2.0 ALTERNATIVES

This chapter presents the range of alternatives considered for the Coachella Valley California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment in narrative format. Please refer to the Executive Summary for a summary description of the alternatives in comparative table format. The Proposed Plan Amendment (preferred alternative) is also identified, and represents BLM's likely choice for a decision at this time.

Persons who may be adversely affected by the proposed decisions outlined in the Proposed Plan Amendment may file a protest to the Director of the BLM in accordance with the protest procedures outlined in Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 1610.5-2. These procedures are described in the front of this document. **Written protests must be filed with the Director on or before November 18, 2002**. BLM's final decision may or may not be the Proposed Plan, depending on public input received during the 30-day protest period and the 60-day Governor's consistency review period upon publication of the Proposed Plan Amendment/ Final EIS. Before the Record of Decision is issued for the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment, the Director shall render a decision on any protests received.

2.1 General Description of Each Alternative

Each alternative is arranged by plan element. Plan elements are resources or activities BLM is responsible for managing on the public lands. This particular suite of plan elements for which BLM is proposing new decisions, were selected based on the issues and concerns expressed by the public during public scoping. The alternatives describe different approaches for managing a particular plan element. The number of alternatives for each plan element ranges from two to four.

The alternatives are labeled Alternative A, Alternative B, Alternative C and Alternative D. Alternatives A through C represent an array of options ranging from less restrictive land use (A) to more restrictive (C). Alternative D is the "no action" alternative. If Alternative D is selected, BLM would be opting to not change any of the decisions outlined in the *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (1980, as amended) at this time, and to continue with the current management strategy for that particular plan element.

Many of the plan elements are independent of one another relative to the impact analysis. Some plan elements are interrelated. The array of alternatives for interrelated plan elements are designed to track closely with one another, such that Alternatives A, B and C of one plan element correlate with Alternatives A, B and C respectively of an interrelated plan element.

As this is a plan amendment and not a revision, most of the guidance and land use plan decisions established in the *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (1980 as amended) shall remain extant. The Proposed Plan Amendment goals and conservation objectives are an addition to the existing CDCA Plan goals and objectives. The land

use plan action alternatives identify specific proposed changes to the CDCA Plan, and are not meant to replace all decisions for a particular plan element.

2.2 Plan Goals Common to All Alternatives

Goals define a future desired condition or outcome for a resource or program, in order to resolve resource management issues. These particular goals were developed out of the various issues (Section.1.3) identified during the informal and formal public scoping process for this Plan Amendment. During plan implementation, goals serve as benchmarks for determining land use plan conformance. The following goals are a supplement to the goals presented in the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (1980, as amended). The Proposed Plan Amendment incorporates the following goals.

1. Ensure a balance of multiple use and sustainable public land uses with progress toward attaining healthy, properly functioning ecosystems.
2. Achieve recovery of listed species, and manage species to avoid future listings.
3. Maintain a network of motorized vehicle routes necessary to meet recreational and other needs while minimizing affects to air quality and other resource values, in order to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and other environmental laws.
4. Establish and maintain a network of hiking, biking and equestrian trails that provide opportunities for year-round recreation.
5. Make available public lands to support community infrastructure needs for southern California including energy production, mineral extraction and utilities, while minimizing resource use conflicts and promoting species recovery in the plan area as a whole.
6. Work in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, the State of California and local jurisdictions to conserve the values of, and manage land uses in, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.
7. Work in collaboration with the Torres Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians to manage wetland habitats in the Whitewater Delta north of the Salton Sea.
8. Protect the free-flowing characteristics and outstandingly remarkable values of rivers that are eligible and may be suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation, and ensure their tentative classifications as “wild,” “scenic” or “recreational” are not affected.
9. Participate as a federal land management partner with the local Coachella Valley jurisdictions, and contribute to development and implementation of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan.
10. Work cooperatively with the Bureau of Reclamation and the local water agencies to help implement California’s water management program.
11. Develop an overall strategy for managing the public lands which is adaptable over time based on the results of resource monitoring in order to effectively achieve the aforementioned goals.

2.3 Proposed Plan Amendment (Preferred Alternative)

Wild and Scenic Rivers. River segments on BLM-managed lands within the following areas (Figure 2-1) are determined eligible for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River System (NWSRS) with the following tentative classifications:

Table 2-1: River Segments Determined Eligible

Area	River Channel	Tentative Classification	Length (miles, BLM lands only)		Location
Whitewater Canyon	Main	Wild	6.5 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 30 T2S R3E, Sec. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15
		Recreational	1.6 (non-wilderness)		T2S 3E, Sec. 15, 22, 23, 26
Mission Creek	Main	Wild	3.1 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 16, 22, 28
		Recreational	2.1 wilder-ness	1.4 non-wilder-ness	T1S R3E, Sec. 34 T2S R3E, Sec. 2 T2S R4E, Sec. 17, 18
	North Fork	Wild	0.4 (wilderness)		T1N R3E, Sec. 32 T1S R3E, Sec. 4
	South Fork	Wild	1.1 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 8
	West Fork	Recreational	2.9 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 34 T2S R3E, Sec. 2, 3, 11
Palm Canyon	Main	Scenic	1.2 (non-wilderness)		T5S R4E, Sec. 36

Manage public lands within 1/4 mile of the identified river segments to protect their free-flowing characteristics; protect, and to the degree practicable enhance, the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) which contribute to their eligibility; and ensure that their eligibility or tentative classification will not be affected before a determination of their suitability or non-suitability as Wild and Scenic Rivers can be made. ORVs are identified in the documentation of eligibility (Appendix B). Existing protective management measures are also described in the same appendix.

