorn sheep from recreational use of these trails. Trail closures starting January 1 would reduce disturbance to ewes with the earliest parturition dates. The earliest born lambs have the highest survival rates and avoidance of impacts during this early time period potentially has greater benefits to Peninsular bighorn sheep than closures at the end of the lamb rearing season.

This alternative would provide a modest reduction in lambing disturbance in comparison to the Proposed Trails Plan. It would greatly reduce disturbance compared to Alternative C, which would have no restrictions on trail use.

Where additional analysis is needed to portray the impacts from Alternative B, it is provided below.

West of Palm Canyon

- North Lykken Trail
- Skyline Trail
- South Lykken Trail

Closure of the North Lykken, Skyline, and South Lykken Trails for the entirety of lambing season would reduce impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep substantially as compared to the other proposed Alternatives. As a result there would be fewer disturbances to lactating ewes and their lambs, and Habitat utilization could increase in areas traditionally used for trails. Bighorn Sheep may utilize Habitat closer to the urban edge with a reduction in trail disturbance along this linear corridor.

South Palm Springs

- Araby Trail
- Shannon Trail
- Berns Trail

- Garstin Trail
- Clara Burgess Trail
- Hahn Buena Vista Trail
- Goat Trails
- Eagle Canyon Trail
- Wild Horse Trail
- Thielman Trail
- Dry Wash Trail east of the Dry Wash to Vandeventer Trail connector
- Upper Dunn Road

Cathedral City / Rancho Mirage

- Lower Dunn Road
- Cathedral Canyon Trail
- Mirage ("Bump and Grind") Trail above its intersection with the Hopalong Cassidy Trail

Closure of the Cathedral Canyon Trail, Lower Dunn Road, and the upper part of the Mirage Trail could reduce disturbance to lambing in Cathedral and Magnesia Canyons. The Cathedral Canyon Trail goes directly through a lamb rearing area. The Lower Dunn Road climbs above the Canyon overlooking an area frequented by lactating ewes. Similarly, the upper reaches of the Mirage Trail overlook the Magnesia Canyon lamb rearing Habitat. The closure of these trails could greatly reduce impacts to ewes during the lambing period.

Palm Desert / Indian Wells

- Art Smith Trail, west of its intersection with the Hopalong Cassidy Trail
- Dead Indian Canyon Trail

La Quinta

- Bear Creek Canyon Trail south of the Section 13/24 boundary, T6S R6E
- Bear Creek Oasis Trail
- Boo Hoff Trail
- Guadalupe Trail
- La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla Trail (includes the Morrow Trail and a portion of the Boo Hoff Trail)

**(2) Seasonal Trail Program Element 2: Trail Closures – Hot Season**

This alternative would prohibit use of certain trails as identified in Table 10 of *Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges, California* (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2000) during the hot season from June 1 through September 30. Under Alternative B, 20 trails are

proposed for closure during the hot season, which would provide a greater benefit to bighorn sheep during the summer months than Alternatives A because of the greater number of trails affected. Human use would be reduced during this period. This alternative would avoid potential impacts to bighorn sheep from recreational use of these trails.

The following trails would be closed June 1 through September 30. Impact analysis is provided for each trail or group of trails.

- North Lykken Trail

There is a perennial water source above the North Lykken Trail that bighorn sheep use during the hot season. Recreation impacts to bighorn sheep are minimized when the trail is located below the areas where sheep occur (MacArthur et al. 1982, Hicks and Elder 1976, Geist 1971). Because of the location of this trail, the effects of recreation on bighorn sheep would be expected to be minimal. Closure of the North Lykken Trail during this period could reduce disturbance to watering in Tachevah Canyon. Hikers may divert up Tachevah Canyon on a spur trail after hiking north on the North Lykken Trail. Under the other alternatives this trail is open during the hot season, permitting potential disturbance at watering areas.

- Murray Hill Trail Complex

- *Araby Trail*
- *Shannon Trail*
- *Berns Trail*
- *Garstin Trail*
- *Clara Burgess Trail*
- *Hahn Buena Vista Trail*
- *Goat Trails*
- *Eagle Canyon Trail*
- *Wild Horse Trail*
- *Thielman Trail*
- *Dry Wash Trail east of the Dry Wash to Vandeventer Trail connector*

The benefits to sheep from a hot season closure in the area of this trail complex would be low since there is only one known water source in this area. There is an ephemeral water source in Eagle Canyon that during years of normal rainfall produces a couple of gallons of water per minute. During drought years there is no water in Eagle Canyon. Use of the Clara Burgess, Goat, and Eagle Canyon Trails could result in disturbance to bighorn sheep use of this water source. Lack of water is thought to be one of the factors limiting sheep expansion in this part of the

Northern Santa Rosa Mountains. This hot season closure could also result in reduced disturbance to the sheep migrating through the area.

- Dunn Road

The location of the water source near the southern segment of Dunn Road is above 4000 feet; therefore the use of this water source by sheep is unlikely due to the high elevation. The lower portion of Dunn Road, on the other hand, passes near Cathedral Canyon which provides an important source of water during both the spring and summer months. Closure of Dunn Road during the hot season would facilitate unimpeded access to this water source, thereby providing maximum protection for it compared to the other Alternatives.

- Cathedral Canyon Trail

Cathedral Canyon provides an important source of water during both the spring and summer months. Closure of the Cathedral Canyon Trail during the hot season would facilitate unimpeded access to this water source, thereby providing maximum protection for it compared to the other alternatives.

- Art Smith, Dead Indian Canyon, and Schey Trails

Two ephemeral water sources are located near the Art Smith and Dead Indian Canyon Trails and another water source is located by the Schey Trail in Cat Canyon. The closures of these three trails (two seasonally; one permanently) could reduce the disturbance to sheep watering in these areas. [Note: The portion of the Schey Trail not incorporated by the Hopalong Cassidy Trail was approved for closure and decommission separate from the Trails Plan. The western part of Dead Indian Canyon was approved for seasonal closure from January 1 through September 30 separate from the Trails Plan.] Alternative C keeps the Art Smith Trail open during the hot season. Alternative B provides maximum protection for the water sources compared to the other alternatives.

- La Quinta Cove Trails

- Bear Creek Canyon Trail south of the Section 13/24 boundary, T6S R6E
- Bear Creek Oasis Trail
- Boo Hoff Trail
- Guadalupe Trail
- La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla Trail (includes the Morrow Trail and a portion of the Boo Hoff Trail)

Closure of the Bear Creek trails during the hot season would eliminate disturbance to several sheep water sources (three ephemeral and one perennial) during this period. Closure of the Boo Hoff Trail, including its northern leg, would have minimal benefits to sheep watering because of the apparent absence of water sources in this area. Closure of the Guadalupe Trail could prevent disturbance to an ephemeral sheep water source (shown in the Sikes Act Plan but subsequently not found in 2001 and 2002 by BLM biologists) in this canyon during the hot season. Compared to other alternatives, Alternative B offers greater protection to sheep water sources in this area because it includes more trails in mandatory closures.

- Southern Santa Rosa Mountains

No closures during the hot season are proposed along the Martinez Canyon and Cactus Spring Trails. A total of six water sources (three ephemeral and three improved) occur near these trails and could be disturbed by trail users. One perennial and two ephemeral water sources also lie near the trail to Jack Miller's cabin. The water sources could also be disturbed by trail users who take this spur off the Cactus Spring Trail. Due to the light use of these trails and their remote location, disturbance to these water sources is likely to be quite infrequent; even in the absence of a closure, disturbance would probably be rare.

**(3) Seasonal Trail Program Element 3: Public Awareness and Education Program**

This program would increase the likelihood of trail users complying with the Seasonal Trail Program, thereby reducing the adverse impacts to sheep.

**(4) Seasonal Trail Program Element 4: Review of Seasonal Trail Program and Other Management Prescriptions**

All biological resources would benefit from review of the Seasonal Trail Program and other management prescription effectiveness. Monitoring of management actions and review provides management agencies with information with which to modify or adapt management actions. The intent of the trails management plan is to facilitate recovery of bighorn sheep while providing recreational opportunities for the public. Reviewing the program would enable managers to evaluate how well these goals are being accomplished.

**(5) Seasonal Trail Program Element 5: Research**

There is uncertainty regarding the long-term effects of trail use on bighorn sheep populations. This alternative includes research to address these uncertainties. The MSHCP Sections 7 and 8 describe the research program.

## **Additional Management Actions**

### ***Closure of Certain Trails to Bicycles***

Biological impacts would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan.

### ***New Trail Construction - Perimeter Trails***

New trails constructed under this alternative would be the same as the Proposed Trails Plan with one exception: the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail would not be constructed. Biological impacts for the perimeter trails would be the same as for the Proposed Trails Plan.

### ***Trail Rerouting***

Trails to be rerouted under this alternative would be the same as Proposed Trails Plan. Hence, biological impacts for trail rerouting would be the same as for the Proposed Trails Plan.

### ***Trail Decommission and Removal***

Trails to be decommissioned and removed would be the same as the Proposed Trails Plan. Hence, biological impacts for trail decommission and removal would be the same as for the Proposed Trails Plan.

### ***Trailheads***

Trailheads would be the same as for the Proposed Trails Plan. Impacts to bighorn sheep would be avoided by utilizing existing trailheads wherever possible. No impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep would likely occur from use of or improvements to existing trailheads.

## **Other Public Access Issues**

### ***Cross-Country Travel***

Biological impacts would be less than those described for the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative C because Alternative B would prohibit cross-country travel year-round. Since off-trail hiking may have a greater effect on bighorn sheep than trail use (Papouchis et al. 2001, Hicks and Elder 1979), the year-round restriction would help ensure that potential effects on bighorn sheep throughout the year are reduced.

### ***Camping***

Biological impacts would be similar as described for the Proposed Trails Plan, except that under Alternative B the restriction would be mandatory for the entire year rather than during the lamb rearing and hot seasons only.

***Dogs***

The adverse biological impacts to sheep would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan except in the Andreas Hills area where no dog use area would be designated. Potential disturbances from dogs would therefore be reduced near Andreas Hills.

***Pack Stock***

Biological impacts would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan. Impacts would be less than under Alternative C which would allow all types of pack stock including llamas and goats.

***Murray Hill Facilities***

Removal of these facilities would not likely discourage use of Murray Hill. Impacts would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan.

***Non-commercial, Noncompetitive Organized Group Activities***

Under Alternative B, impacts from such groups would not occur when the seasonal trail closures are in effect. Biological impacts would be less than those described for other alternatives because of the closure.

***Non-motorized Commercial Recreation Activities***

Under Alternative B, impacts from such activities would not occur when the seasonal trail closures are in effect. Such activities, typically hiking, equestrian, or mountain bike groups, would be prohibited on 22 trails from January 1 to June 30 and on 20 trails from June 1 to September 30, reducing impacts to lambing and watering. In addition, commercial use permits would be issued in compliance with NEPA, ESA, and other applicable environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Biological analyses would be completed on a case-by-case basis and would not be a part of this alternative.

***Competitive Recreation Events***

Under Alternative B, competitive recreation events would be prohibited year-round in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat, preventing any impacts to bighorn sheep from such events. Under the Proposed Trails Plan, the impacts could be slightly more than Alternative B because they allow the use of paved roads within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat for such events. Impacts under Alternative C could be greater because there is no prohibition of competitive recreation events in bighorn sheep habitat.

***Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails***

Motorized-vehicles would be prohibited on trails except for administrative purposes such as maintenance and construction of trails when the Seasonal Trail Program is not in effect. This

prohibition means that for many trails motorized activity related to maintenance and construction could not occur from January 1 through September 30, thereby avoiding impacts to bighorn sheep during the lambing and hot seasons.

