

## 3.10 RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

### 3.10.1 Scope

This section examines existing recreational resources in the vicinity of the proposed mine expansion that could be affected by the construction and operation of the expansion.

### 3.10.2 Recreational Resources in the Vicinity of the Mesquite Mine

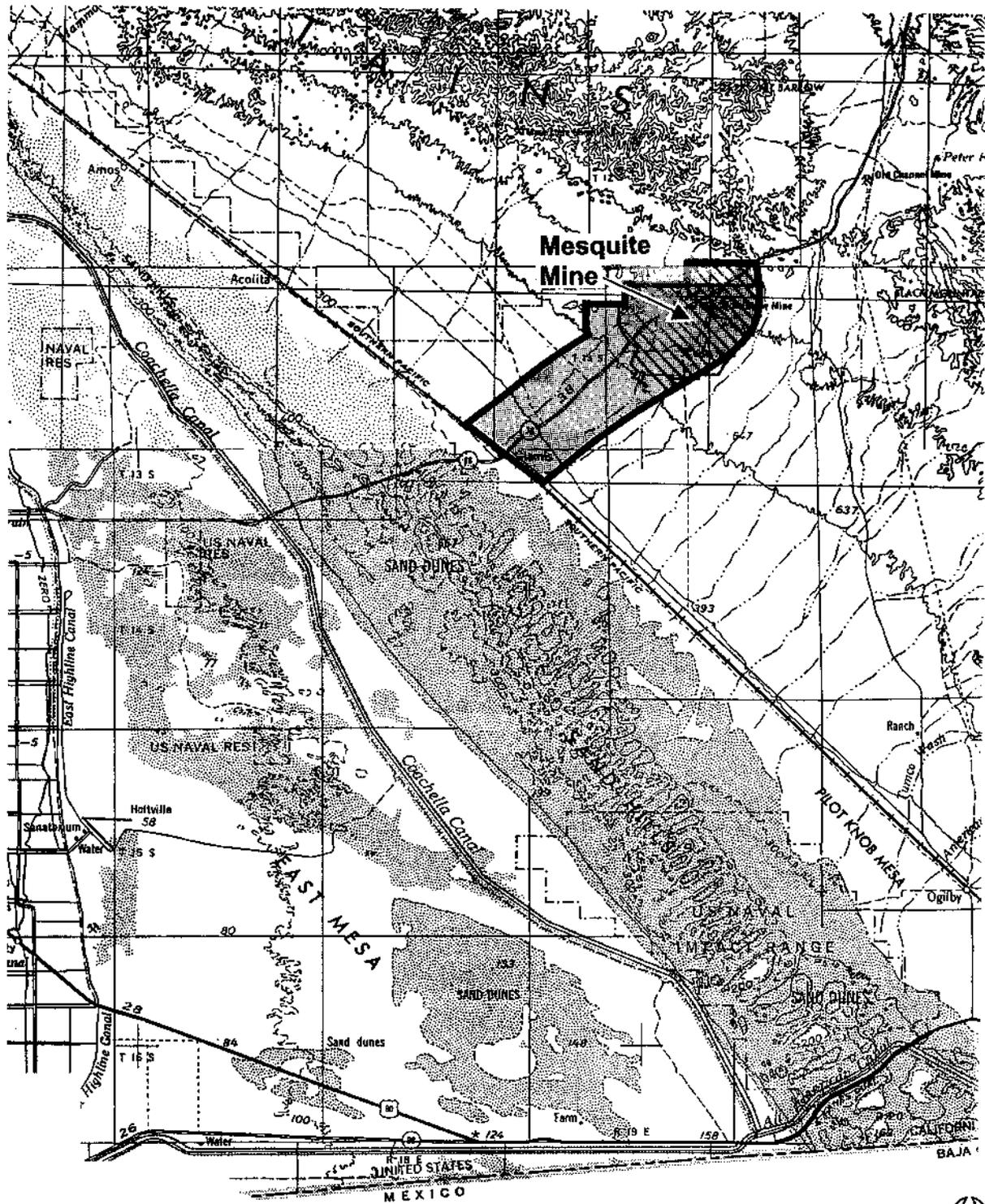
The lands surrounding the Mesquite Mine are periodically used for recreational activities including rock-hounding, dispersed camping, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, target shooting, and hunting. Recreation activities are centered primarily in the Glamis area of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA), which is extensively used by OHVs. The sand dunes are about five miles southwest of the project site. On winter holiday weekends, the ISDRA is visited by 30,000 or more OHV enthusiasts and other campers (Butler Roach Group, Inc., 1995).