Subsequent to identification of eligible river segments through this planning process, determinations of suitability would be analyzed in a separate reporting package, including a plan amendment and legislative environmental impact statement.

River segments on BLM-managed lands in Little Morongo Canyon, Big Morongo Canyon, and Whitewater Canyon south of Bonnie Bell were assessed and determined to be ineligible for inclusion into the NWSRS.

Visual Resource Management. Based on the general characteristics of the BLM-managed public lands within the Coachella Valley, Visual Resource Management (VRM) classifications would be assigned as follows (Figure 2-2):

Table 2-2: Visual Resource Management Classifications

AREA DESCRIPTION	VRM CLASS	ACREAGE
BLM-managed lands within the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions	Class 1	95,461
BLM-managed lands within ACECs and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (except for designated wilderness which is Class 1)	Class 2	97,539
BLM-managed lands within CVMSHCP conservation areas, except for wind energy facilities, and sand and gravel mining sites (see below)	Class 2	
BLM-managed lands associated with existing and future development of wind energy facilities, and sand and gravel mining sites, whether inside or outside the CVMSHCP conservation areas	Class 4	12,852
Remaining BLM-managed lands, other than those in the NECO overlap area	Class 4	
BLM-managed lands within the NECO overlap area	Not assigned	131,376

Land Health Standards. Adopt the rangeland health standards developed for livestock grazing in consultation with the California Desert District Advisory Council, for use as regional land health standards. These regional land health standards would apply to all BLM lands and programs, and would be implemented through terms and conditions of permits, leases and other authorizations, actions, resource monitoring, assessments undertaken in accordance with BLM's land use plans. BLM would seek to incorporate these standards into the multi-jurisdictional monitoring program for the CVMSHCP, and to coordinate with local jurisdictions in monitoring and assessment of land health. These standards may not be used to permanently prohibit allowable uses established by law, regulation or land use plans.

1. **Soils**. Soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, geology, landform, and past uses. Adequate infiltration and permeability of soils allow accumulation of soil moisture necessary for optimal plant growth and vigor, and provide a stable watershed. As indicated by:
   - Canopy and ground cover are appropriate for the site;
   - There is diversity of plant species with a variety of root depths;
   - Litter and soil organic matter are present at suitable sites;
   - Maintain the presence of microbiotic soil crusts that are in place;
   - Evidence of wind or water erosion does not exceed natural rates for the site; and

- Hydrologic and nutrient functions maintained by permeability of soil and water infiltration are appropriate for precipitation.

2. **Native Species**. Healthy, productive and diverse habitats for native species, including special status species (Federal T&E, Federal proposed, Federal candidates, BLM sensitive, or California State T&E, and CDD UPAs) are maintained in places of natural occurrence. As indicated by:
   - Photosynthetic and ecological processes continue at levels suitable for the site, season, and precipitation regimes;
   - Plant vigor, nutrient cycle, and energy flow are maintaining desirable plants and ensuring reproduction and recruitment;
   - Plant communities are producing litter within acceptable limits;
   - Age class distribution of plants and animals are sufficient to overcome mortality fluctuations;
   - Distribution and cover of plant species and their habitats allow for reproduction and recovery from localized catastrophic events;
   - Alien and noxious plants and wildlife do not exceed acceptable levels;
   - Appropriate natural disturbances are evident; and
   - Populations and their habitats are sufficiently distributed to prevent the need for listing special status species.

3. **Riparian / Wetland and Stream Function**. Wetland systems associated with subsurface, running, and standing water, function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbances. Hydrologic conditions are maintained. As indicated by:
   - Vegetative cover will adequately protect banks, and dissipate energy during peak water flows;
   - Dominant vegetation is an appropriate mixture of vigorous riparian species;
   - Recruitment of preferred species is adequate to sustain the plant community;
   - Stable soils store and release water slowly;
   - Plant species present indicate soil moisture characteristics are being maintained;
   - There is minimal cover of invader/shallow-rooted species, and they are not displacing deep-rooted native species;
   - Maintain shading of stream courses and water sources for riparian dependent species;
   - Stream is in balance with water and sediment being supplied by the watershed;
   - Stream channel size and meander is appropriate for soils, geology, and landscape; and
   - Adequate organic matter (litter and standing dead plant material) is present to protect the site and to replenish soil nutrients through decomposition.

4. **Water quality**. Surface and groundwater complies with objectives of the Clean Water Act and other applicable water quality requirements, including meeting the California State standards. Best Management Practices would be implemented to help achieve these standards. Achievement of standards would be indicated by:
   - Chemical constituents, water temperature, nutrient loads, fecal coliform, turbidity, suspended sediment and dissolved oxygen do not exceed the applicable requirements.
   - Achievement of the standards for riparian, wetlands and water bodies;
   - Aquatic organisms and plants (e.g., macro invertebrates, fish, algae and plants) indicate support for beneficial uses; and
   - Monitoring results or other data that show water quality is meeting the standards.

Air Quality. Implement the following air quality management prescriptions. A more detailed description is provided in Appendix C.

- Reduce the number of unpaved routes upwind of sensitive receptors.
- Manage unauthorized off-road use by posting signs and enforcing closures. Provide opportunities for OHV use away from sensitive receptors.
- Install sand fencing where fencing can assist in reducing PM10 emissions and maintain habitat for sand dependent species.
- Authorized uses would include terms and conditions to minimize fugitive dust emissions, based on the Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan. Proposed projects with the potential to exceed National Ambient Air Quality Standards shall include in the site-specific environmental analysis, a dust control plan prepared in coordination with the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Multiple-Use Classification. Classify BLM-managed lands within wilderness areas as Multiple-Use Class “C” (Controlled Use). Classify non-wilderness BLM-managed lands within conservation areas (see Glossary for definition) as Multiple-Use Class “L” (Limited Use). Classify remaining BLM-managed lands as Multiple-Use Class “M” (Moderate Use). (Figure 2-3a).