### **5.3.3.3 Trails Plan Alternative C (No Action Alternative)**

#### **Trails Open All Year**

All trails within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would be available for year-round non-motorized use. The impacts of year-round use on each trail are discussed below.

- West of Palm Canyon
  - Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
  - Museum Trail
  - Picnic Table Trail

Biological impacts would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B.

#### ***North Lykken Trail***

Biological impacts related to use of the segment south of Desert Riders Park would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan. Use of the trail north of Desert Riders Park on a year-round basis increases the potential for disturbance to watering in Tachevah Canyon during the summer months.

#### ***Skyline Trail***

Keeping this trail open year-round may impede recovery efforts in this area.

#### ***South Lykken Trail***

Biological impacts would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan.

- South Palm Springs
  - Araby Trail
  - Shannon Trail
  - Berns Trail
  - Garstin Trail
  - Henderson Trail
  - Alexander Trail
  - Goat Trails

- Eagle Canyon Trail
- Wild Horse Trail
- Clara Burgess Trail
- Hahn Buena Vista Trail
- Fern Canyon Trail
- Vandeventer Trail
- Dry Wash Trail
- Upper Dunn Road
- Dry Wash to Vandeventer Trail connector
- Thielman Trail
- Palm Canyon Trail
- Indian Potrero Trail
- Potrero Canyon Trail

Use of these trails on a year-round basis would create potential disturbance to sheep throughout the year. Impacts in this area from year-round use would not be as great as in other areas within the range because of the limited water sources, quality of forage, and lack of lamb rearing areas. Impacts would be greater under this Alternative than under the other alternatives because of the lack of seasonal restrictions. Allowing non-motorized trail use on the upper end of Dunn Road would likely have very little impact on bighorn sheep because of the high elevation (see impact analysis under the Proposed Trails Plan).

- Cathedral City / Rancho Mirage

#### ***Lower Dunn Road***

Allowing year-round use on lower Dunn Road between the second BLM gate and Dry Wash would impact bighorn sheep during the lambing season (see impact analysis for the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B). Cathedral Canyon is immediately adjacent to the Lower Dunn Road and provides excellent lambing habitat with a long history of use.

#### ***Cathedral Canyon Trail***

Cathedral Canyon provides excellent lambing habitat with a long history of use. Leaving Cathedral Canyon Trail open year-round would generate potential impacts year-round to bighorn sheep by allowing recreation during the lamb rearing and watering seasons. Impacts would be greater than under the other Alternatives which all restrict use of this trail to varying degrees.

#### ***Bighorn Overlook Trail***

This trail remains close to the toe of slope and does not traverse occupied sheep habitat. Year-round use of this trail is not anticipated to impact bighorn sheep. On rare occasions sheep may

encounter people here. Since this trail is also open year round under the other alternatives, impacts would be the same for all alternatives.

***Mirage (“Bump and Grind”) Trail outside the Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve***

The portion of the Mirage Trail outside the Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve occupies the lower elevations of the mountains in this area, from about 300 to 600 feet above sea level. Year-round use of this segment of the trail would result in minimal impacts to bighorn sheep given the distance from occupied habitat and intervening terrain that limits the viewshed. On the other hand, the upper segment of the Mirage Trail within the Ecological Reserve, which is available for use from October 1 through June 14, leads to a flat promontory overlooking sensitive lamb rearing Habitat in Magnesia Canyon. In addition, there are numerous unauthorized trails that take off from this flat overlook across ridges to Ramon and Bradley Peak. Use of these unauthorized trails would put hikers well above occupied sheep habitat, which is known to increase flight distance and cardiac response in bighorn sheep (MacArthur et al. 1979, 1982). Allowing seasonal use of the upper part of the Mirage Trail, therefore, would increase the potential for disturbance during lamb rearing. Impacts under this Alternative would be greater than the other Alternatives which all restrict use of the upper trail segment to varying degrees.

- Palm Desert / Indian Wells
  - Art Smith Trail outside the Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve
  - Dead Indian Canyon
  - Eisenhower Mountain Trail (access through The Living Desert)

Allowing use of the Dead Indian Canyon and Art Smith Trails on a year-round basis would increase disturbance during the lamb rearing and watering seasons (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B). Use of the Eisenhower Mountain Trail on a year-round basis could create some minor disturbance to sheep, but is unlikely to impact lamb rearing and watering as these activities have not been detected in this vicinity. Alternative C would result in greater impacts on Dead Indian Canyon and Art Smith Trails than the other alternatives which require restrictions on use of these trails. Impacts would be the same for all the alternatives on the Eisenhower Mountain Trail, because the stipulations are the same.

- La Quinta
  - Bear Creek Canyon Trail
  - Bear Creek Oasis Trail
  - Boo Hoff Trail
  - Guadalupe Trail
  - La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla Trail (includes the Morrow Trail and a portion Boo Hoff Trail)

Allowing use of these trails year-round would create the potential to disturb sheep during the lamb rearing and watering seasons. Impacts would be greater than under the other alternatives which place various restrictions on these trails, except for the La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla Trail. Impacts could be particularly acute on the Bear Creek Oasis Trail which has both lambing and watering resources, as well as on the Boo Hoff Trail, the northern leg of which bisects ewe habitat.

- Southern Santa Rosa Mountains
  - Cactus Spring Trail
  - Martinez Canyon Trail

Allowing use of these trails year-round would create the potential to disturb sheep during the lamb rearing and watering seasons. Impacts would be same as described under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B.

- U.S. Forest Service lands
  - All trails

Since these trails are also open year-round under the other alternatives the impacts would be the same.

## **Additional Management Actions**

### ***Trails with Seasonal Limits on Use***

Trails in Magnesia Spring and Carrizo Canyon Ecological Reserves are currently closed to public use from June 15 to September 30 pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations. Affected trails are identified below:

- Art Smith Trail (segment)
- Mirage ("Bump and Grind") Trail (segment)
- Carrizo Canyon Trail

### ***Closure of Certain Trails to Bicycles***

Alternative C would lead to slightly more impact to sheep than the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B which close BLM portions of several trails in the Murray Hill area.

### ***New Trail Construction***

No new trails are included in Alternative C. Proposals for new trails would be addressed on a case-by-case basis. .

***Trail Rerouting***

No trail reroutes are proposed in Alternative C, so existing impacts would continue (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan).

***Trail Decommission and Removal***

No trail decommissioning is proposed in Alternative C so existing impacts would continue (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan).

***Trailheads***

Impacts to bighorn sheep would be avoided by utilizing existing trailheads whenever possible. No adverse impacts to biological resources are anticipated.

**Other Public Access Issues**

***Cross-Country Travel***

Allowing cross-country travel year-round within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains would result in disturbance to bighorn sheep (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B for a more complete analysis). The extent and location of impacts could vary widely depending on where people travel cross-country. Potential impacts could be greater than under the other alternatives because they impose restrictions on cross-country travel.

***Camping***

Allowing camping year-round within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains would result in disturbance to bighorn sheep (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B for more complete analysis). The extent and location of impacts could vary widely depending on where people camp. Potential impacts could be greater than under the other alternatives because they impose restrictions on camping.

***Dogs***

Allowing dogs year-round within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains would result in serious disturbance to bighorn sheep because sheep see dogs as predators (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B). Impacts would be significant and unmitigated.

***Pack Stock***

Allowing all types of animals for pack stock, especially goats, within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains may impact bighorn sheep through disease

transmission, competition for water and forage, and disturbance (see discussion under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B for more complete analysis).

***Murray Hill Facilities***

Biological impacts would be the same as described for the Proposed Trails Plan because the facilities would be retained on Murray Hill.

***Non-commercial, Noncompetitive Organized Group Activities***

Noncommercial, noncompetitive organized group activities are allowed under Alternative C consistent with year-round use of trails by individuals (except in Ecological Reserves where seasonal closures occur). Therefore, biological impacts would be the same as previously described. Determinations of whether a Special Recreation Permit is required for use of BLM-managed lands by such groups would be made on a case-by-case basis. Where such permits are required, they would be issued after NEPA and ESA requirements are met. Stipulations conditioning use by these groups may reduce disturbances to bighorn sheep during the lamb rearing and watering seasons.

***Non-motorized Commercial Recreation Activities***

Non-motorized commercial recreation activities may be permitted under Alternative C subject to current permitting processes, and existing regulations, policies, and land management plans, as applicable. Where permits are required for commercial activities (e.g., commercial use of BLM lands), they would be issued after NEPA, CEQA, and ESA requirements are met. Stipulations conditioning such activities may reduce disturbances to bighorn sheep during the lamb rearing and watering seasons.

***Competitive Recreation Events***

Competitive recreation events may be permitted under Alternative C subject to current permitting processes, and existing regulations, policies, and land management plans, as applicable. Where permits are required for competitive events (e.g., competitive activities on BLM lands), they would be issued after NEPA, CEQA, and ESA requirements are met. Stipulations conditioning such events may reduce disturbances to bighorn sheep during the lamb rearing and watering seasons.

***Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails***

Motorized-vehicle use of trails for trail maintenance and construction would be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Impacts to bighorn sheep could be greater than under the other alternatives because they impose restrictions on such activities when the Seasonal Trail Program is in effect.

#### **5.3.4 Biological Mitigation for Impacts**

##### ***Summary of Proposed Trails Plan Mitigation Program Associated with the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan***

As noted in Section 5.3.1, the Proposed Trails Plan presented in the initial Draft MSHCP (November 2004) took a precautionary approach towards trails management in Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat. In response to public comments, CVAG and USFWS (the Lead Agencies) worked with CDFG and BLM. Management actions necessary to mitigate potential adverse effects to sheep in light of current and projected trail use in sheep habitat within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area were identified. Some of these management concerns, including a reroute of the Art Smith and Mirage Trails, were addressed by a separate action outside of the MSHCP approval process.

In response to this further consideration and as a part of the overall mitigation program, the approach to trails management was revised in the initial Final MSHCP (February 2006) and carried forward in this Final Recirculated Trails Plan to one of Adaptive Management, where research and monitoring is placed as the highest priority. The Proposed Trails Plan emphasizes research on the effects of trail use on bighorn sheep and monitoring of human use on trails and bighorn sheep populations.

The Proposed Trails Plan will initially focus on multi-agency scientific data gathering to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep health, habitat selection, and long-term population dynamics. The overarching goal of this research program is to obtain empirical data from the Plan Area to guide trails management. The research and monitoring program were elements of the initial Draft MSHCP, initial Final Plan, and remain elements in this Final Recirculated Plan. Under the Proposed Trails Plan, trails will remain open all year, with the exception of three trails, which will be closed during the hot season. As part of the research program, some of the trails may be subject to manipulation of trail use levels, including increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether, to determine the effect of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep. The focus of the research program will be on certain trails, the use of which may affect bighorn sheep lambing habitat; this list of trails may be adjusted as the research study design is developed.

The Proposed Trails Plan incorporates management actions which have been identified to anticipate, address and mitigate potential impacts to bighorn sheep before they reach levels of significance. These actions are consistent with the Adaptive Management approach that is applied in the Proposed Trails Plan and include:

1. an intensive monitoring program that measures human use levels and bighorn sheep distribution, abundance, recruitment, survival, and cause-specific mortality;
2. establishment of thresholds for ewe group numbers with corresponding management actions to address potential declines;
3. annual review of the public use and trails management program to address potential concerns;
4. management actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery, including reroutes, fencing, and other measures associated with the Art Smith and Mirage Trails; these actions have been approved and implemented separate from the Trails Plan; and
5. undertaking other actions as part of the trails management program that would benefit or enhance Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat, e.g., removal of tamarisk in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains to make additional water sources available for use by wildlife.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 1: Trails Open All Year***

The initial Draft EIR/EIS presented analysis indicating that trails designated as open all year would not have a potentially significant adverse affect on bighorn sheep populations, even though year-round access to trails in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat may result in some disturbance to sheep. An essential part of the Proposed Trails Plan, which serves to help avoid potentially significant impacts to bighorn sheep, is a research program that evaluates effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat. The Proposed Trails Plan's intensive monitoring program will measure human use levels and bighorn sheep populations, thresholds for ewe group numbers and adult mortality rates, annual review of the public use and trails management program, actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery, including reroutes, fencing, and other measures associated with the Art Smith and Mirage Trails, and other actions as part of the Management Program to benefit or enhance Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat.