The BLM has collected data regarding the use of the area surrounding the project site (Recreation Area 16, Figure 3.10-1). This area was surveyed during select winter weekends from October 1989 to May 1990. Table 3.10-1 reflects the approximate number of camping units and the number of visitors in this area for two-day, three-day, and four-day weekends. As populations in Southern California, Arizona, and other areas continue to grow, it is expected that the demand for recreational resources, such as those provided in the vicinity of the Proposed Action site, would also grow.

The self-guided Mesquite Mine Overlook Trail, approximately 0.8 miles in length, is located at the project site. This trail provides a view of the mining operations as well as information on the native plants and animals, the local geology, and multiple-use public lands. This trail was built as a joint effort by the Mine and the BLM, and was designed to educate visitors about contemporary mining practices, public land management, and the natural environment. An interpretive brochure for the trail was also developed by the Mine and the BLM. Several thousand visitors use the trail each year, including school children and local civic groups.

### 3.10.3 Wilderness Areas

As directed by FLPMA and the Wilderness Act of 1964, all BLM-managed lands in California were inventoried and specific areas were identified as wilderness study areas. Wilderness Areas (WAs) were designated by the California Desert Protection Act of October 31, 1994. WAs located in the vicinity of the mine site are listed in Table 3.10-2. No WA is closer than four miles to the mine site.



SOURCE: BLM, 1993

North 3/14/00

Mesquite Mine Expansion EIR/EIS  
**Recreational Area Number 16**

**FIGURE**  
**3.10-1**

Table 3.10-1

**Bureau of Land Management Visitor Count Data  
Selected Weekends from October 1989 To May 1990  
For Recreation Area 16, Mesquite Mine**

# of Days	Camping Units <sup>(1)</sup>	Visitors <sup>(2)</sup>
2- day weekends	270	945
3-day weekends	567	1,985
4- day weekends	265	938
<b>Total <sup>(3)</sup></b>	1,102	3,858

## Notes:

- (1) The number of camping units in the area counted during weekends between October 1989 and May 1990.
- (2) The number of visitors is estimated by multiplying the number of camping units observed by 3.5 persons per unit.
- (3) Totals presented are less than the total number of visitors during the period from October 1989 to May 1990 because counts were not made every weekend.

Counts were conducted on an opportunistic basis. Actual totals may be greater than those shown. Use in 1991 and 1992 is projected to have increased at a rate of 5% each year.

Source: The Butler Roach Group, 1995

Table 3.10-2

**Wilderness Areas in the Project Vicinity  
Mesquite Mine**

WA Number	WA	Approximate Distance/Direction from the Project Site
WA 35085	Indian Pass	11 miles/east
WA 35107	Picacho Peak	11 miles/east
WA 35092	Little Picacho Peak	14 miles/southeast
WA 35099	North Algodones Dunes	4 miles/west

Source: BLM, 1999.

Note: WA No. 35099, North Algodones Dunes, also includes the Algodones Dunes ACEC.

## 3.11 VISUAL RESOURCES

### 3.11.1 Scope

This section provides a discussion of the existing visual resources in the vicinity of the Mesquite Mine that could be affected by the construction and operation of the proposed mine expansions. The effect that a project could have on visual resources would not be limited to the project site. Rather, the degree to which a project could affect the visual quality of a landscape depends on the visual contrast created between a project and the surrounding existing landscape (BLM, 1986b).

All of the BLM-managed public lands in the CDCA (with the exception of a few small and scattered parcels), have been designated geographically into four multiple-use classes. Classification is based on the sensitivity of resources and kinds of uses within each geographic area. In the CDCA, visual resource management objectives in the multiple-use class guidelines provide the framework for determining appropriate levels of management, protection, and rehabilitation of BLM lands.

The Proposed Action site is located mostly within a Multiple-Use Class M designated area within the CDCA. Multiple-Use Class M provides for a wide variety of present and future uses such as mining, livestock grazing, energy and utility development, and recreation. Class M management is also designed to conserve desert resources and to mitigate damage to those resources that permitted uses may cause (BLM, 1980).