Habitat Conservation Objectives. For each of the eight vegetation community types (Figure 2-4), the habitat conservation objectives outlined in Table 2-4 would be used to assess compatible uses and to develop appropriate mitigation measures within conservation areas on BLM-managed lands. Future activities would be required to conform to the habitat conservation objectives established for a particular community type within the conservation areas. Activities which cannot meet the habitat conservation objectives, either through avoidance or mitigation measures, would be disallowed. New utilities within utility corridors would be designed to avoid impacts to sensitive plants, endemic species and their habitats, and significant cultural resources.

Application of the habitat conservation objectives would utilize BLM's normal processes for evaluating and managing proposed land uses. That is, upon receipt of an application for a proposal, BLM would conduct interdisciplinary analysis to determine the effects of the proposal and perform the necessary consultations with other agencies as part of its decision-making processes. The analysis team would use the habitat conservation objectives as both a standard for assessing the compatibility of the proposal within conservation areas, and as a basis for development of mitigation measures.

Fire Management. Response to wildland fire is based on ecological, social and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and other values to be protected dictate the appropriate management response to the fire. Based on these factors, the following fire management categories are identified for the following vegetation communities (Figure 2-5):

> **Fire Management Category A**. The following communities are areas where fire would not be desired at all: sand dunes and sand fields. Immediate suppression is a critical element of fire management in these desert environments because fire historically has never played a large role in the development and maintenance of the ecosystem.
>
> **Fire Management Category B**. The following vegetation communities are areas where wildfire is not desired: (1) desert scrub, (2) desert alkali scrub, (3) marsh, (4) dry wash woodland, pinyon-juniper woodland and mesquite, and (5) riparian areas. Immediate suppression is a critical element of fire management in these desert communities because fire historically has never played a large role in the development and maintenance of these communities. Prescribed fire may be utilized as a resource management tool in very select situations, for example to effectively manage exotic vegetation.
>
> **Fire Management Category C**. (1) Oak woodlands and forest communities and (2) chaparral communities are areas where wildland fire (including prescribed burning) may be allowed. The following constraints must be considered in determining the appropriate level of suppression: (1) emphasize protection of life and property, especially trail users and montane communities, (2) evaluate potential beneficial or adverse effects on threatened and endangered species habitat, especially endemic species, (3) evaluate potential for adverse effects to significant or sensitive cultural and other natural resources, (4) promote mosaic pattern of vegetation resulting from different fire histories within the larger landscape, (5) protect areas so that they do not burn at less than 15 year intervals.

Special Area Designations. Designate the Coachella Valley Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) to include BLM-managed lands within the CVMSHCP conservation areas which are outside existing ACECs, Wilderness Areas, National

Monuments, proposed NECO Chuckwalla WHMA, and freeway interchanges in the NECO Plan overlap area (Figure 2-6a). Existing ACEC boundaries would remain unchanged.

Land Tenure: Exchange & Sale Criteria. BLM lands in the Coachella Valley would generally be retained in public ownership. The following criteria would be applied in evaluating the suitability of land exchanges and sales. Land sales would only be conducted if reasonable opportunities for land exchange are not available in order to provide land base in support of the CVMSHCP. Land exchanges and sales may be considered if they would:

1. Facilitate effective and efficient management of conservation areas;
2. Be conducted in coordination with the local jurisdictions;
3. Would result in a net benefit to the conservation areas or divert intensive uses away from sensitive areas;
4. Not remove rare species nor their habitat, nor remove rare habitat types from conservation management;
5. Not remove eligible historic properties from conservation management; &
6. Not divest of public domain lands in a manner which eliminates a significant public benefit.

Proposed exchanges or sales would be conducted in coordination with the local jurisdictions to ensure the proposed exchange would meet the larger multi-jurisdictional objectives of habitat conservation and support to local communities in the Coachella Valley. All land exchanges and sales would be subject to consultation requirements under the Endangered Species Act. Disposal of specific parcels through exchange or sale may require biological or cultural field surveys in order to complete consultation. Site specific application of the criteria and determinations identifying necessary surveys would occur once project proposals are received.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Acquisition proposals are discretionary Bureau actions, depending on overall Bureau priorities and resource capabilities at the time. Acquisition proposals would be required to meet the following criteria. Proposed acquisitions would:

1. Be acquired from willing sellers only;
2. Be conducted in coordination with the local jurisdictions;
3. Benefit the Coachella Valley conservation areas by a) directly augmenting public ownership in a sensitive area or b) diverting uses away from sensitive areas by providing opportunities elsewhere for recreation use including hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, off-highway vehicle use, and other activities; or
4. Improve the presence of a variety of biotic or abiotic habitat components under conservation management.

Management of Acquired Lands and Formerly Withdrawn Lands, including OHV Designations. Lands acquired by purchase, donation or lands removed from withdrawal status shall be managed in accordance with the CDCA Plan, as amended and the applicable land and mineral laws upon issuance of an opening order published in the *Federal Register*. Lands located within the boundaries of ACECs or any other area having an administrative designation established through the land use planning process shall become part of the area within which they are located and managed accordingly upon issuance of the opening order.