In accord with Recovery Task 1.2.2. of the bighorn sheep Recovery Plan, if in the year under review, the number of ewes within a ewe group or subgroup drops below 15, the Trails Management Subcommittee and researchers would meet and review all data regarding the decline and the causes thereof. Mitigation actions may include immediate trail closures if circumstances warrant such action in order to assure that adverse impacts do not rise to the level of significance. Subsequently, the long-term management actions needed to address the decline may include but would not be limited to trail rerouting, adjustments in use levels, enforcement actions, and trail closures. If data indicate that a ewe group or subgroup population has dropped

to fewer than five individuals, immediate action to close associated trails shall be taken. The Wildlife Agencies, BLM, a representative of the CVCC, and researchers would meet and confer as soon as possible, but in not more than thirty days, to review the data and to identify appropriate measures to be taken regarding trail use in the area that may affect the ewe group or subgroup.

So long as hikers remain on designated trails, sheep access to water sources may not be significantly impeded. Dogs will not be allowed on trails open all year. Sheep in the vicinity of some trails may occasionally delay their movement to and from habitat areas. It is not certain whether this occasional hindrance to access to Habitat areas results in habitat fragmentation, however implementation of the Management Program are expected to avoid potentially significant impacts. Other trails open all year are located below the toe of slope and outside documented lambing areas and water sources. Use of these trails, therefore, would have low potential for disturbance to bighorn sheep. The use of trails on Forest Service lands is subject to existing regulations, policies and land management plans. All Forest Service trails are outside Essential bighorn sheep Habitat and no impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep would occur from their use.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 2: Research Program***

The subject research program set forth in Element 2 of the Proposed Trails Plan acknowledges the need for additional data about the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep population, and will provide empirical data to inform decisions about future trails management actions that complement Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery and provide a safety net for the trail use provided for in the Proposed Trails Plan. Implementation of the research program will serve to avoid potentially significant impacts to Peninsular bighorn sheep before they occur. The program provides for the development and evaluation of specific trail use scenarios that will allow the testing of hypotheses regarding trail use and sheep response. The program also provides for annual reporting of interim research results and consideration by the Trails Management Subcommittee of alternative trails management actions that protect sheep and their habitat from potentially significant adverse impacts for CEQA analysis purposes from trail use. Therefore, the components of the research program shall be designed to preclude potentially significant adverse effects for CEQA analysis purposes, and they will serve as a mitigation strategy of adaptive management for potential adverse effects from trail use.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 3: Monitoring of Trail Use and Peninsular Bighorn Sheep Population***

The monitoring program will include a mandatory self-issue permit system on selected trails covered by the Proposed Trails Plan. The self-permitting system will, in conjunction with other monitoring activities described in Element 3, provide detail on the levels and type of trail use in the study area. It will also provide information that can be used to educate and sensitize trail users to their potential impacts on sheep and sheep Habitat. The program will provide periodic documentation of trail use, provide ongoing population surveys of Peninsular bighorn sheep on an annual basis, and other data for consideration by the Trails Management Subcommittee that could result in trails management actions to protect sheep and their habitat from significant impacts. Therefore, as part of the trails management program, the monitoring program is designed to preclude potentially significant adverse effects for CEQA analysis purposes and mitigate potential adverse effects from trail use.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 4: Hot Season Trail Closures***

Hot season closures will avoid potentially significant impacts to sheep and their access to essential water sources during the hottest and driest times of the year. Therefore, the impacts associated with the implementation of this element are beneficial to biological resources, especially bighorn sheep, that might otherwise avoid important water sources during this period of greatest need, and will mitigate a potentially significant adverse impact for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 5: Construction of New Trails***

The proposed perimeter trails are not expected to substantially impact Peninsular bighorn sheep, nor result in Take. The Proposed Trails Plan provides for additional research as set forth in Element 2 (described above) to address and effectively preclude potentially significant impacts to sheep from recreational trail use. The construction of perimeter trails and other new trails, including the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail, are further mitigated because they are deferred until the initial phase of the monitoring and research program has been completed. This deferral will ensure that trail conditions (e.g., use levels) are as consistent as possible once the research and monitoring programs are initiated. If research results show that recreational trail use would adversely impact bighorn sheep, authorization for impacts associated with new trails would not be provided and trails would not be constructed unless impacts can be otherwise

mitigated. It should be noted that the construction of perimeter or other new trails will be subject to further review and assessment under NEPA and CEQA.

Existing trailhead facilities will be used whenever possible; improvements to these facilities may be undertaken to meet the minimum requirements, upon separate approval by the applicable jurisdiction. Improvements to existing trailheads are not expected to create any potentially significant adverse impacts on sheep or other wildlife.

Future proposals for new trails on Reserve Lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area, other than the identified perimeter trails, would be addressed on a case-by-case basis, subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. Such trail proposals would require an Amendment to the Plan and their effects will be reduced to less than significant levels by adherence to the following development guidelines set forth in the Proposed Trails Plan.

- Perimeter trails would generally run parallel to and not rise more than 200 feet above the toe of slope, except where necessary to avoid residential or other developed areas or topographically inaccessible terrain.
- Perimeter trails would not be constructed within 1/4 mile of wildlife water sources.
- Perimeter trails would incorporate topographic variability where possible.
- Perimeter trails would be available for year-round use.
- Construction of perimeter trails would be allowed from July 1 through December 31 only.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 6: Public Awareness and Education Program***

The public awareness and education program associated with the Proposed Trails Plan will serve as a mitigation program that will further limit or reduce potential impacts of trail use on bighorn sheep. Informed and educated users will be better equipped to utilize trail facilities in a manner consistent with the conservation goals of the MSHCP. The education program will also enhance cooperation and participation in the self-permitting program of the Proposed Trails Plan by vesting users in the monitoring and management of trail use. Therefore, the implementation of Element 6 of the Proposed Trails Plan is expected to have a beneficial effect on conservation of bighorn sheep and their Habitat.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 7: Review of Trails Program***

The annual review and reporting of trail use and sheep effects will facilitate evaluation of progress and development of management recommendations (Adaptive Management). Compliance with and effectiveness of the hot season closures, mandatory self-issue permits, and other trail management prescriptions will also be tracked, and other new data will be evaluated. The sheep population thresholds will trigger monitoring and adaptive management actions affecting trail use and/or sheep and habitat management, consistent with the Recovery Plan, and will avoid potentially significant adverse impacts to sheep before they occur. As with Elements 2, 3 and 4 of the Proposed Trails Plan, Element 7 provides a mitigation measure whereby wildlife managers will track trail use and sheep impacts, and incorporate thresholds that could trigger immediate action to further limit adverse effects if they occur. The implementation of this element may have a beneficial effect on conservation of bighorn sheep.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Trails Management Plan Element 8: Rerouting and Decommissioning of Trails***

The evaluation of potential impacts from trails rerouting and decommissioning will be deferred until the initial phase of the monitoring and research program has been completed, ensuring that trail use levels remain as consistent as possible. This activity will occur following approval of a specific project by the appropriate project lead agency and these actions will be subject to separate NEPA and CEQA review and analysis. Actions regarding trails on BLM lands will not be a Covered Activity under the MSHCP, and BLM will undertake its own approval process for rerouting trails on lands it administers. Actions regarding the rerouting of trails on CDFG lands will require authorization from CDFG and will also be subject to CEQA review. Trail rerouting will be designed to protect sensitive resource values (e.g., cultural resources, wildlife habitat, soils) where meaningful and feasible. Redundant trails will be removed to reduce current impacts in these areas. Trails and trail segments on certain State lands will also be decommissioned and removed, thereby reducing trail use impacts in sensitive Habitat areas. Trails not listed as approved in the Proposed Trails Plan are unauthorized. The Trails Management Subcommittee will evaluate whether unauthorized trails will be decommissioned and removed or may be considered as potential new trails. Impacts associated with deferring the rerouting, decommissioning, and removal of trails are expected to be less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Cross-Country Travel***

Mitigation for allowance for cross-country travel includes its prohibition between January 1 and September 30. During the prohibited period individuals will be required to stay within 50 feet of the centerline of trails on either side. Holders of permits issued for research and extended study will be exempt from the cross-country prohibition. Bicycles will be prohibited year-round from traveling cross-country, and is restricted to trails. Outside Essential bighorn sheep Habitat on the remaining Federal lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, cross-country travel will be allowed year-round (except for bicycles which will be restricted to trails), subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. The restrictions on cross-country travel are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Camping***

Mitigation for allowance for camping includes its prohibition between January 1 and September 30. Camping will be prohibited within 1/4 mile of water sources. Campers will be required to obtain a permit for camping where and when camping is allowed. The Permittees, CVCC, CDFG, and BLM will develop a permit system for administering these permits. Outside Essential bighorn sheep Habitat on the remaining Federal lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, camping is allowed year-round, subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. The restrictions on camping are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Dogs***

Mitigation associated with potential dog use of sensitive habitat includes the restriction of dogs to designated areas only. An educational kiosk at each designated dog walking area will inform dog owners about basic bighorn sheep ecology and behavior, as well as the potential threats to bighorn sheep due to the presence of dogs. The boundaries of dog walking areas will be clearly signed. To address dog use areas and further mitigate for unauthorized walking of dogs in sensitive habitat, the Proposed Trails Plan provides that upon construction of the Garstin to Thielman Link Trail, east of the Andreas Hills residential community, a dog use area will be established on and limited to the lower segments of the Garstin Trail, the link trail itself, and the lower segment of the Thielman Trail. A dog walking area will be permitted west of Cathedral City Cove in the wash from Dunn Road to the northern boundary of Section 5, T5S R5E. It should also be noted that additional designated dog areas are already located at Homme-Adams Park/Cahuilla Hills Park in the City of Palm Desert, and south of La Quinta Cove to the flood

control levee in Section 13, T6S R6E. The latter area is outside Essential Habitat, and is not within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. The Proposed Trails Plan's restrictions on dogs are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Bicycle Restrictions***

A variety of restriction are placed on bicycle use by the Proposed Trails Plan. Certain trails, or segments thereof (see Section 2.5.7.3), will be closed year-round to bicycles, consistent with existing laws, regulations, and local ordinances. The restrictions on bicycles are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Pack Stock***

Pack stock use will be limited to horses, mules, and burros. The restrictions on pack stock are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Murray Hill Facilities (applies to BLM land only)***

No mitigation measures are required. Picnic tables and equestrian hitching posts at the summit of Murray Hill will be retained and are not expected to result in significant adverse impacts on biological resources in this area for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Non-commercial, Non-competitive Organized Group Activities***

Mitigation for these activities, as set forth in the proposed Trails Plan, include their being subject to the mandatory self-issue permit system described under Element 3. Except as required under Element 3, a permit will not be required for noncommercial, noncompetitive organized group activities on BLM-managed lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument when the primary purpose of the activity is hiking, running, bicycling, or horseback riding. If the primary purpose of the activity on BLM-managed lands is other than hiking, running, bicycling, or horseback riding, a representative of the group must contact the BLM to determine whether a permit is required. Upon completion of the research program, including the issuance of management recommendations, permit requirements for noncommercial, noncompetitive organized group activities may be modified as appropriate to support recovery of Peninsular bighorn sheep. The restrictions on non-commercial, noncompetitive organized group

activities are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Non-Motorized Commercial Recreation Activities***