Outside of the CDCA area, Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes are used to prescribe the amount of change allowed in the characteristic landscape. A parallel can be drawn between the Multiple-Use Classes applied to the CDCA and the VRM Classes applied to other BLM-managed lands. The objectives of Multiple-Use Class M are similar to the objectives of VRM Class III. VRM Class III areas have a "low visual sensitivity" resource value. The objective of this class is to at least partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape may be moderate. Management activities may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominate natural features of the characteristic landscape (BLM, 1984).

### 3.11.2 Visual Character

#### 3.11.2.1 Mesquite Mine

The site lies adjacent to and north of SR 78, a rural, low-volume highway, carrying approximately 1,250 vehicles per day (Caltrans, 1992). The Mesquite Mine is an industrial-looking land use with noticeable features that include the previously described overburden and ore-residue piles, the ore conveyor and associated industrial dome, and buildings. Brownie Hill, a natural feature, rises more than 300 feet above the site. The proposed mine expansion area consists of relatively flat terrain containing a series of parallel drainage channels, separated by slightly elevated desert pavement areas.

Sparse vegetation and sun baked coarse gravels create a reddish-brown and green texture across much of the project area. Elevated overburden and heap leach piles from mining operations, smooth in texture and free of most vegetation prior to reclamation, contrast with the desert floor, both in texture and color. The mine itself consists of numerous man-made landforms rising to a height of over 200 feet, and three existing mine pits.

The project region is characteristic low desert, with little soil and sparse vegetation. The Chocolate Mountains, a narrow range running northwest to southeast, rise to the east of the project to an elevation of approximately 2,500 feet. The Chocolate Mountain "foothills" lie north, in the visual "backdrop" of the project site. The other element of visual interest is provided by the Algodones Dunes, a large sand dune area located approximately seven miles southwest of the mining area.

A more detailed description of existing land uses on and surrounding the mine site is provided in Section 3.9 (Land Use) of this EIR/EIS.

### 3.11.3 Scenic Quality

The majority of the project site has been disturbed by permitted mining activities. There is minimal disturbance to the surrounding areas. For the most part, the surrounding landscape has retained its natural character. Scenic quality refers to the value of a landscape from a visual perception point of view. Therefore, visual quality describes the overall scenic quality of the project site within the context of the surrounding environment.

The project site and surrounding lands are characterized by undulating terrain containing a series of parallel drainage channels with sparse vegetation. Drainage patterns and vegetation form reddish brown to dark gray and light to dark green lines across the desert terrain. The terrain is abruptly changed by occasional dark-colored, rugged hills and rock outcrops that reach elevations of up to 400 feet above the surrounding desert floor. The dark form of the Chocolate Mountains, located north of the project site, is seen as a visual backdrop north of SR 78. These mountains increase the area's scenic appeal. Man-made modifications to the area over the past 100 years have been related primarily to mineral exploration and development. These modifications, such as the Mesquite Mine, have changed the scenic character of the area on a local basis. Informal (unpaved) roads crosses much of the area.

### 3.11.4 Visibility

Part of the mine site is visible to the public primarily from SR 78, a rural, low-volume highway that runs adjacent to the southern and eastern sides of the project area. SR 78 is not a designated scenic route (Imperial County, 1993). Buildings, facilities, heap leach pads and overburden stockpile areas associated with the Mesquite Mine and processing facilities are visible to motorists traveling on SR 78. Given the general expansiveness and undeveloped nature of the area, the visual impression is locally dominated by these facilities.

Views in the region are expansive, particularly during periods of clear weather. The primary physical barrier to visibility is the Chocolate Mountains. Air pollution is the major factor limiting visibility in Imperial County.

The Mesquite Mine is partially illuminated at night to allow for nighttime operations. These lights create a glow in the sky above the mine facilities. This light source would be reduced with closure of the mine, anticipated to occur no later than the year 2001 under current economic conditions and permits. Some night operations would continue during Mine reclamation to complete the rinsing process. Approval of the Proposed Action would extend the period of operation until approximately 2006.