Off-highway vehicle area designations would be applied to lands acquired through purchase, donation, or exchange through the following criteria as part of this CDCA Plan Amendment:

- Lands acquired within Congressionally designated wilderness boundaries, would be designated "closed" as per the Wilderness Act of 1964, the California Desert Protection Act, or other applicable legislation.
- Lands acquired within Big Morongo Canyon and Dos Palmas ACECs would be designated as "limited"; casual motorized-vehicle travel would be restricted to routes designated "open."
- Lands acquired within the Coachella Valley, Willow Hole-Edom Hill, and Indian Avenue Preserves would be designated "limited" consistent with the Coachella Valley Preserve System Management Plan and Decision Record (November, 1995); casual motorized-vehicle travel would be restricted to routes designated "open."
- Lands acquired within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and within the scope of this CDCA Plan Amendment, would be designated as "limited" as per the National Monument Act (Public Law 106-351, October 24, 2000); casual motorized-vehicle travel would be restricted to routes designated "open."
- Lands acquired within designated "open" areas would be designated as "open."
- All other lands acquired within the planning area covered by this plan amendment, and otherwise currently designated as "limited," would also be designated as "limited." Casual motorized-vehicle travel would be restricted to routes designated "open."

Existing routes on lands acquired by BLM would be designated through the following criteria as part of this CDCA Plan Amendment:

- If the existing route provides the only access to private property, the route would be designated "limited" or "open" depending on the needs of the property owner and consideration of the other criteria below.
- If the existing route is the continuation of a County-maintained road across the acquired parcel, and is needed to provide connectivity of the road across public or private lands, then the route would be designated "open."

- If the route is a continuation of an existing "open" route on public lands that provides the only access or connectivity to another "open" route on adjacent public lands, the route would be designated "open."
- If the acquired parcel is within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, a designated ACEC, or multi-jurisdictional preserve area, and if the existing route is not part of, or does not provide access or connectivity to, an existing "open" route in the special area or preserve, then the route would be "closed" per the existing management plan or record of decision.
- If a route on an acquired parcel within one of the above special management areas is an extension or segment of an existing "open" or "limited" route that provides access to public facilities or visitor services, then the route would have the same "open" or "limited" designation as the existing segments.
- If the route on an acquired parcel is a segment, or an extension, of a "closed" route on public lands, then the route would be "closed."
- New routes constructed as part of a right-of-way or other authorization which would require that the route be closed to protect property or public safety, would be designated as "limited" or "closed" consistent with the appropriate plan of operation or right-of-way grant, and record of decision.
- New routes constructed for access to public use or visitor facilities, such as trailheads or interpretive sites, and authorized under an activity plan and record of decision, would be designated as "limited" or "open" consistent with the appropriate plan.
- Routes on acquired lands that are redundant or parallel to existing "open" routes (within 0.25 mile) would be closed to provide resource protection and attainment of PM10 air quality standards.
- Routes on acquired lands that are identified in the CVMSHCP or other multi-jurisdictional habitat conservation plan would be designated in accordance with the management prescriptions in the plan.
- Routes on acquired lands that have been designated as an OHV open area, would be designated "open."
- Routes on acquired lands that have been designated as closed to OHV use, would be designated "closed" if the route does not serve an essential public purpose, provide the only access to private property, or fall within one of the above categories.

Communication Sites & Utilities. Facility design, site availability and use of public lands to support energy production and communications services would be consistent with habitat conservation. Windpark development would be permitted in designated areas (Figure 2-7) and new towers within existing communication sites on a space available basis and consistent with habitat conservation objectives using appropriate mitigation measures. Proposed utilities within designated utility corridors and within conservation areas may be considered, consistent with the habitat conservation objectives. Proposed utilities would be

designed or mitigation measures imposed to ensure new utilities within conservation areas avoid impacts to sensitive plants, endemic species and their habitats, and to significant cultural resources.

Sand and Gravel Mining. Continue to provide sand and gravel and other mineral material resources to support road maintenance, infrastructure, housing construction and other community needs in the Coachella Valley. Mineral materials sales within the CVMSHCP conservation areas would be restricted to State of California Division of Mines and Geology classified and designated resource areas (Figure 2-7), and new mining proposals would be allowed if habitat conservation objectives could be met using appropriate mitigation measures. Outside the conservation areas, mining may be considered consistent with federal laws and regulations.

Livestock Grazing. Whitewater Canyon Allotment (Figure 2-8) management emphasis will be on the compatibility with (1) conservation objectives of the desert tortoise, arroyo toad, and riparian habitat values, and (2) use of, and access to, intermingled private lands. Grazing would continue as a permitted use until the lessee voluntarily relinquishes the permitted use and preference, at which time the allotment would become unavailable for grazing. Upon BLM's relinquishment acceptance, the BLM will, without further analysis or notice, not reissue the lease; remove the allotment designation; and assume any and all private interest in range improvements located on public lands.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Retire Palm Canyon & Morongo Herd Management Areas. BLM parcels within and adjacent to the Palm Canyon HMA (T5S R4E and T4S R4E) would be transferred to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians via land exchange, in accordance with the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 (Figure 2-9).

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations.

- Establish an off-highway vehicle managed use area in the vicinity of Drop 31 which emphasizes opportunities for camping, trail riding and exploration along designated routes, trails and open washes. Adopt the off-highway vehicle management prescriptions set forth in the NECO Plan.
- Design and implement a network of open routes for the Drop 31 area that provides local touring options outside wilderness and connects to the regional system of open routes established under the NECO plan amendment. Designate the route system developed for the Drop 31 area through the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Plan as "open."
- Seek to acquire lands from willing sellers to facilitate continued opportunity and effective management for vehicle-based camping and touring in the vicinity of Drop 31. The final boundaries of the vehicle recreation area may be affected by lands available for acquisition.
- Windy Point south of Highway 111 (357 acres of public lands) would be designated "closed" to off-highway vehicles. Motorized-vehicle use of this

area would be limited to emergency services and administrative personnel during performance of official duties.