The Proposed Trails Plan allows for these activities, except on selected trails when manipulations of use under the research program or hot season closures are in effect (see Elements 2 and 4). CVCC in conjunction with CDFG and USFWS would develop a permit system for commercial activities on non-Federal lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. In developing this permit system, consistency with requirements for commercial recreation use permits on Federal lands will occur to the extent practicable. The restrictions on non-motorized commercial recreation activities are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Competitive Recreation Events***

The Proposed Trails Plan will prohibit competitive recreation events on or off trails, including the use of developed trailheads in association with a competitive event. Competitive events using paved roads or developed sites, except for developed trailheads, may be allowed. CVCC, in conjunction with CDFG and USFWS, will develop a permit system for such activities. In developing this permit system, consistency with requirements for competitive recreation use permits on Federal lands will occur to the extent practicable. The restrictions on competitive recreation events are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails***

Under the Proposed Trails Plan, motorized vehicles would be prohibited on all trails, except as specifically approved for trail maintenance and construction projects. Use of motorized vehicles for trail maintenance and construction projects in designated wilderness is generally prohibited; exceptions to the prohibition must be in conformance with existing laws and regulations. Motorized-vehicle use of trails may only be authorized where and when limitations on public uses are not in effect (see Section 2.5.7.3). The restrictions on motorized vehicle use of trails are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

***Summary of Mitigation Associated with Existing Trails Outside the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area***

The Proposed Trails Plan recognizes that trails on Reserve Lands outside the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area have been established primarily in association with existing parks, preserves, and wilderness areas. These trails are considered as compatible activities under the Plan (see Section 2.5.7.3(b)(3)). The restrictions and guidelines on the use of exiting trails outside the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area are expected to reduce potential adverse effects to biological resources to levels that are less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes.

**5.3.5 Levels of Significance after Mitigation for CEQA Analysis**

The impacts of the Proposed Trails Plan would be less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes. Alternative C would have similar impacts to biological resources however, levels of disturbance to bighorn sheep is uncertain.

**5.4 Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns for the Proposed Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan**

**5.4.1 Introduction and Background**

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 1800s as “Indian Trails.” The following trails, or portions of them, 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 BLM.

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 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 1920s.

Historic period trails (those constructed and in use more than 50 years ago) used by early cattle ranchers and recreational equestrians may be eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion A for their association with the themes of local economic development and the development of recreation. For purposes of analysis, historic period trails would be treated as historic properties. The 1941 “Desert Riders Trail Map of Palm Springs and Environs” includes the following trails:

Araby	Cathedral Canyon	Eagle Canyon	Fern Canyon
Potrero Canyon	Skyline	Vandeventer	Wild Horse

Both prehistoric and historic trails may be eligible individually or as properties within an archaeological or historic district. In general, properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years are not be considered eligible for the National Register unless they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or are found to be of “exceptional importance” (36 CFR 60.4). Trails constructed by Desert Riders less than 50 years ago may be eligible if it is determined that they are part of an eligible district and are found to contribute to the significance of the district. As individual properties, these newer trails do not appear to meet the standard of having exceptional importance: the period dating to the 1960s saw a decline in the contribution of recreational trail riding to the local economy and local recreation as evidenced by a decline in the number of stables. While Desert Riders and other recreational equestrians continued to use and construct trails, the significance of the trails decreased relative to development of the community as a resort destination based on other recreational activities.

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 BLM 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 campsites, and concentrations of pottery fragments (sherds).

Inventory and evaluation have 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 an 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 inventory area. Three 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 three 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, seven lack the characteristics that would make them eligible to the National Register and one requires 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 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 ongoing 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. Please see the Cultural Resources Background Report (Appendix F) for correspondence and a list of Native American Tribes that were consulted during the preparation of the Trails Plan and EIR/EIS.

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.

#### **5.4.2 Thresholds of Significance/Criteria for Determining Significance for CEQA Analysis**

##### **NEPA/CEQA 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 provides 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.

### **Standards and Criteria**

The following standards and criteria were used to determine whether the Proposed Trails Plan and other alternatives would have a significant impact on cultural resources. These standards and criteria of significance were drawn from a variety sources, including CEQA and NEPA.

- (A) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in CEQA Section 15064.5.
- (B) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to CEQA section 15064.5.
- (C) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature.
- (D) Disturb any human remain, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries.
- (E) 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).

### **5.4.3 Cultural-Resource-Related Project Impacts**

This section analyzes the potential for significant impacts or adverse effects to cultural resources within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area as a result of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan.

#### **5.4.3.1 Public Use and Trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains**

The following analysis addresses the potential of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Trails Plan alternatives to affect the trails listed above which are assumed to be historic properties for the purpose of this analysis. The analysis also considers the potential for the proposed actions to affect historic properties which may occur within the Plan Area. If an action has the potential to affect historic properties, cultural resources review would be needed before the action may be implemented. Literature reviews, field surveys and, where avoidance of adverse effect is not possible, data recovery or other mitigation of effect may be required.

Mountain biking and equestrian use may result in impacts to trails such as increased erosion or other alteration of trail tread or location. Increased public visitation may lead to an increase in artifact collection from archaeological sites. Increased public visitation may, on the other hand, make it more difficult for site looters to have undisturbed access to archaeological sites.

The effects of recreation and public visitation on culturally significant trails, associated cultural sites, and areas identified as sensitive through Native American consultation are to be addressed in the Cultural Resources Management Plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. Collection of baseline data on the condition of cultural resources within the National Monument, site monitoring, and evaluation of the impacts of visitors have been proposed. In addition, the proposed National Monument Strategic Recreation Management Plan would address the compatibility of all types of recreational uses within the National Monument and establish a monitoring program to assess levels of use and to determine the need for altering management to protect and preserve resource values.

### **Recreational Use of Existing Trails**

Except for proposed closures to mountain biking, the types of uses allowed on trails do not vary between alternatives: trails would continue to be available for use by all means of non-motorized conveyance consistent with existing regulations, policies and land management plans. In general, bicycles are prohibited from specific trails consistent with existing closures, laws, regulations, ordinances and land use plans. Additionally, the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B propose to close portions of the Fern Canyon and Vandeventer Trails to mountain bike use. Fern Canyon

and Vandeventer are considered historic properties as described in Section 5.4.2. The potential for adverse effects to these trails from erosion and other trail alteration due to mountain bike usage would be decreased under Alternative B.

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B each propose to limit trail usage in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat to varying degrees. Trail use in areas outside of Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would be unchanged. The described actions do not represent a change from current usage with regards to the potential to affect historic properties. Compatibility of all types of recreational uses of trails, and their effects to cultural resources, would be addressed in the Strategic Recreation Management Plan and Cultural Resources Management Plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.

### **New Trails**

Alternative C addresses new trail construction on a case-by-case basis, subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. Cultural resources review, including inventories as necessary, would be conducted and adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated, as appropriate.

New trails proposed for construction under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B have the potential to affect cultural resources as discussed below.

Cultural resources inventories were completed as described in Section 5.4.2 for the following proposed new trails: Cathedral City Cove, North Cahuilla Hills/Hopalong Cassidy, South Cahuilla Hills/Hopalong Cassidy, West La Quinta Cove, and East La Quinta Cove perimeter trails.

The remaining proposed new perimeter trails occur in areas that have previously been subject to cultural resources inventories or have a low potential to contain significant resources. No historic properties have been identified in these areas.

No cultural resources were identified within the areas inventoried for the Cathedral City Cove, North Cahuilla Hills, West La Quinta Cove, and East La Quinta Cove perimeter trails. These trail areas also have a low potential to contain significant resources.

An archaeological site located in association with the South Cahuilla Hills trail presents an opportunity for public education and interpretation. This site is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Proposed Trails Plan differs from Alternative B in its proposal to construct a connector trail from Palm Desert to La Quinta, which will now be deferred until after the research program under this alternative and will be subject to subsequent environmental review before it can be constructed. Inventories were completed for portions of the preferred alignment from the Visitor Center loop trail to Deep Canyon, and each of the Deep Canyon to La Quinta Connector Trail alignments.

No historic properties or cultural resources were identified along the preferred alignment from the Visitor Center to Deep Canyon. The Urban Fringe alignment passes through areas with a low potential for historic properties: Dead Indian Wash and residential developments.

The Deep Canyon alignment passes through an area known to contain cultural resources and trail construction in this area would require additional cultural resources inventory and review. The potential for significant resources to occur in this area is high.

The common western leg of the Deep Canyon to La Quinta Connector Trail North and South Eisenhower Mountain alignments also passes through an area known to contain cultural resources. One of these may be eligible for listing on the National Register and would require additional evaluation, including determination of eligibility and effect. Although none of these resources should be directly affected by trail construction, there would be a potential for indirect effects from public access, including casual collection of artifacts. This area also presents an opportunity for public education and interpretation which could decrease the potential for casual artifact collection.

No additional cultural resources were identified along the course of either the South Eisenhower (preferred) or North Eisenhower alignments.

Three sites had been previously recorded along the common leg of the Connector Trail where it crosses Deep Canyon. Two of these sites are not eligible; the third is outside the APE. One site had been previously recorded along the common western leg of the Indio Mountain and Indio Canyon alignments. This site could not be relocated.

No cultural resources were identified along the eastern inventoried portion of the Indio Mountain alignment.

The eastern portion of the Indio Canyon alignment follows a prehistoric trail segment, which is eligible for inclusion in the National Register. This trail currently receives a moderate amount of use and continued pedestrian travel would not result in an adverse effect, although equestrian and/or mountain bike use could result in increased erosion or other impacts to this trail. As with

the South Cahuilla Hills and Eisenhower Mountain trails, this is an area, which presents an opportunity for public education and interpretation.

Where specific trail alignments have not been determined, the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B identify corridors where trails could be constructed after NEPA and CEQA analysis. These corridors are located primarily along the toe of slope of the Santa Rosa Mountains and include areas along the western flank of Murray Hill, through *The Living Desert*, and along the east side of the Santa Rosa Wilderness to provide access to Martinez Canyon.

As discussed previously, 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. As specific trail alignments are proposed, cultural resources review, including inventory, would be conducted and adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated as appropriate.

### **Trail Rerouting**

Rerouting a trail which qualifies as a historic property could diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association. This would constitute an adverse effect. Rerouting of trails also has the potential to adversely affect historic properties within the new trail corridor or adjacent to the existing trail.

Under Alternative C, proposals for trail rerouting would be addressed on a case-by-case basis, subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. Cultural resources review, including inventory, would be conducted and adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated, as appropriate.

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B propose that trails be rerouted to protect sensitive resource values, including those related to cultural resources. Rerouting trails to avoid areas identified as sensitive by Native Americans or that contain historic properties would have a positive effect to cultural resources.

The initial Draft Trails Plan (November 2004) proposed rerouting of the eastern portion of the Art Smith Trail. This trail is recognized as following a Cahuilla route but it is unclear whether the current trail follows a pre-existing Cahuilla trail. Portions of the trail were constructed by Desert Riders within the last 50 years and removal of these portions would have no effect on historic properties, unless it is determined that the trail contributes significantly to an eligible

historic district. A complete determination of eligibility and effect or recommendation for mitigation cannot be made until additional research to distinguish between modern and prehistoric trail segments has been completed. The rerouting of the eastern-most portion of the Art Smith Trail has been addressed under a separate action involving USFWS, CDFG, BLM and the City of Palm Desert. It does not result in the immediate removal of the existing trail, which will be deferred until the subject segment's cultural value can be further assessed.