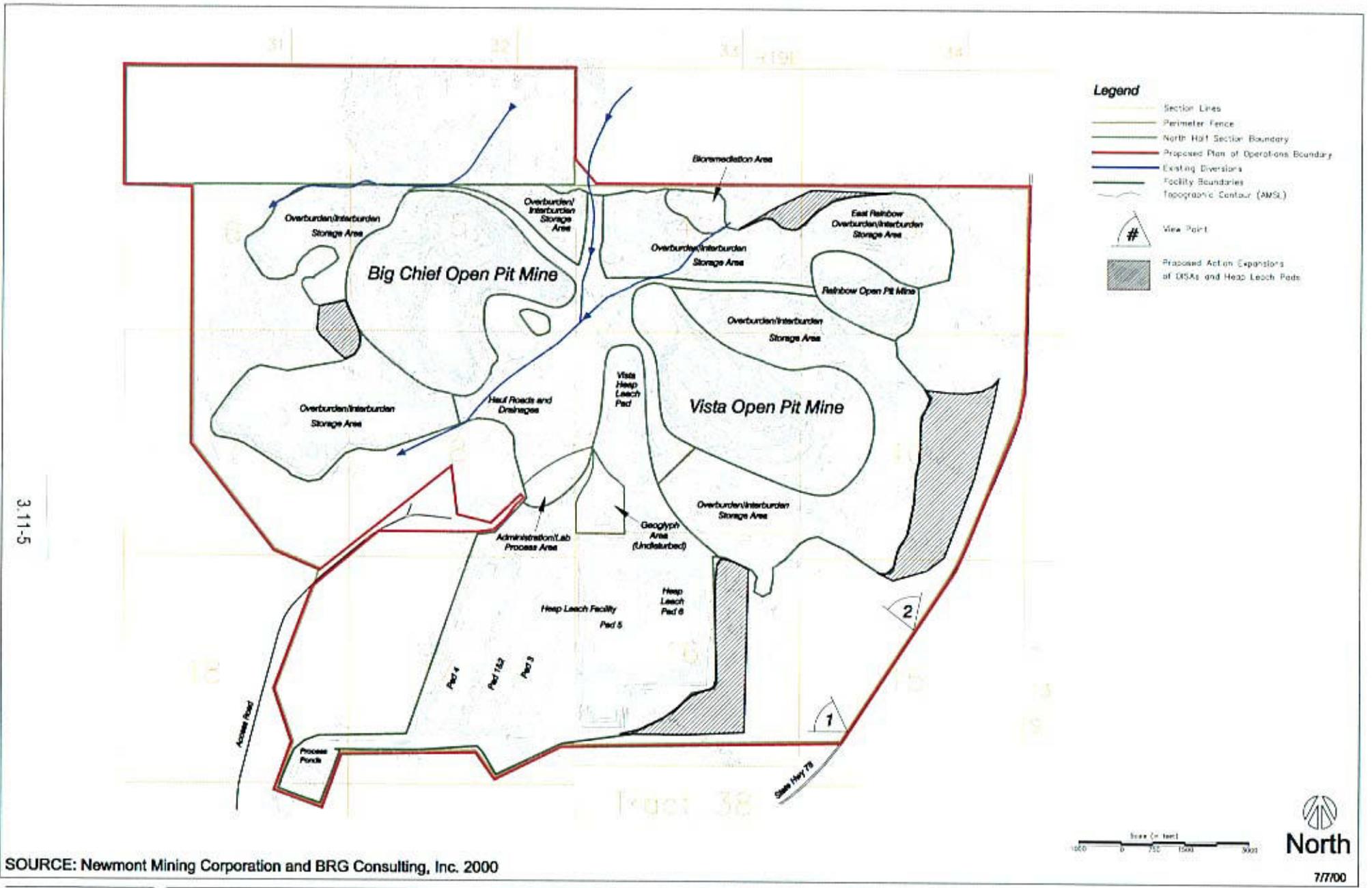
Two viewpoints were chosen to illustrate the most important views toward the project site along SR 78 (Figure 3.11-1). These represent a viewpoint along a travel route, or at a use area or a potential use area, where the view of a management activity would be most revealing (BLM, 1984). A description of the project site view from both identified viewpoints is presented below.

### **3.11.4.1 View Point No. 1**

Figure 3.11-2 shows the existing view from View Point No. 1, which is from the shoulder of SR 78, approximately seven feet off the road surface at the southeastern edge of the project boundary, looking northwest at the project site. It should be noted that the view from an automobile passing this view point is partially blocked by the mine boundary fence and vegetation. The foreground view seen in Figure 3.11-2 consists of a chain-link fence along the project boundary, and natural desert terrain with native vegetation. The mid-ground consists of multiple benches of the heap leach pads in Sections 16 and 17 (See Figure 2.1-1). These heap leach pads, with their lighter color, smooth texture, and flat-topped forms, have resulted in a low modification to the characteristic landscape. A small segment of the Chocolate Mountains can be seen in the background at the northern end of this view point. Note: The existing topographic expression of the leach facility and the OISAs is temporary. Reclamation will involve modifying the linear nature of the existing facilities.