- Conservation areas and the remaining BLM-managed lands, except wilderness. would be designated or remain "limited." Casual motorized-vehicle travel would be restricted to routes designated "open."
- Wilderness areas are closed to casual motorized-vehicle use by statute.
- BLM would initiate a public information effort to assist OHV users in identifying and locating the appropriate areas for various types of OHV recreation in the local area and the region, including identification of non-BLM lands where opportunities are available for such activities.
- Work with Riverside County and the OHV Recreation Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation to establish an OHV recreation area in the southeastern portion of the Coachella Valley (in or adjacent to Section 22, T5S R8E). This site is Riverside County land, is adjacent to the county landfill, and contains desirable terrain for OHV recreation and is conveniently located off Interstate 10. An OHV "free-play" area at this location would serve as an outlet and opportunity for local off-highway vehicle users, which in turn would enhance effectiveness in managing areas closed to OHV use.
- If the OHV "free-play" area were to be acquired by BLM, the intent would be to designate the area as "open" in order to address the need to provide an outlet for this type of use in the Coachella Valley. More detailed analysis at this time concerning the final design, boundaries and management of the OHV "free-play" area is outside the scope of this Plan Amendment since the subject lands are not currently managed by BLM and sufficient information is not yet available to address those subjects. Additional information may be provided by the Coachella Valley MSHCP.

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Routes within CVMSHCP conservation areas would be designated in accordance with habitat conservation objectives and air quality management strategy, while allowing for recreation opportunities (see Figure 2-11b; Appendix D, Table D-4). Routes outside the conservation areas would be designated "open" except for redundant routes (identified in Table D-4), which would be "closed" to minimize air quality non-attainment in the Coachella Valley. Short recreational spur roads west of the Indio air quality monitoring station would be closed.

Maintain the public route network as needed and seek legal access across private land parcels from willing sellers in areas designated for public recreation. Manage vehicle access in the Dunn Road area (including the Dry Wash route and routes in Palm Canyon, totaling 15 miles on public land) for administrative purposes such as flood control, law enforcement, search and rescue, and fire control, as well as controlled levels of permitted uses such as research and commercial recreation, subject to permission of private landowners for use of non-federal lands.

Existing gates would be maintained on Dunn Road and new gates would be installed to preclude unauthorized access from the Royal Carrizo area. Public land portions of Dunn Road, Dry Wash Road, and the access route from Royal Carrizo would be closed except for administrative and permitted access until bighorn sheep populations recover. The designation of these roads may be re-evaluated at that time. Permitted use may include limited research and recreational access by permit, contingent on acquiring access across private lands and compliance with the terms of a biological opinion. Motorized commercial recreational access would be confined to the fall months and both activities and the areas to be visited would be designed to avoid conflicts with bighorn sheep recovery, in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Legal access to landowners and agencies may be provided through a right-of-way grant with terms and conditions based upon a biological opinion. Temporary landowner access may be authorized by permit.

Table 2-7b: Motorized Vehicle Route Designations – Proposed Plan

Total miles open to motorized vehicles (BLM lands only)	47
Total miles currently closed to motorized vehicles (BLM lands only); no change under this alternative	70
Total miles additionally closed to motorized vehicles (BLM lands only)	26

Existing Route Closures Common to All Alternatives. Certain routes in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve/ACEC and Dos Palmas Preserve/ACEC were closed through a previous amendment to the CDCA Plan; the Record of Decision was signed in April 1998. These routes, totaling 25 miles, would remain closed under all alternatives and are not included in the mileage for which decisions would be made under this CDCA Plan Amendment. For a complete description of each route and map location, see Appendix D, Table D-2.

Forty-five (45) miles of other routes on BLM-managed lands have not been available for public use over time. Many of these routes have been gated by rights-of-way holders as authorized through their grants (e.g., windfarm operators, Metropolitan Water District, Desert Water Agency) or closed through activity level decisions (e.g., routes in the Coachella Valley Preserve; decision record signed November 1995). Public access to portions of other routes on BLM-managed lands has been precluded by gates on non-BLM lands (e.g., southern portion of Dunn Road, route south of La Quinta Cove, routes accessing the southern portion of Carrizo Canyon), or precluded by posting of “no trespassing” signs by private landowners (e.g., northern portion of Dunn Road). These routes would be designated “closed” under all alternatives of this CDCA Plan Amendment. For a complete description of each route and map location, see Appendix D, Table D-3.

Special Recreation Management Areas. A Special Recreation Management Area which includes the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses, Drop 31, and the Red Canyon Jeep Trail would be designated and named the

Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area (Figure 2-10b). Of the overall 125,441 acres, 90,304 acres of the proposed SRMA are public lands managed by the BLM. Part of the overall Meccacopia SRMA management strategy to be addressed through a Recreation Area Management Plan prepared for the SRMA includes the following:

a) Protect wilderness values to include minimizing motorized vehicle and mechanized equipment intrusions into the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses.
b) Enhance the quality of motorized recreation on public lands surrounding the two wilderness areas and wildlife watering zones (see "d" below) by providing adequate facilities and management to direct use and protect environmental values.
c) Enhance the quality of non-motorized recreation on public lands by minimizing the potential for conflicts with motorized vehicles, and providing adequate facilities and management to direct use and protect environmental values.
d) Construct and maintain additional water sources with limited vehicle access to discourage bighorn sheep from using the Coachella Canal and to minimize conflicts with off-highway vehicle users. Development of water sources inside wilderness areas would be consistent with limits and guidelines established in the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (NECO Plan). Also per the NECO Plan, additional guzzlers in wilderness may be considered upon completion of the relevant meta-population plan by the California Department of Fish and Game. Development of wildlife water sources outside wilderness would be based on analysis and approval of site specific proposals developed in consultation with California Department of Fish and Game.