The new alignment of the Art Smith Trail, which utilizes segments of the southern Schey Trail, has been determined to have no effect to historic properties (see Exhibit 5-3 for a depiction of the new alignment). A cultural resources inventory of portions of the proposed perimeter trail route (Hopalong Cassidy Trail) has been conducted. No historic properties were identified in the areas inventoried and the remainder of the route has a low potential to contain historic properties.

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B also propose rerouting the Guadalupe Trail. This trail is recognized as a Cahuilla trail and is less likely than the Art Smith Trail to have undergone substantial alteration. Rerouting of this trail would result in an adverse effect by compromising the integrity of the trail: the unused portion of the trail would either be eradicated intentionally or would be allowed to fade away. Either option results in loss of the trail-therefore a loss of integrity of location, design, setting, feeling and association (to related sites and the landscape).

### **Trail Decommission and Removal**

Decommission or removal of a trail which qualifies as a historic property could diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association. This would constitute an adverse effect. Surface disturbance associated with decommissioning also has the potential to adversely affect historic properties adjacent to the trail.

Under Alternative C, proposals for trail decommission and removal would be addressed on a case-by-case basis, subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. Cultural resources review, including inventory, would be conducted and adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated, as appropriate.

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B propose to decommission trails in the Murray Hill Complex. Patencio (1943) identified this as an area that contained numerous trails used by the Cahuilla. Cultural resources review, including inventory and evaluation would be necessary before a determination of effect can be made.

The initial Draft Trails Plan proposed to decommission portions of the Art Smith Trail and a spur trail in Section 14, T.6S R6E. Art Smith Trail is recognized as following a Cahuilla route but it is unclear whether the current trail follows a preexisting Cahuilla trail. Portions of the trail were constructed by Desert Riders within the past 50 years and removal of these portions would have no effect on historic properties, unless it is determined that the trail contributes significantly to an eligible historic district. A complete determination of effect or recommendation for mitigation cannot be made until additional research to distinguish between modern and prehistoric trail segments has been completed. As noted above, the rerouting of the eastern-most portion of the Art Smith Trail has been undertaken under a separate action involving USFWS, CDFG, BLM and the City of Palm Desert. It does not result in the immediate removal of the existing trail, which will be deferred until the subject segment's cultural value can be further assessed.

The spur trail in Section 14, T6S, R6E has not been specifically identified on the ground, but may well be a prehistoric trail. Two prehistoric trail segments are known to exist in Section 14. Removal of such a trail would result in an adverse effect.

None of the remaining trails proposed for decommissioning are known to be historic properties. However, additional cultural resources review, including inventory would be necessary to determine whether historic properties exist within the area of potential effects of decommissioning activities.

## **Trailheads**

New construction and improvements that result in new surface disturbance have the potential to cause adverse effects. Trailhead development under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternatives B and C would require approval by the applicable jurisdiction and case-by-case analysis. Identified adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated as appropriate.

## **Cross-Country Travel**

Tribal members have expressed concern that cross country travel would allow the public to access culturally sensitive areas. No specific locations of concern have been identified; this issue would be further addressed through on-going consultation and planning related to the National Monument.

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B each propose some level of restriction on cross-country travel and would therefore have a positive effect on Native American concerns. The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B also restrict cross-country travel by mountain bikes, thereby providing an additional measure of protection to cultural resources.

## **Camping**

Areas that present suitable camping locations exhibit qualities, closeness to water and level surface for example, commonly associated with a higher potential for an area to contain cultural resources. Camping has the potential to affect cultural resources through casual collection of artifacts, and through inadvertent damage to artifacts and features through surface disturbances associated with camping activities. The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B would place seasonal restrictions on or prohibit camping in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area and therefore limit the potential for adverse effects. Alternative B prohibits camping year-round and provides the greatest protection to cultural resources.

The requirement of a free permit for camping on remaining federal lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area and National Monument (Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B) would allow for distribution of public education and interpretation materials which could be used to convey a stewardship/conservation message. This would have a positive effect on cultural resources.

## **Dogs**

The actions described for this issue do not have the potential to affect cultural resources.

## **Pack Stock**

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B propose to limit pack stock to horses, mules, and burros. Alternative C would allow the use of other pack stock, such as llamas and goats. The alternatives do not differ in their potential to affect cultural resources. Determination of the effects of pack stock on cultural resources is beyond the scope of this analysis. The proposed National Monument Strategic Recreation Management Plan and Cultural Resources Management Plan would address the compatibility and effects of recreational uses within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. The Strategic Recreation Management Plan would establish a monitoring program to assess levels of recreational use and to determine the need for altering management to protect and preserve resource values.

## **Murray Hill Facilities**

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative C propose to retain the picnic and equestrian facilities at Murray Hill. The facilities would be removed under Alternative B. No historic properties are known to exist at this location and any cultural resources present would have been previously

affected by installation and use of the facilities. The current proposed actions do not have the potential to affect historic properties.

### **Non-commercial, Non-competitive Organized Group Activities**

The Proposed Trails Plan would have a positive effect on cultural resources by providing an opportunity to educate the public and deliver a stewardship/conservation message, as provided for under Element 6 of the Proposed Trails Plan.

Alternative B would have a positive effect on cultural resources by providing an opportunity to educate the public and deliver a stewardship/conservation message. Also, the permits are discretionary and the BLM could refrain from issuing permits for access to culturally sensitive areas.

### **Non-Motorized Commercial Recreation Activities**

The Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B would allow non-motorized commercial activities where and when the general public is allowed access and subject to the same requirements as other trail use. The alternatives do not differ with regards to their potential to affect cultural resources. Alternative C would allow such uses subject to existing regulations, policies and land management plans. Commercial recreation activities on federal lands are subject to federal permitting processes and environmental review, therefore adverse effects would not be expected to result from any of the alternatives.

### **Competitive Recreation Events**

The Proposed Trails Plan would prohibit competitive recreation events on or off trail in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. Competitive events using paved roads or developed sites may be allowed subject to existing regulations, policies and land management plans.

Alternative B would prohibit such activities in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat year round and would allow for competitive recreation events outside of Essential bighorn sheep Habitat subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans. Alternative C would permit such activities subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans.

Competitive recreation events on federal lands are subject to federal permitting processes and environmental review therefore adverse effects would not be expected to result from any of the alternatives.

## **Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails**

Motorized vehicle use facilitates access to remote and potentially sensitive areas. Access, and the ability to carry excavation tools and equipment, increases the potential for looting of archaeological sites. Motorized vehicles also have the potential to cause adverse effects to the trails and adjacent historic properties by contributing to increased erosion. Each alternative limits motorized vehicle access on trails to trail maintenance and construction purposes only. The alternatives do not differ with regards to their potential to affect cultural resources and trail maintenance and construction are subject to environmental review, therefore adverse effects would not be expected to result from any of the alternatives.

### **5.4.4 Cultural-Resource-Related Mitigation Measures for CEQA Analysis**

#### **Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area**

If an action under any of the public access and use alternatives has the potential to affect historic properties, cultural resources review would be needed before the action may be implemented. Literature reviews, field surveys and, where avoidance of adverse effect is not possible, data recovery or other mitigation of effect may be required. Actions which may cause adverse effects to historic properties include trail rerouting, decommission, and removal. The continued use of existing trails does not constitute a new action or present new impacts to cultural resources.

Research into the effects of recreation and public visitation on culturally significant trails, associated cultural sites, and areas identified as sensitive through Native American consultation would be further addressed in the Cultural Resources Management Plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.

Collection of baseline data on the condition of cultural resources within the National Monument, site monitoring, and evaluation of the impacts of visitors have been proposed. In addition, the proposed National Monument Strategic Recreation Management Plan would address the compatibility of all types of recreational uses within the National Monument and establish a monitoring program to assess levels of use and to determine the need for altering management to protect and preserve resource values.

#### **Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail and Other New Trails**

Archaeological sites located in association with the Cahuilla Hills perimeter trail and the Eisenhower Mountain and Indio Canyon alignments of the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector

Trail present opportunities for public education and interpretation, which should be considered during the detailed planning for these trails, resulting in a positive effect on cultural resources.

In the event the Indio Canyon segment of the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail, which follows a prehistoric trail, is selected, use of this trail by equestrians and mountain bikers should be evaluated in terms of potential impacts to cultural resources.

The Deep Canyon alignment of the connector trail between the Visitor Center loop trail and Deep Canyon passes through an area known to contain cultural resources and trail construction in this area would require additional cultural resources review, identification and evaluation. There is a high potential for historic properties and accordingly, adverse effects from trail construction, to occur in this area. If these sites are determined to be eligible for listing, a mitigation treatment plan would be developed in consultation with the SHPO.

The western leg of the Deep Canyon to La Quinta segment also passes through an area known to contain cultural resources. One of these may be eligible for listing on the National Register and would require additional evaluation. If this site is determined to be eligible for listing, a mitigation treatment plan would be developed in consultation with the SHPO.

Where trail alignments have not been determined, the Plan identifies corridors where take authorization would be granted under the Plan, and trails could be constructed in these corridors after NEPA and CEQA analysis on non-biological issues. As discussed above, there is a high potential for cultural resources and historic properties to occur within the perimeter trail corridors. As specific trail alignments are proposed, cultural resources review would be conducted and adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated, as appropriate.

#### **5.4.5 Levels of Significance after Mitigation for CEQA Analysis**

If the mitigation measures identified above and incorporated in the proposed MSHCP are implemented in conjunction with trails planning, potential adverse impacts to sensitive cultural resources would be avoided and are expected to be less than significant. A variety of positive effects can be expected to result if opportunities for educational interpretive facilities are incorporated into trail and trailhead design, including a greater appreciation by residents and visitors for regional cultural resources.

## **5.5 Parks, Trails, and Recreation for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan**

### **5.5.1 Introduction and Background**

As discussed in Section 3.10 of the EIR/EIS, the Coachella Valley is one of the country's most desirable geographic areas for full- and 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 effects that the proposed Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan and alternatives may have on recreational resources and opportunities. The Proposed Trails Plan is a Covered Activity under the proposed MSHCP and applicable to both federal and non-federal lands.

### **5.5.2 Thresholds of Significance/Criteria for Determining Significance for CEQA Analysis**

Standards and criteria have been drawn from a variety of sources, including CEQA and NEPA, to determine whether and to what extent approval of the management prescriptions assessed in this EIR/EIS would significantly impact the environment. With regard to potential impacts to recreational resources and opportunities, these include the following:

- a) Cause a substantial reduction in the availability of existing parks, trails, public open space, or other recreational areas or facilities of local, regional, state, or national importance.
- b) Cause or accelerate a substantial adverse change or physical deterioration in existing parks or trails in the region.
- c) Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse effect on the environment.
- d) Cause or induce the development of trails, parks, or other recreational facilities that could adversely affect the Conservation Goals and Objectives of the proposed Plan.

### **5.5.3 Parks, Trails, and Recreation-Related Project Impacts**

Potential impacts of the Proposed Trails Plan and other alternatives are discussed below. The Trails Plan sets forth management strategies to assure compatibility between recreational activities and sensitive biological resources, and is assessed for its potential to adversely affect recreational resources and opportunities in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. As a result of the lack of specific information regarding trail changes due to Adaptive Management approach and/or future Alternative selection, it should be noted that any trail closures, decommissioning, new construction, or limitations of use will be subject to the applicable CEQA and/or NEPA requirements depending on the location of the trail. CEQA and/or NEPA requirements provide opportunities for public input.