### **3.11.4.2 View Point No. 2**

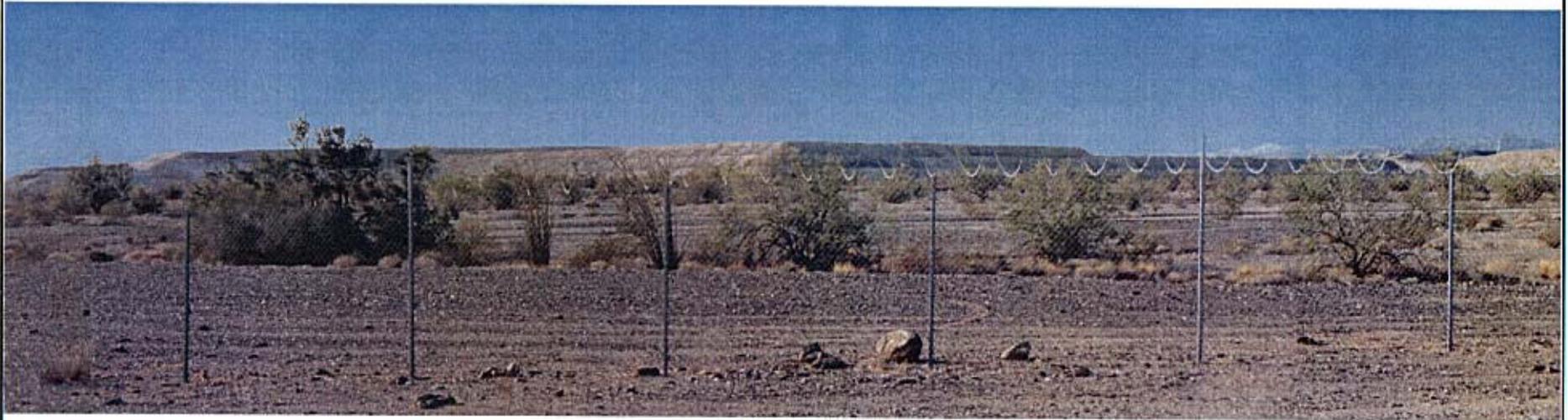
Figure 3.11-3 shows the existing view from View Point No. 2, which is from an elevated area across SR 78, approximately three quarters of a mile north of the southeastern edge of the project boundary looking along the northeastern border of the project site. It should be noted that the view from an automobile passing this view point is partially blocked by the fence and vegetation. The foreground view seen in Figure 3.11-3 consists of a chain-link fence along the project boundary, and natural desert terrain with native vegetation. In the mid-ground lies a series of overburden/interburden piles associated with mining operations, which are visible below and at the horizon at the center of the field. These stockpiles, with their lighter color, smooth texture, and flat-topped forms, have resulted in a temporary (pre-reclamation) low modification to the natural landscape. The Chocolate Mountains are seen intermittently, over the tops of the overburden piles in the background of this view point.



Mesquite Mine Expansion EIR/EIS  
View Point Locations

FIGURE  
3.11-1

3.11-7



SOURCE: BRG Consulting, Inc., 2000.