Recreation: Stopping, Parking, and Vehicle Camping. Stopping, parking, and vehicle camping would be allowed within 100 feet from the centerline of an approved route except where fenced. The following exception applies: Where wilderness boundaries are coincident with approved routes, stopping, parking, and vehicle camping must remain outside the wilderness boundary.

Recovery Strategy for Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep. The proposed Recovery Strategy for Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep emphasizes restoration of public lands and coordination of conservation efforts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, local jurisdictions, and non-government organizations to promote recovery of bighorn sheep. A combination of habitat improvement projects, management of land uses to avoid, reduce, or mitigate disturbance, and excluding bighorn sheep from the urban environment is proposed. The *Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges, California (USFWS 2000)* was used in the development of this strategy. References to the Recovery Plan are in parentheses.

Objective A: Restore and manage habitat to promote recovery of bighorn sheep

- Acquire, or exchange to acquire, bighorn sheep habitat from willing landowners (Recovery Plan p. 75).
- Implement a fire management plan in fire adapted habitats to help maintain bighorn sheep habitat (Recovery Plan p. 78).
- Management of invasive weeds such as tamarisk, arundo, and fountain grass will continue to be a priority habitat management effort (Recovery Plan p. 77).
- Maintain existing water sources through tamarisk eradication and provide additional artificial water sources on public lands. Locations for artificial water sources would be carefully selected to reduce interactions between bighorn and the urban interface (Recovery Plan pp. 77 and 79).

Objective B: Manage land uses to avoid, reduce, or mitigate disturbance

- Manage aircraft activities to reduce or eliminate habitat fragmentation or interference with bighorn sheep resource use patterns (Recovery Plan p. 89).
- Manage road use on BLM-managed lands, consistent with the CDCA Plan (1980) as amended, to minimize habitat fragmentation or interference with bighorn sheep resource use patterns (Recovery Plan p. 89).
- Develop and implement education and public awareness programs (Recovery Plan pp. 104-107).
- Publish an annual report describing management, monitoring results, and management implications of research conducted on BLM-managed public lands.
- Reduce impacts to bighorn sheep (especially during the water stress and lambing season) using a combination of methods, including voluntary avoidance programs, closures, seasonal restrictions, and permit stipulations and mitigations. Projects emphasizing the least disturbing techniques available and practicable would be encouraged. Some level of disturbance to bighorn sheep may be permitted during water stress and lambing season to obtain information, resulting in more effective management of bighorn sheep and their habitat (Recovery Plan pp. 83-89).

Objective C: Manage bighorn sheep populations to promote recovery.

- Coordinate all management and monitoring efforts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, Coachella Valley Association of Governments, and local

jurisdictions to ensure a landscape level approach to recovery of bighorn sheep populations.

- Make public lands available for species management by California Department of Fish and Game for activities, such as predator management, reintroduction and augmentation, conducted in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local jurisdictions, and in accordance with the *Master Memorandum of Understanding between the California Department of Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management (*October 1993). (Recovery Plan pp. 92-94).
- Construct fences across public lands to exclude bighorn sheep from urban areas where there is a demonstrated problem. Projects would be coordinated with local jurisdictions, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game to ensure that water is available before sheep are excluded from urban areas known to provide water (Recovery Plan p.80).

Hiking, Biking & Equestrian Trails. Manage trail segments across public lands in coordination with members of the public, local jurisdictions, State and other Federal agencies to provide for a year-round suite of non-motorized recreation opportunities on interconnected trails in the Coachella Valley and surrounding mountains. Non-motorized uses of the public lands within the Coachella Valley planning area may be limited, including area and trail closures, as needed to protect sensitive resources. New trails which avoid impacts to sensitive resources and are developed in coordination with the community may be allowed.

2.4 Land Use Plan Alternatives

2.4.1 Wild and Scenic Rivers

Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B & C). River segments on BLM-managed lands within the following areas are determined eligible for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River System (NWSRS) with the following tentative classifications (Figure 2-1):

Table 2-1: River Segments Determined Eligible

Area	River Channel	Tentative Classification	Length (miles, BLM lands only)	Location
Whitewater Canyon	Main	Wild	6.5 (wilderness)	T1S R3E, Sec. 30 T2S R3E, Sec. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15
		Recreational	1.6 (non-wilderness)	T2S 3E, Sec. 15, 22, 23, 26

Area	River Channel	Tentative Classification	Length (miles, BLM lands only)		Location
Mission Creek	Main	Wild	3.1 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 16, 22, 28
		Recreational	2.1 wilder-ness	1.4 non-wilder-ness	T1S R3E, Sec. 34 T2S R3E, Sec. 2 T2S R4E, Sec. 17, 18
	North Fork	Wild	0.4 (wilderness)		T1N R3E, Sec. 32 T1S R3E, Sec. 4
	South Fork	Wild	1.1 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 8
	West Fork	Recreational	2.9 (wilderness)		T1S R3E, Sec. 34 T2S R3E, Sec. 2, 3, 11
Palm Canyon	Main	Scenic	1.2 (non-wilderness)		T5S R4E, Sec. 36

Manage public lands within 1/4 mile of the identified river segments to protect their free-flowing characteristics; protect, and to the degree practicable enhance, the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) which contribute to their eligibility; and ensure that their eligibility or tentative classification will not be affected before a determination of their suitability or non-suitability as Wild and Scenic Rivers can be made. ORVs are identified in the documentation of eligibility (Appendix B). Existing protective management measures are also described in the same appendix.

Subsequent to identification of eligible river segments through this planning process, determinations of suitability would be analyzed in a separate reporting package, including a plan amendment and legislative environmental impact statement. River segments on BLM-managed lands in Little Morongo Canyon, Big Morongo Canyon, and Whitewater Canyon south of Bonnie Bell were assessed and determined to be ineligible for inclusion into the NWSRS.