#### **5.5.3.1 Proposed Trail Plan (Alternative A)**

##### **Recreational Use of Existing Trails**

The Proposed Trails Plan would provide year-round use of 38 of the 40 trails or trail segments addressed in Section 2.5.7.3, or about 95 of 115 miles (83%) of trails that spread across the lower elevations of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. These trails extend from the Snow Creek area west of Palm Springs to Martinez Canyon south of La Quinta, and would assure the availability of a wide range of mountain hiking, biking, and horseback riding experiences. As part of the monitoring and research program to determine the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep, some of these trails may be subject to manipulations of use levels, including increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether. The initial focus of the research program, however, would be limited to 11 trails or trail segments, or about 38 miles (33% of total trail mileage addressed by the Trails Plan). It is anticipated that manipulations of trail use levels, if necessary as part of the research design, would most likely occur on these 11 trails or trail segments. It is also likely that trail use manipulations would not be imposed on all 11 trails at the same time.

Three trails or trail segments totaling about 10 miles (9% of total trail mileage) would be closed during the “hot season” from June 15 through September 30. Portions of two trails addressed in the Trails Plan (Carrizo Canyon and Mirage Trails) occur on lands managed by the California Department of Fish and Game; use of these trail segments is subject to decisions made by the State. Rerouting of the Art Smith Trail and development of the Hopalong Cassidy perimeter trail, including disposition of the northern Schey Trail located about one-half mile south of Cat Creek and connecting with the Art Smith Trail, have been addressed separate from the Trails Plan.

While 88% of trails addressed by the Proposed Trails Plan, or 83% of total trail mileage, would be available for year-round use, it is important to understand the context of this proposal relative to availability of trails during the predominant trail use season when most use is concentrated, which generally occurs from January through April. Considering availability of trails during this period, 38 of the 40 trails addressed by the Trails Plan (95%), or 105 of 115 miles of trails (91%), would be available without restriction as regards levels of use (restrictions on entry with dogs, however, would be imposed; extent of potential trail use restrictions in conjunction with the proposed focused research program is unknown at this time). As shown in Table 5 of Appendix I (“Actual and Potential Use of Trails Subject to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Plan”, Note: Since preparation of Appendix I, certain trails within the plan have been constructed and therefore are not included in the Proposed Trails Plan.), approximately 89% of trail use on selected trails for the January through June period from 2001 to 2003 was observed during the first four months of the year (870 users on average per year), while 11% of use was observed during the months of May and June (110 users on average per year).

Adjusted to account for different intensities of observation (i.e., 404 hours of observation on average per month for the January through April period versus 347 hours on average per month for May and June), the percentages of trail use for these two periods would be approximately 86% and 14%, respectively. For comparison purposes, an even distribution of trail use would have been 67% during the first four months and 33% during the latter two months. These 38 trails would continue to be available for use without restriction until mid-June when the hot season closure of three trails or trail segments becomes effective.

Although trail use data are lacking for the second halves of the three years during which trail use was recorded (2001-2003), it is reasonable to assume that use continued to decline into the hot summer months of July through September, consistent with an observed decline of use in the months of May and June with the approach of high temperatures. As the year continues into its last quarter, anecdotal information suggests that trail use increases as the weather cools. During this period, no restrictions on the use of existing trails are proposed at this time; however, the data from the research program and decisions made through the Adaptive Management program may impose some future restrictions.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that opportunities for recreational use of existing trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains would be marginally affected upon implementation of the Proposed Trails Plan, even though the extent to which trail use restrictions would be imposed in conjunction with the focused research program is currently unknown. However, given that the focus of the research program would be on 11 trails and trail use restrictions would not likely be

simultaneously imposed on all 11 trails, there would remain ample opportunities for recreational trail use throughout the Conservation Area should such restrictions occur.

*Hot Season Closure.* As indicated above, under Proposed Trails Plan three trails or trail segments would be closed during the "hot season" from June 15 to September 30 to assure optimum access to water for bighorn sheep. Also as indicated above, it is reasonable to assume that trail use levels during this time of the year are substantially lower than during the non-summer months. Considering the extent of available trails in combination with the lower levels of use, it is reasonable to conclude that the effects of summer trail closures on recreational opportunities would be minor.

*Closures to Bicycle Use.* New (additional) closures of certain trails or trail segments to bicycles would be limited to those that complement existing closures by precluding access where continuation of use along a trail would result in a violation. Therefore, these new restrictions would have a minor effect on trail use by mountain bicyclists.

*Adaptive Management.* Upon completion of the focused research program, study results and management recommendations would be integrated into a revised public use and trails management program, using best available science, professional judgment, and wildlife management principles where study results may be less than definitive. Depending on study results, future restrictions on recreational use of existing trails may or may not be imposed.

In summary, implementation of the Proposed Trails Plan would not substantially affect trail use opportunities on existing trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area.

## **New Trails**

*Perimeter Trails.* The Proposed Trails Plan described in the initial Draft EIR/EIS (November 2004) included the construction of several new perimeter trails along the urban-wildland interface from Cathedral City to La Quinta, as well as the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail. These proposals, however, would be deferred under the Proposed Trails Plan pending completion of a focused research program that evaluates the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (except as regards construction of the Hopalong Cassidy perimeter trail, which has been addressed as a separate action from the Proposed Trails Plan). While no benefits would be accrued from deferring development of new trails, existing opportunities for recreational trail use would generally not be constrained under the Proposed Trails Plan. Therefore, deferring the construction of new trails would not have a substantial effect on recreation.

## **Trail Rerouting, Decommission and Removal**

As with the construction of new trails, proposals to reroute, decommission, and remove trails would be deferred under the Proposed Trails Plan pending completion of a focused research program that evaluates the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (see Section 2.5.7.3). While some trails are specifically identified in the Proposed Trails Plan for potential rerouting, such actions would not be approved coincident with approval of the Trails Plan. Some trails are specifically identified for consideration by the Trails Management Subcommittee for decommission and removal, though again such actions would not be approved coincident with approval of the Trails Plan. Further, specified trails on State lands would be decommissioned and removed per decision of the California Department of Fish and Game, but such decisions would be made apart from those for the Proposed Trails Plan. Finally, rerouting a portion of the Art Smith Trail and the associated decommission and removal of the rerouted segment, along with disposition of the northern Schey Trail, have been addressed separate from the Trails Plan. Therefore, impacts to recreational opportunities resulting from the Proposed Trails Plan as it relates to trail rerouting, decommission, and removal are not anticipated at this time.

## **Trailheads**

No actions are identified in the Proposed Trails Plan relative to the use or development of trailheads, including associated parking facilities. Only guidelines (minimum facilities) for trailhead development are identified. Therefore, no impacts to recreation would occur under the Proposed Trails Plan relative to trailhead development.

The Garstin to Thielman Trail link trail, when developed, is not expected to attract substantial additional use above that occurring at this time on the Murray Hill complex of trails. The link trail is not likely to constitute an attraction by itself since its use would need to occur in conjunction with other existing trails. Therefore, adverse impacts to neighborhood traffic flow or private residences from parking relative to the new link trail in and of itself are not anticipated.

A parking facility for the proposed Cathedral City Cove perimeter trail would likely be developed on BLM-managed lands at the entrance to Dunn Road. Parking for trail users would also be accommodated at the City of Rancho Mirage City Hall facilities. Street-side parking in Cathedral City Cove would not likely occur, especially along the eastern and western sides where fencing precludes access across flood control channels. Therefore, adverse impacts to traffic flow or private residences from parking would be minor if they occur at all.

Parking for both the north and south Cahuilla Hills segments of the proposed Hopalong Cassidy Trail would be accommodated at the existing Art Smith, Homme-Adams Park, and Cahuilla Hills Park Trailheads. Adverse impacts from parking, therefore, are not anticipated.

Parking for the West La Quinta Cove perimeter trail would be accommodated on a nearby street. It has been determined that sufficient space exists alongside the street to accommodate anticipated use. However, some disruption to local traffic flow and/or disturbances to nearby residents could occur, depending on levels of use. However, this disruption will be less than significant due to the limited anticipated use of this trail.

Parking for the East La Quinta Cove perimeter trail may be accommodated by a nearby parking lot off Calle Tecate that serves a City recreation area south of the Cove. However, trail users that do not live within walking distance of the perimeter trail may be inclined to park on streets that are close to the trail. This may cause some disruption to local traffic flow and/or disturbances to nearby residents, depending on levels of use.

### **Cross-Country Travel**

Prohibiting cross-country (off-trail) travel in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat from January 1 through September 30, thereby limiting travel during this period to identified trails, would adversely affect access to certain parts of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. Whereas opportunities have heretofore been available year-round to scale a number of peaks or use desert washes where established trails do not exist (e.g., Haystack Mountain, Toro Canyon, and Agua Alta Canyon), access to these features would be limited to a 106-day period during the fall and early winter of each year. Of particular concern would be the limitation on access to peaks identified by the Sierra Club's Desert Peaks Section, i.e., Martinez Mountain and Rabbit Peak to which established trails are not identified in the Trails Plan. Although the number of individuals seeking to "bag" these peaks is unknown, these hikers would be required to schedule their activities during the period when cross-country travel is allowed. This may or may not preclude their opportunities for this endeavor, depending on personal circumstances.

### **Camping**

Prohibiting camping in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat from January 1 through September 30 would reduce opportunities for this activity, though the extent to which camping has occurred during this time period is unknown. However, infrequent reported observations of backcountry camping activities would indicate that such levels are low. Under the Proposed Trails Plan, individuals desiring to camp in this area would need to schedule their activities during the period when camping is allowed. This may or may not preclude their opportunities for this endeavor,

depending on personal circumstances. The requirement for obtaining a free permit for backcountry camping in the National Monument may result in greater inconvenience and constrain spontaneity, but opportunities for this activity would not be precluded because of it.

## **Dogs**

Limiting entry with dogs to designated areas within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would reduce opportunities for hiking with these pets, and could affect individuals who consider accompaniment by a dog in the backcountry as enhancing their safety, especially for women hiking alone. However, opportunities for this activity would not be precluded in the Santa Rosa Mountains as individuals may be accompanied by their dogs on trails in the designated areas and on trails at elevations above bighorn sheep Habitat. Further, individuals would retain opportunities to use trails without dogs. The degree to which individuals may refrain from using trails without accompaniment by a dog because of safety reasons is unknown.

## **Pack Stock**

Limiting pack stock to horses, mules, and burros would not substantially affect opportunities for recreation in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. Although the extent to which llamas and goats have been or would be used is unknown, anecdotal information suggests that the use of these animals as pack stock within the National Monument is infrequent.

## **Murray Hill Picnic and Horse Hitching Facilities**

Retention of picnic tables and equestrian hitching posts at the summit of Murray Hill would benefit recreation, though only to the degree that individuals would enjoy their use. These facilities, however, are not necessary for sitting or eating food—especially upon considering that most of those successfully reaching the summit are reasonably fit and do not require special facilities for sitting or eating—or for securing horses. Natural features such as rock outcrops provide sufficient “venues” for these tasks.

## **Non-commercial, Non-competitive Organized Group Activities**

Noncommercial, noncompetitive organized group activities under the Proposed Trails Plan would be subject to the same management prescriptions that apply to activities undertaken by individuals; hence, impacts to recreation would be the same as previously described. However, for groups undertaking activities where the primary purpose is not hiking, running, bicycling or horseback riding, noncommercial, noncompetitive organized group activities on BLM-managed lands may require the issuance of a *Special Recreation Permit* from BLM. In accordance with

the regulations at 43 CFR 2932, obtaining a *Special Recreation Permit* may require the submission of an application of up to 180 days before the intended use date.

BLM would ascertain the need for such a permit on a case-by-case basis given the concern for potential impacts to bighorn sheep and/or other resource values in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. This application requirement could thwart efforts by certain groups to organize activities “at the last minute.” Fee and insurance requirements, which may be required in conjunction with issuance of a *Special Recreation Permit*, could preclude certain groups from undertaking activities where the primary purpose is not hiking, running, bicycling, or horseback riding.