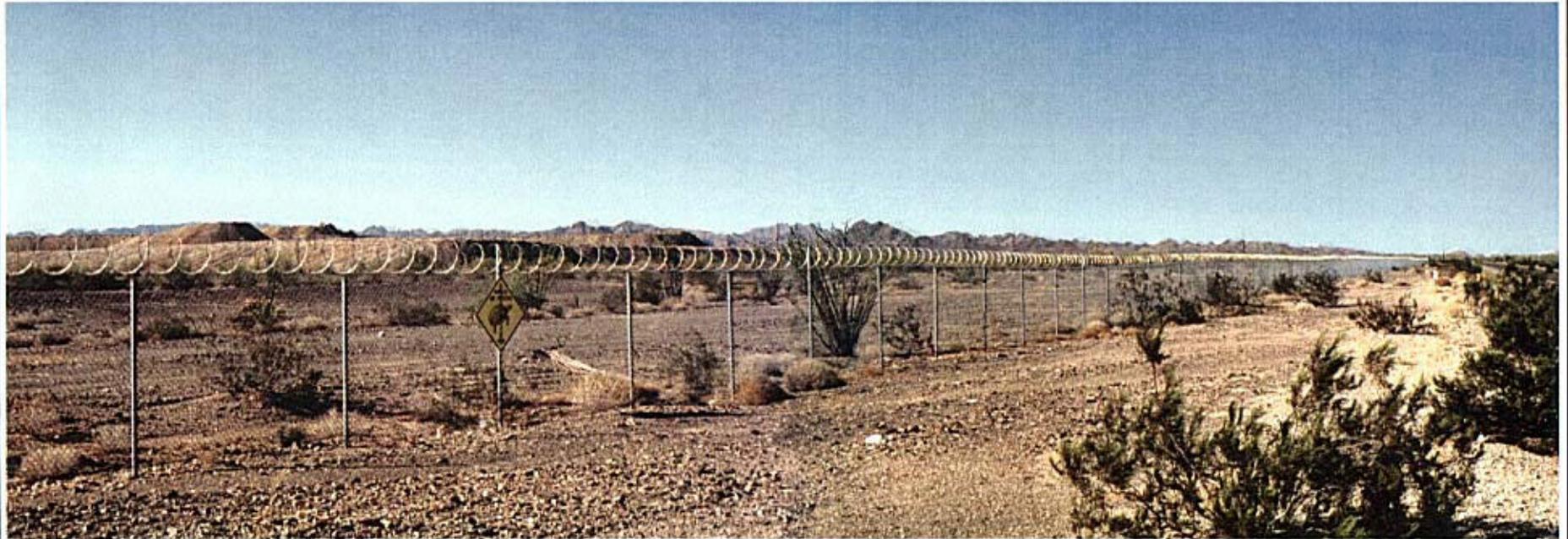
No Scale  
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Mesquite Mine Expansion EIR/EIS

**Existing Conditions**  
View Point No. 1

**FIGURE**  
**3.11-2**

3.11-9



SOURCE: BRG Consulting, Inc., 2000.

No Scale

1/3/00

Mesquite Mine Expansion EIR/EIS

**Existing Conditions**  
View Point No. 2

**FIGURE**

**3.11-3**

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## 3.12 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Existing environmental health and safety conditions at the Mesquite Mine result from ongoing mining operations. The physical characteristics of the mine consist of open pits, heap leach pads and gold recovery facilities and various ancillary facilities typical of open-pit gold mine operations. These facilities are described in detail in Section 2.1.5. The proposed mine expansion for which this EIR/EIS is prepared would increase the disturbed area by approximately 10 percent in order to extend mine operations to 2006.

Various measures have been incorporated into existing mine operations to minimize the potential for health and safety impacts to mine employees and the general public. These measures include operational requirements set forth by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal-OSHA) and various other federal and state agencies that have been observed by the Mine since inception of operations in 1984. Observance and enforcement of these regulations and guidelines by the Mine is ongoing.

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## 3.13 SOCIOECONOMICS

This section discusses the existing socioeconomic environment and identifies the potential socioeconomic impacts that could result from the development of the Proposed Action.

### 3.13.1 Scope

The scope of the socioeconomics discussion presented here and in Chapter 4.0, Section 4.1.13, is based on public and interested agency input and is limited to employment, income, and demographic effects within Imperial County because the majority of project-related effects would occur in Imperial County.

### 3.13.2 Employment and Income

#### 3.13.2.1 Employment and Income in Imperial County

In 1997, the County of Imperial's civilian labor force was estimated to be 56,800 persons. Of this number, 41,800 were employed and 15,000 were unemployed. The unemployment rate was 26.5 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997).

In past years, the agricultural sector was the largest employer in Imperial County. Since 1991, Government employment in Imperial County has increased by over 2,000 jobs, primarily associated with increased employment at the Calipatria State Prison, a new State prison at Seeley, and increased employment associated with the Border Crossing in Calexico. During this same period, agricultural jobs declined in Imperial County.