No Action Alternative (Alternative D). Determinations regarding the eligibility of river segments on BLM-managed lands for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System would not be made at this time.

2.4.2 Visual Resource Management.

Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B & C). Based on the general characteristics of the BLM-managed public lands within the Coachella Valley, Visual Resource Management (VRM) classifications would be assigned as follows (Figure 2-2):

Table 2-2: Visual Resource Management Classifications

AREA DESCRIPTION	VRM CLASS	ACREAGE
BLM-managed lands within the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions	Class 1	95,461
BLM-managed lands within ACECs and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (except for designated wilderness which is Class 1)	Class 2	97,539
BLM-managed lands within CVMSHCP conservation areas, except for wind energy facilities, and sand and gravel mining sites (see below)	Class 2	
BLM-managed lands associated with existing and future development of wind energy facilities, and sand and gravel mining sites, whether inside or outside the CVMSHCP conservation areas	Class 4	12,852
Remaining BLM-managed lands, other than those in the NECO overlap area	Class 4	
BLM-managed lands within the NECO overlap area	Not assigned	131,376

No Action Alternative (Alternative D). No Visual Resource Management classifications would be assigned at this time. Instead, VRM objectives would be established for affected lands on a case-by-case basis when project proposals are submitted to the BLM. In accordance with policy, BLM lands within the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, and the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses are managed consistent with VRM Class 1 objectives.

2.4.3 Land Health Standards

Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B & C). Adopt the rangeland health standards developed for livestock grazing in consultation with the California Desert District Advisory Council, for use as regional land health standards. These regional land health standards would apply to all BLM lands and programs, and would be implemented through terms and conditions of permits, leases and other authorizations, actions, resource monitoring, assessments undertaken in accordance with BLM's land use plans. BLM would seek to incorporate these standards into the multi-jurisdictional monitoring program for the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, and to coordinate with local jurisdictions in monitoring and assessment of land health. These standards may not be used to permanently prohibit allowable uses established by law, regulation or land use plans.

1. **Soils**. Soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, geology, landform, and past uses. Adequate infiltration and permeability of soils allow accumulation of soil moisture necessary for optimal plant growth and vigor, and provide a stable watershed. As indicated by:
   - Canopy and ground cover are appropriate for the site;

- There is diversity of plant species with a variety of root depths;
- Litter and soil organic matter are present at suitable sites;
- Maintain the presence of microbiotic soil crusts that are in place;
- Evidence of wind or water erosion does not exceed natural rates for the site; and
- Hydrologic and nutrient functions maintained by permeability of soil and water infiltration are appropriate for precipitation.

2. **Native Species**. Healthy, productive and diverse habitats for native species, including special status species (Federal T&E, Federal proposed, Federal candidates, BLM sensitive, or California State T&E, and CDD UPAs) are maintained in places of natural occurrence. As indicated by:
   - Photosynthetic and ecological processes continue at levels suitable for the site, season, and precipitation regimes;
   - Plant vigor, nutrient cycle, and energy flow are maintaining desirable plants and ensuring reproduction and recruitment;
   - Plant communities are producing litter within acceptable limits;
   - Age class distribution of plants and animals are sufficient to overcome mortality fluctuations;
   - Distribution and cover of plant species and their habitats allow for reproduction and recovery from localized catastrophic events;
   - Alien and noxious plants and wildlife do not exceed acceptable levels;
   - Appropriate natural disturbances are evident; and
   - Populations and their habitats are sufficiently distributed to prevent the need for listing special status species.

3. **Riparian / Wetland and Stream Function**. Wetland systems associated with subsurface, running, and standing water, function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbances. Hydrologic conditions are maintained. As indicated by:
   - Vegetative cover will adequately protect banks, and dissipate energy during peak water flows;
   - Dominant vegetation is an appropriate mixture of vigorous riparian species;
   - Recruitment of preferred species is adequate to sustain the plant community;
   - Stable soils store and release water slowly;
   - Plant species present indicate soil moisture characteristics are being maintained;
   - There is minimal cover of invader/shallow-rooted species, and they are not displacing deep-rooted native species;
   - Maintain shading of stream courses and water sources for riparian dependent species;
   - Stream is in balance with water and sediment being supplied by the watershed;

- Stream channel size and meander is appropriate for soils, geology, and landscape; and
- Adequate organic matter (litter and standing dead plant material) is present to protect the site and to replenish soil nutrients through decomposition.

4. **Water quality**. Surface and groundwater complies with objectives of the Clean Water Act and other applicable water quality requirements, including meeting the California State standards. Best Management Practices would be implemented to help achieve these standards. Achievement of standards would be indicated by:
   - Chemical constituents, water temperature, nutrient loads, fecal coliform, turbidity, suspended sediment and dissolved oxygen do not exceed the applicable requirements.
   - Achievement of the standards for riparian, wetlands and water bodies;
   - Aquatic organisms and plants (e.g., macro invertebrates, fish, algae and plants) indicate support for beneficial uses; and
   - Monitoring results or other data that show water quality is meeting the standards.

No Action Alternative (Alternative D). Adopt the rangeland National Fallback Standards as regional land health standards. These regional land health standards would apply to all BLM lands and programs, and would be implemented through terms and conditions of permits, leases and other authorizations or actions undertaken in accordance with BLM's land use plans. These standards may not be used to permanently prohibit allowable uses established by law, regulation or land use plans.

1. **Soils**. Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate and landform.
2. **Riparian / Wetland**. Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning condition.
3. **Stream Function**. Stream channel morphology (including but not limited to gradient, width/depth ratio, channel roughness and sinuosity) and functions are appropriate for the climate and landform.
4. **Native Species**. Healthy, productive and diverse populations of native species exist and are maintained.