Non-commercial, non-competitive organized groups whose primary purpose is hiking, running, bicycling, or horseback riding, and which would utilize BLM-managed lands for their activities, would not be burdened by the requirements of 43 CFR 2932 under the Proposed Trails Plan, that is, they could pursue such activities on BLM-managed lands without a *Special Recreation Permit* so long as the activities are consistent with other provisions of the Trails Plan. This would allow for greater spontaneity in planning activities for hiking, running, bicycling, and equestrian groups. Absent this management prescription, the BLM would be required to ascertain the need for a *Special Recreation Permit* on a case-by-case basis. This could result in substantial delays in obtaining a permit.

### **Non-Motorized Commercial Recreation Activities**

Limiting non-motorized commercial recreation activities to trails and areas where and when the general public is allowed access would not constrain such commercial opportunities since general public access would be minimally limited under the Proposed Trails Plan.

Further, applications for *Special Recreation Permits* to conduct non-motorized commercial activities on BLM-managed lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains have historically been few in number. This circumstance is not expected to substantially change.

### **Competitive Recreation Events**

Prohibiting competitive recreation events on and off trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area would have minor effects on recreation. In recent years, such events have largely been limited to orienteering. Promoters of orienteering events would be required to locate venues in areas other than the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains.

This could have a temporary beneficial effect on non-participants where such events might occur; the activities of these non-participants would not be disrupted by the event, thereby enhancing their opportunities for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. On the other hand, competitive events on paved roads or developed sites, such as the annual Tram Road Challenge, as well as competitive events outside the Conservation Area could occur, subject to limitations that may be imposed by the entity having jurisdiction over the subject lands.

### **Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails**

It is anticipated that the prohibition of motorized vehicles on trails, except for the purposes of maintenance and construction, would enhance the quality of experiences for non-motorized trail users. Motorized vehicles are a source of noise that is generally incongruous with primitive backcountry experiences, and can create unsafe conditions due to their potential speed. An absence of noise generated by motorized vehicles along with a reduced risk of collision may result in a higher quality backcountry experience. On BLM-managed lands, casual motorized-vehicle access (i.e., access without specific authorization) on trails addressed by the Trails Plan is already prohibited (except for a portion of the Martinez Canyon Trail outside the Santa Rosa Wilderness).

#### **5.5.3.2 Alternative B**

### **Recreational Use of Existing Trails**

Under this alternative, at least 20 trails or major trail segments would be available for year-round use across the lower elevations of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. This represents a substantial decrease in trail-based recreation opportunities relative to the other alternatives.

Trail Closures. This alternative would restrict access to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains on a seasonal basis to a greater degree than the other alternatives. Based on estimated use of certain trails within Essential Habitat for bighorn sheep, approximately 3,200 to 4,000 individuals per season would be denied access to these trails (see *Appendix J*), including the unique Cactus to Clouds Trail (which includes the Skyline Trail).

Closure of trails under this alternative would likely increase the level of use on other nearby trails. Such increased use could adversely affect trail users seeking solitude, though to an unknown extent since it cannot be predicted how users would avail themselves of the remaining opportunities for trail-based activities.

Hot Season Closures. The effects of “hot season” closures would be greater than under the Proposed Trails Plan given that 17 additional trails or trail segments are affected. However, as it is reasonable to assume that trail use levels during this time of the year are substantially lower than during the non-summer months, and considering the extent of available trails in combination with the lower levels of use during this period, it is reasonable to conclude that the effects of summer trail closures on recreational opportunities would be minor.

Bicycle Closures. The effects of bicycle closures would be the same as described under the Proposed Trails Plan.

Adaptive Management. As under the Proposed Trails Plan, a mechanism would be provided through Adaptive Management that may allow greater use of trails if the local bighorn sheep population continues to increase and the compatibility of trail use and bighorn sheep recovery is demonstrated, thereby reducing the adverse impacts that would result from restrictions on trail use. Conversely, Adaptive Management based on data from monitoring and research could result in increased restrictions on trail use should circumstances warrant.

In summary, trail closures proposed under Alternative B represent a substantial limiting restriction on trail use opportunities and access to open space.

## **New Trails**

Perimeter Trails. Effects relative to the construction of new perimeter trails (deferred) would be the same as described under the Proposed Trails Plan.

Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail. A connector trail between Palm Desert and La Quinta is not proposed under Alternative B.

## **Trail Rerouting, Decommission, and Removal**

Trail reroutes, decommissions, and removals under this alternative are addressed in the same manner as under the Proposed Trails Plan, hence opportunities for recreation would be affected in the same manner.

Specific reroutes for portions of the Goat Trails are proposed in conjunction with approval of the Palm Hills project north of Eagle Canyon. Development of this project would necessitate the obliteration of some existing trails. The project proponent would ensure that existing trail connectivity between the Rimrock Shopping Center, and the Araby, Berns, and Clara Burgess Trails is maintained. Although the total number of trails may be reduced in the project area,

opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding would not be substantially affected. Segments of the Goat Trails and Eagle Canyon Trail on Indian lands in Section 32 (T4S R5E) are not subject to the Proposed Trails Plan.

## **Trailheads**

As no actions are identified relative to the use or development of trailheads—instead, guidelines only are suggested that may be considered by the applicable jurisdiction—no impacts to recreation would occur.

The analysis under the Proposed Trails Plan that addresses the effects of parking vehicles where access to new perimeter trails would likely occur is applicable to Alternative B.

## **Cross-Country Travel**

Impacts to recreation resulting from a year-round prohibition of cross-country travel in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would be substantially greater than those described under the Proposed Trails Plan. Opportunities to scale a number of peaks or use desert washes in this area where established trails do not exist (e.g., Haystack Mountain, Toro Canyon, Agua Alta Canyon) would be altogether precluded. Of particular concern would be the elimination of access to peaks identified by the Sierra Club's Desert Peaks Section; Martinez Mountain and Rabbit Peak, to which established trails are not identified in the Trails Plan, could no longer be accessed. Although the number of individuals seeking to “bag” these peaks is unknown, these hikers would be foreclosed from pursuing this activity.

## **Camping**

Impacts to recreation resulting from a year-round prohibition of camping in Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would be greater than those described under the Proposed Trails Plan. However, since reported observations of backcountry camping activities are few, thereby indicating that levels are low, impacts would not likely be substantial. Opportunities for camping would remain outside Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains.

## **Dogs**

Except for the identification of a designated dog area in Palm Springs near the Andreas Hills residential area, the proposal is the same as described under the Proposed Trails Plan. Under Alternative B, individuals who have historically used trails in the Andreas Hill area for walking dogs (e.g., Garstin, Wild Horse, Thielman, Shannon, and Henderson Trails) would be precluded

from their use for this purpose. Hence, opportunities for trail walking with dogs would be locally reduced under this alternative relative to the Proposed Trails Plan.

### **Pack Stock**

As the proposal under this alternative is the same as the Proposed Trails Plan, impacts to recreation would be the same as previously described.

### **Murray Hill Picnic and Horse Hitching Facilities**

Removal of the picnic tables and hitching posts at the summit of Murray Hill as proposed under this alternative would not substantially affect recreation. Although trail users would not have the benefit of picnic tables for sitting and eating food, a lack of such facilities would not likely be an important factor regarding the quality of a trail experience at this location. Since those that successfully make it to the summit can be considered as reasonably fit, it can be assumed that sitting on rock outcrops instead of picnic tables would not be a substantial hindrance to sitting or eating food. Similarly, the lack of hitching posts at the summit would simply require the hitching of horses to natural features such as rocks.

### **Non-commercial, Non-competitive Organized Group Activities**

This alternative would restrict group access to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains on a seasonal basis to a greater degree than the other alternatives because trail use restrictions are more extensive.

### **Non-Motorized Commercial Recreation Activities**

Since the proposal under this alternative is substantially similar to the Proposed Trails Plan, impacts previously described would largely be the same.

### **Competitive Recreation Events**

Although the proposal under this alternative is largely similar to the Proposed Trails Plan and impacts as previously described would largely be the same, the expansion of the prohibition to include paved roads and developed sites within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat would preclude opportunities to conduct some competitive events. Chief among these would be the annual Tram Road Challenge, a nationally publicized event that attracts participants from near and far. Given the popularity of this event, the impacts to recreation from its prohibition would be substantial.

## **Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails**

Since the proposal under this alternative is substantially similar to the Proposed Trails Plan, impacts previously described would largely be the same.

### **5.5.3.3 Alternative C (No Action Alternative)**

## **Recreational Use of Existing Trails**

Under this alternative, opportunities for non-motorized recreation would be the greatest relative to the other alternatives since all trails would be open year-round. However, this conclusion assumes that new trail development described under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B (deferred) would not completely offset displaced use under these alternatives; the degree to which displaced use would be accommodated under the Proposed Trails Plan and Alternative B is not known. Trail closures affecting bicyclists would not be changed relative to the existing situation; hence cycling opportunities would not be affected under this alternative.

## **New Trails**

No new trails are identified for construction under this alternative. Since use of existing trails would not be constrained and the current level of activities would be accommodated, considering new trails on a case-by-case basis would not adversely affect opportunities for non-motorized recreation in the near future.

## **Trail Rerouting, Decommission, and Removal**

No trail reroutes, decommissions, and removals are proposed, therefore no substantial impacts to recreation are anticipated.

## **Trailheads**

Use of existing trailhead facilities would continue. Construction of new trailheads would be addressed on a case-by-case basis, as would installation of trail registers, kiosks, and interpretive information materials. Since existing opportunities for recreation would not be constrained, no impacts to recreation would occur.

## **Cross-Country Travel**

Relative to the other alternatives, the No Action Alternative best provides for cross-country travel opportunities since no new restrictions would be imposed. Adverse impacts to recreation would not be likely.

## **Camping**

Relative to the other alternatives, the No Action Alternative best provides for camping opportunities since no new restrictions would be imposed. Adverse impacts to recreation would not be likely.

## **Dogs**

Relative to the other alternatives, the No Action Alternative best provides for trail use with dogs since no new restrictions would be imposed. However, adverse impacts to recreation may occur if trail users are confronted by dogs exhibiting hostile behavior, particularly those that may be off leash and out of sight of their owners. The extent to which this may occur is unknown. In addition, the presence of dog excrement on trails may detract from the aesthetic quality of a backcountry trail experience.

## **Pack Stock**

Relative to the other alternatives, the No Action Alternative best provides for utilizing pack stock since no new restrictions on types of animals would be imposed. However, anecdotal information suggests that the use of pack stock within the National Monument is infrequent; hence the lack of pack stock restrictions is not anticipated to result in any substantial benefits to recreation.

## **Murray Hill Picnic and Horse Hitching Facilities**

As the proposal under this alternative is the same as the Proposed Trails Plan, impacts to recreation would be the same as previously described.

## **Non-commercial, Non-competitive Organized Group Activities**

Under this alternative, opportunities for organized group activities would be the greatest relative to the other alternatives since all trails would be open year-round for such use. However, this alternative does not exclude certain activities or groups of a certain size from the requirement to

obtain a *Special Recreation Permit* to use BLM-administered lands. Absent these exclusions, BLM would be required to ascertain the need for a *Special Recreation Permit* on a case-by-case basis. This could result in substantial delays in obtaining a permit.

### **Non-Motorized Commercial Recreation Activities**

Under this alternative, opportunities for non-motorized commercial recreation activities would potentially be the greatest since no trails would be precluded from such activities. However, the extent to which limitations or prohibitions might be imposed upon considering proposals to conduct such commercial activities is unknown. Such limitations or prohibitions imposed by the applicable jurisdiction could be similar to those that would occur under one of the other alternatives.