The largest sector, by earnings, in Imperial County in 1991 was government, with 32.8 percent of the total, followed by services with 18.2 percent of the total. Mining provided 3.1 percent of earnings in 1991. This share declined to 1.4 percent by the year 1997. Mining provided the highest earnings per job in 1991 (\$39,337) and remains among the highest earnings per job sectors in the local economy. The 1996 per capita personal income for Imperial County was estimated to be \$14,394. This was 65.7 percent of the per capita personal income for the State of California (\$21,895) and 79.4 percent of the per capita personal income of the United States (\$18,136).

#### 3.13.2.2 Existing Employment and Income at the Proposed Site

Most of the mine property is owned by Hospah Coal Company and leased to Santa Fe Pacific Gold Corporation (SFPGC), and operated by Newmont Gold Company. SFPGC and Newmont Gold Company are subsidiaries of Newmont Mining Corporation. Newmont Mining Corporation is a Delaware corporation headquartered in Denver, Colorado. Prior to June 25, 1993, Gold Fields operated the Mesquite Mine. The direct and indirect employment and earnings associated with the Mesquite Mine are summarized below.

As of June 1999, the gold mine employs 164 workers, down from 370 workers in fiscal year (FY) ending September 1992. Mine workers commute from both California and Arizona (Table 3.13-1). Paid salaries are approximately \$7.5 million dollars plus benefits of \$3 million. The average wage paid to employees for FY 1999 was approximately \$45,000 with an additional \$17,500 in benefits paid per worker (Newmont Gold Company, 1999).

The mine is scheduled to close no later than mid 2001 given current gold prices. Therefore, the employment, income, and revenues currently generated by the mine (Table 3.13-2) would be lost. Other local employers include the Glamis Beach Store, various aggregate producers who periodically mine aggregate in the area, and BLM which manages the adjacent federal lands. Because it is not expected that these jobs would be impacted by the Proposed Action and because many of these jobs are seasonal, no effort has been made to quantify employment and earnings associated with these activities.

### 3.13.3 Demographics

The following section includes a discussion of various demographic issues applicable to the Proposed Action. To obtain a better understanding of the demographic conditions in Imperial County, a comparison of similar demographic characteristics for the State of California, and the United States is included.

#### 3.13.3.1 Selected Demographic Statistics

Selected demographic statistics (1996) for Imperial County, the State of California, and the United States are shown on Table 3.13-3. The total population of Imperial County was estimated to be 140,931 in 1996. This represented 0.4 percent of the population of the State of California (31,762,190) and 0.05 percent of the population of the United States (265,463,000). The number of persons per household in the County of Imperial was estimated to be 3.26 in 1990. This is 17 percent larger than the average household size in the State of California (2.79) and 24 percent larger than the average household size in the United States (2.63).

Table 3.13-1

**Distribution of Mesquite Mine Employees  
June 9, 1999**

California	
Selected Areas	Number of Employees
Brawley	36
Herber	2
El Centro	14
Calipatria	2
Calexico	7
Imperial	16
Blythe	9
Palo Verde	1
Seeley	2
Winterhaven	3
Westmorland	5
Holtville	15
Niland	1
<b>TOTAL CALIFORNIA</b>	<b>113</b>
Arizona	
Yuma	49
San Luis	2
<b>TOTAL ARIZONA</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>MINE TOTAL</b>	<b>164</b>

Source: Mesquite Mine, 1999.

Table 3.13-2

**Fiscal Statistics  
Mesquite Mine**

Selected Financial Variables	1998
Spending	\$54,061,226
Taxes:	
Sales Tax	\$76,596
Property Tax	\$383,761
Federal Income Tax	\$1,290,082
State Income Tax	\$295,505
Federal Unemployment Tax	\$16,881
State Unemployment Tax	\$72,220
Rent	\$6,027
Royalties	\$3,027

Source: Newmont Mining Corporation, 1999.

Table 3.13-3

**1996 Selected Demographic Statistics  
Imperial County, State Of California, United States**

Selected Variables	Imperial County	State of California	United States
Total Population	140,931 <sup>(a)</sup>	31,762,190 <sup>(a)</sup>	265,463,000 <sup>(b)</sup>
Per Capita Personal Income (1996)	\$14,394 <sup>(b)</sup>	\$21,895 <sup>(b)</sup>	\$18,136 <sup>(b)</sup>

Source: (a) U.S. Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1999.  
(b) U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999.