2.4.4 Air Quality

Activities on the BLM-managed lands must be in compliance with the objectives of the Clean Air Act, and Federal and State standards. Compliance with State Implementation Plans prepared by the Air Quality Management District would help to achieve the Federal and State standards. The following are alternative BLM strategies to facilitate compliance with the Coachella Valley PM10 State

Implementation Plan in effect at the time of approval.

Alternative A. BLM's air quality management strategy would consist of the following:

- Install sand fencing where fencing can assist in reducing PM10 emissions and maintain habitat for sand dependent species.
- Authorized uses would be subject to the Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan and would include applicable measures to minimize fugitive dust emissions.

Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Implement the following air quality management prescriptions. A more detailed description is provided in Appendix C.

- Reduce the number of unpaved routes upwind of sensitive receptors.
- Manage unauthorized off-road use by posting signs and enforcing closures. Provide opportunities for OHV use away from sensitive receptors.
- Install sand fencing where fencing can assist in reducing PM10 emissions and maintain habitat for sand dependent species.
- Authorized uses would include terms and conditions to minimize fugitive dust emissions, based on the Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan. Proposed projects with the potential to exceed National Ambient Air Quality Standards shall include in the site-specific environmental analysis, a dust control plan prepared in coordination with the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

No Action Alternative (Alternative D). Authorized uses would include terms and conditions to minimize fugitive dust emissions, based on the Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan. Proposed projects with the potential to exceed National Ambient Air Quality Standards shall include in the site-specific environmental analysis, a dust control plan prepared in coordination with the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

2.4.5 Multiple-Use Classification

Public lands are assigned a Multiple-Use Class (MUC) according to the allowable level of multiple use. Class C (Controlled Use) designation is the most restrictive, and is assigned to wilderness with minimal levels of multiple use. Class L (Limited Use) lands are managed to provide lower-intensity, carefully-controlled multiple use of resources while ensuring that sensitive values are not significantly diminished. Class M (Moderate Use) lands are managed to provide for a wider variety of uses such as mining, livestock grazing, recreation, utilities and energy development, while conserving desert resources and mitigating damages permitted uses may cause. Class I (Intensive Use) provides for concentrated uses of lands and resources to meet human needs.

Alternative A. Classify BLM-managed lands within wilderness areas as Multiple-Use Class "C" (Controlled Use). Classify non-wilderness BLM-managed lands within conservation areas (see Glossary for definition) as Multiple-Use Class "L" (Limited Use), except for those lands within the Windy Point, Indio Hills (both units), and Iron Door OHV open areas which would be classified as Multiple-Use Class "I" (Intensive Use). Classify BLM-managed lands outside conservation areas as Multiple-Use Class "M" (Moderate Use), except for those lands within the Drop 31 OHV open area which would be classified as Multiple-Use Class "I." BLM-managed lands within the identified sand and gravel mining areas would be classified as Multiple-Use Class "I" as an exception to these management prescriptions.

Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Classify BLM-managed lands within wilderness areas as Multiple-Use Class "C" (Controlled Use). Classify non-wilderness BLM-managed lands within conservation areas (see Glossary for definition) as Multiple-Use Class "L" (Limited Use). Classify remaining BLM-managed lands as Multiple-Use Class "M" (Moderate Use). (Figure 2-3a).

No Action Alternative (Alternative D). BLM multiple-use classifications would remain unchanged (Figure 2-3b).

Table 2-3: Alternative Multiple-Use Classification Acreages

Multiple-Use Classification	Alternative A Acreage	Alternative B Acreage	Alternative C Acreage	Alternative D Acreage
C - Controlled Use	166,860	166,860	166,860	166,860
L - Limited Use	151,075	154,717	154,717	97,223
M - Moderate Use	12,539	15,653	15,653	23,774
I - Intensive Use	6,756	N/a	n/a	n/a
Unclassified	n/a	N/a	n/a	49,373

2.4.6 Habitat Conservation Objectives

For the purposes of this Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment, BLM lands within conservation areas were categorized into eight vegetation community types: (1) sand dunes and sand fields, (2) desert scrub communities, (3) chaparral communities, (4) desert alkali scrub communities, (5) marsh communities, (6) dry wash woodland and mesquite communities, (7) riparian communities, and (8) woodland and forest communities. Conservation objectives were established based on the habitat needs for sensitive species which occupy the various community types.

The term “conservation areas” refers to areas with a special designation in order to protect biological resources, such as: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, Wilderness Areas, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and conservation areas established through the Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP).

Proposed Plan (Alternatives B & C). For each of the eight vegetation community types (Figure 2-4), the habitat conservation objectives outlined in Table 2-4 would be used to assess compatible uses and to develop appropriate mitigation measures within conservation areas on BLM-managed lands. Future activities would be required to conform to the habitat conservation objectives established for a particular community type within the conservation areas. Activities which cannot meet the habitat conservation objectives, either through avoidance or mitigation measures, would be disallowed. New utilities within utility corridors would be designed to avoid impacts to sensitive plants, endemic species and their habitats, and significant cultural resources.

Application of the habitat conservation objectives would utilize BLM’s normal processes for evaluating and managing proposed land uses. That is, upon receipt of an application for a proposal, BLM would conduct interdisciplinary analysis to determine the effects of the proposal and perform the necessary consultations with other agencies as part of its decision-making processes. The analysis team would use the habitat conservation objectives as both a standard for assessing the compatibility of the proposal within conservation areas, and as a basis for development of mitigation measures.

No Action Alternative (Alternatives A & D). Guidelines provided in the CDCA Plan, as amended would be used to determine allowable uses within conservation areas.