### **Competitive Recreation Events**

Under this alternative, opportunities for non-motorized commercial recreation activities would potentially be the greatest since no trails would be precluded from such activities. However, the extent to which limitations or prohibitions might be imposed upon considering proposals to conduct such competitive activities is unknown. Such limitations or prohibitions imposed by the applicable jurisdiction could be similar to those that would occur under one of the other alternatives.

### **Motorized-Vehicle Use of Trails**

Addressing the use of motorized vehicles for trail maintenance and construction projects on a case-by-case basis may result in greater disturbances to trail users than under other alternatives given that no periods are identified wherein such use would be prohibited.

#### **5.5.4 Parks, Trails, and Recreation-Related Mitigation Measures**

Research Program: The Proposed Trails Plan provides a mechanism through Adaptive Management by which access to trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains is consistent with progress in the recovery of bighorn sheep as demonstrated through results obtained from the proposed monitoring and research programs.

Overall: Mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design of the proposed Trails Plan to assure consistency with the Conservation Goals and Objectives of the proposed MSHCP, i.e., it is “self-mitigating.” No further mitigation is required.

### **5.5.5 Levels of Significance after Mitigation**

Potential adverse impacts to recreational resources resulting from implementation of the Proposed Trails Plan would occur at levels that are less than significant as substantial opportunities for trail-based activities would continue.

## **5.6 Visual/Scenic Resources**

### **5.6.1 Introduction and Background**

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 remains relatively pristine, its 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.

### **5.6.2 Thresholds of Significance/Criteria for Determining Significance for CEQA Analysis**

The following discussion outlines the standards and criteria established by federal and state regulations by which potential adverse impacts to visual/scenic resources can be identified. The following focuses first on applicable federal guidelines and then addresses those identified in state regulations.

#### **Applicable Federal and State Standards and Criteria**

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FMPMA) requires that public lands be managed in a manner that would protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmosphere, water resource, and archaeological values. Federal agencies responsible for ensuring that the scenic values of public lands are considered before allowing uses that may have negative visual impacts. The Bureau of Land Management accomplishes this through its Visual Resource Management (VRM) system, which involves inventorying scenic values and establishing management objectives for those values through the resource management planning process, and then evaluating proposed activities to determine whether they conform to the management objectives.

It is the policy of BLM that visual design considerations be incorporated into all surface-disturbing projects occurring on public lands regardless of their size or potential visual impact. Use of BLM's current VRM manuals and handbooks to set management objectives and evaluate potential impacts is mandated. *Appendix H* includes a comprehensive VRM analysis of proposed new trails conducted in association with the analysis of the MSHCP and associated plans.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that measures be taken to ensure that aesthetically pleasing surroundings be retained for all Americans. Potential impacts to visual resources on federally managed lands are addressed in conformance with NEPA. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) provides a checklist of questions<sup>1</sup> that a lead agency can use to address a project's potential environmental impacts. Specifically, the checklist contains the

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix G: Environmental Checklist Form, California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines of 2000, as amended. California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15000-15387.

following four questions pertaining to aesthetics that are intended to assist in the determination of whether a project may result in significant visual impacts:

- (a) Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
- (b) Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- (c) Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- (d) Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

To simplify the assessment process, BLM's Visual Resource Management system is used for both federal and nonfederal lands. Although this system is not usually applicable to non-BLM lands, it satisfies CEQA requirements by providing sufficient information to answer the four questions above. For the purposes of this assessment, therefore, it is presumed that where VRM objectives would be met, the project would have no substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Conversely, where VRM objectives would not be met, substantial adverse effects may occur, though mitigation measures are identified that should reduce visual impacts. As artificial lighting is not proposed in conjunction with any of the trail construction projects, the fourth CEQA checklist question is not applicable.

### ***VRM Objectives***

BLM established Visual Resource Management objectives for public lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument through its California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (2002). These lands were designated as VRM Class II, except for designated wilderness, which is Class I. New perimeter trails and the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail, which under the Proposed Trails Plan would be deferred until completion of a focused research program to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (see Section 2.5.7.3), would be located entirely within the National Monument, but outside designated wilderness, hence subject only to Class II objectives. The objective of Class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The ultimate approval and construction of these trails would be subject to CEQA and/or NEPA review and in the event unmitigable impacts are identified, the trails may not be built.

### ***Contrast Rating***

The basic philosophy underlying visual quality of a landscape depends on the visual contrast created between a project and the existing landscape. The contrast can be measured by comparing the project features with the major features in the existing landscape. The basic design elements of form, line, color and texture are used to make this comparison and to describe the visual contrast created by the project. This assessment process provides a means for determining visual impacts and for identifying measures to mitigate these impacts. However, it is not intended to be the only means of addressing impacts. It should be used as a guide, tempered by common sense, to ensure that every attempt is made to minimize potential visual impacts.

The contrast rating is accomplished from the most critical viewpoints, or key observation points. These points are usually along commonly traveled routes or at other likely observation locations. Factors that should be considered in selection of key observation points are angle of observation, number of viewers, length of time the project is in view, relative project size, season of use, and light conditions. The rating is accomplished by determining the degree of contrast (i.e., strong, moderate, weak, or none) for each element. The following general criteria and factors are used when rating the degree of contrast:

<u>Degree of Contrast</u>	<u>Criteria</u>
None.....	Element contrast is not visible or perceived.
Weak.....	Element contrast can be seen but does not attract attention.
Moderate.....	Element contrast begins to attract attention and begins to dominate the characteristic landscape.
Strong.....	Element contrast demands attention, would not be overlooked, and is dominant in the landscape.

### ***Determining Whether VRM Objectives Are Met***

The contrast ratings are compared with established objectives for the VRM class. For comparative purposes, the four levels of contrast (none, weak, moderate, and strong) roughly correspond with Classes I, II, III and IV, respectively. This means that a “strong” contrast rating may be acceptable in a Class IV area, but probably would not meet the VRM objectives for a Class III area. Similarly, a “moderate” contrast rating may be acceptable in Class III and IV areas, but probably would not meet Class II objectives. In making these comparisons, the cumulative effect of all of the contrast ratings must be considered. Certain combinations of ratings may indicate there is a stronger overall contrast than the individual ratings show. For example, several “moderate” ratings when viewed in combination may warrant an overall “strong” rating. This is a judgmental determination.

### **5.6.3 Visual/Scenic-Resources-Related Project Impacts**

Potential impacts to visual/scenic resources resulting from implementation of the Proposed Trails Plan are limited to those associated with the construction of new trails, especially those within and along the lower elevations of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. As previously indicated, however, construction of new perimeter trails and the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail as described under the Proposed Trails Plan would be deferred pending completion of a focused research program to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (see Section 2.5.7.3). The proposed MSHCP also provides guidelines for the planning and development of new trails and public access within Conservation Areas other than the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area.

#### ***Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)***

The Proposed Trails Plan includes the management of existing trails in these mountains. The development of new trails, including construction of perimeter trails and the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail, would be deferred pending completion of a focused research program to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep. The various components of these alternatives are set forth in Section 2.0 of this EIR/EIS. The effects of each of the Trails Plan alternatives are summarized below.

An overview of the Visual Resource Management system for assessing potential impacts to visual resources that would result from proposed projects, and visual contrast ratings for new perimeter trails and the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail identified in the Proposed Trails Plan, which have been deferred, are presented in *Appendix H: “Visual Contrast Rating for New Trail Construction.”* It has been determined that each of the new perimeter trails, except for the West La Quinta Cove Trail, would conform to BLM’s Class II Visual Resource Management (VRM) objectives. This trail would not conform to Class II VRM objectives, though mitigation measures are identified that would reduce visual impacts.

The preferred alignment, as well as alternatives, for the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail between the Visitor Center loop trail and Deep Canyon would conform to Class II VRM objectives. The South Eisenhower Mountain alignment (preferred) and North Eisenhower Mountain alignment for the Deep Canyon to La Quinta Cove segment would not conform to Class II VRM objectives, though mitigation measures are identified that would reduce visual impacts. The Indio Mountain and Indio Canyon alignments for this segment would conform to Class II VRM objectives.

***Alternative B***

Impacts to visual resources resulting from the construction of new perimeter trails would be the same as described under the Proposed Trails Plan.

***Alternative C***

Visual contrast ratings 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 contrast rating process may be (a) redesigned, (b) abandoned or rejected, or (c) allowed, but with mitigation measures stipulated to reduce critical impacts.

**5.6.4 Visual/Scenic-Resources-Related Mitigation Measures for CEQA Analysis**

As already indicated, consideration of new perimeter trails and the Palm Desert to La Quinta Cove Connector Trail identified under the Proposed Trails Plan has been deferred. Nevertheless, mitigation measures relative to visual resource impacts are described below and will be imposed should proposals for their construction be forthcoming after completion of the focused research program. References to the Proposed Trails Plan are retained and not herein revised. Note, however, that the Hopalong Cassidy perimeter trail, referred to below as the “Bump & Grind to Cahuilla Hills Park Perimeter Trail” and “Art Smith Trailhead to Homme-Adams Park Perimeter Trail,” have been addressed separate from the Proposed Trails Plan.

**Proposed Trails Plan (Alternative A)**

For trails segments under Proposed Trails Plan, the following mitigation measures are recommended to minimize contrasts or other potential visual impacts, even where they are anticipated to be weak:

**Garstin to Thielman Perimeter Trail**

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail’s design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where Feasible.
- (b) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, surface disturbance downhill of the trail’s tread would be minimized to the greatest extent practicable. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural as practicable.

Cathedral City Cove Perimeter Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.
- (b) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimize surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural forms. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated to reduce color contrasts to the greatest extent practicable.

Bump & Grind to Cahuilla Hills Park Perimeter Trail (completed)

- (a) Where possible, utilize or improve existing trails to minimize new surface disturbance.
- (b) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.
- (c) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, if necessary, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimize surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural as practicable. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated to reduce color contrasts to the greatest extent practicable.

Art Smith Trailhead to Homme-Adams Park Perimeter Trail (completed)

- (a) Where possible, utilize or improve existing trails to minimize new surface disturbance.
- (b) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.
- (c) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, if necessary, surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread would be minimized. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural forms. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated with asphalt emulsion or gray paint to reduce color contrasts.

Visitor Center Loop Trail to Deep Canyon Alignments, Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.

- (b) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimize surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural as practicable. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated to reduce color contrasts to the greatest extent practicable.

North and South Eisenhower Mountain Alignments, Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.
- (b) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimize surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural as practicable. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated to reduce color contrasts to the greatest extent practicable.

Indio Mountain Alignment, Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.
- (b) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimize surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural as practicable. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated to reduce color contrasts to the greatest extent practicable.

Indio Canyon Alignment, Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design.
- (b) Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.

West La Quinta Cove Perimeter Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design.
- (b) Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.

East La Quinta Cove Perimeter Trail

- (a) Where possible, construction of the trail in continuous straight lines would be avoided; irregular lines that repeat lines of the characteristic landscape would be incorporated into the trail's design. Natural screens (vegetation and landforms) would be used where possible.
- (b) When constructing side-hill bench cuts, every reasonable effort shall be made to minimize surface disturbance downhill of the trail's tread. Cuts would be shaped to appear as natural as practicable. Freshly broken rock faces would be treated to reduce color contrasts to the greatest extent practicable.

**Alternative B**

Same as Proposed Trails Plan except that the Palm Desert to La Quinta Connector Trail would not be constructed.

**Alternative C (No Action Alternative)**

New trails would be processed and approved on a case by case basis, and mitigation would be on a case by case basis as well.

**5.6.5 Levels of Significance after Mitigation for CEQA Analysis**

Impacts to visual/scenic resources would be less than significant for CEQA analysis purposes upon application of the mitigation measures set forth above.

**SECTION 5.0**

***SANTA ROSA AND SAN JACINTO MOUNTAINS TRAILS PLAN  
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND MITIGATION MEASURES***

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