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## 3.14 PUBLIC SERVICES AND UTILITIES

### 3.14.1 Scope

This section discusses the public services available within Imperial County and the utilities currently existing at the Mesquite Mine.

### 3.14.2 Existing Public Services

The Mesquite Mine is located within a sparsely inhabited area of Imperial County, where the local population base is insufficient to maintain separate community service facilities. Therefore, most facilities, such as police and fire stations, schools, libraries, and hospitals, are located in the more populous areas to the west. Brawley, an incorporated city about 35 miles west of the proposed site, is the closest community providing a full range of public services. The next closest, El Centro, California, is about 50 miles to the southwest.

#### 3.14.2.1 Police, Fire Protection, and Medical Services

An emergency vehicle and first aid station with trained personnel is maintained at the Mesquite Mine to administer treatment in the event of any emergency. In addition, a heliport is located on-site to coordinate with available medical air evacuation services. A security force and fire fighting system and equipment are provided on the Mesquite Mine site as well.

#### 3.14.2.2 Community Facilities

##### ***Schools***

There are 52 K-12 schools in Imperial County. There are three advanced education institutions within or near the Imperial County area. They include: the Imperial Valley College (two-year), in Imperial, California; San Diego State University, Imperial Valley Campus, in Calexico, California; and Arizona Western College (two year) located east of Yuma, Arizona.

##### ***Parks and Recreational Facilities***

Numerous recreational opportunities are available in Imperial County. These include, but are not limited to, sand dune areas, desert areas, the Salton Sea, the Colorado River, and local community parks. These recreational facilities are managed by the BLM, the County, or the City in which they are located. There are 46 parks and 20 playgrounds located within the incorporated cities and unincorporated communities of Imperial County.

Much of the public lands used for recreation in Imperial County are managed by the BLM. The types of recreational activities these areas offer include:

- Open Space
- Nature Study and Resource-Oriented Recreation
- Education and Research
- Wilderness
- OHV Use
- Organized Competitive Vehicle Events

Three Recreation Area Management Plans have been developed for the Imperial County area. They include: the ISDRA; the McCain Valley Resource Conservation Area (in eastern San Diego County); and the Jacumba Outstanding Natural Area.

Recreational facilities located in the vicinity of the Proposed Action are discussed in Section 3.1.10, Recreational Resources, of this EIR/EIS.

## ***Libraries***

There are nine public libraries and one branch of the County Library located within the various communities of Imperial County.

## ***Solid Waste Facilities***

There are 11 Class III solid waste disposal sites within Imperial County. Of this total, ten are operated by the County and one is privately operated. The Class III landfills in Imperial County currently provide in excess of 50 years of capacity, assuming the successful implementation of AB 939-mandated recycling programs. Additionally, a permit exemption (SWIS#13-AA0025) for a landfill at the Mesquite Mine site on land controlled by Newmont for disposal of Class III inert waste (glass, scrap metal, concrete) was renewed on July 1, 1999 by Imperial County Department of Environmental Health Services.

### **3.14.3 Utilities**

#### **3.14.3.1 Electricity**

Electric power is provided to the most populous areas of the County by the Imperial Irrigation District (IID). Electric power is provided to the Mesquite Mine via an existing IID seven-mile, 92 kV transmission line and a 161/92 kV tap substation.

#### ***Communications Systems***

Telephone service is currently provided at the Mesquite Mine via an on-site microwave station.

## **Water**

The Mesquite Mine well field includes three large diameter wells, large high production pumps, two depth monitoring wells, a five-mile long electric power line and a four-mile long above-ground pipeline.

As discussed in Chapter 3.0, Section 3.1.2, Water Resources, of this EIR/EIS, the Mesquite Mine well field is approved for extracting up to 4,033 acre-feet of water per year, based on maximum estimates of potential water demands for dust control, heap leaching, potable water, construction water and evaporation (CUP No. 684-84). The actual water use between 1987 and 1999 varied from 500 to 1,500 acre-feet per year.

Water from this source is not suitable for drinking without prior treatment. Newmont historically treated a portion of this water (less than 50 gpm) by a reverse osmosis process for potable uses at the Mesquite Mine.

## **Sanitation**

Public sewer services in the larger communities are provided by municipal governments or special districts. In less densely populated areas, individual sewage disposal systems are more common. The Mesquite Mine uses individual sewage disposal methods (i.e., septic tanks).

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