

### 3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

#### 3.5 Motorized-Vehicle Access

Management of motorized vehicles on public lands conforms with prescriptions set forth in the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (CDCA Plan, 1980), as amended. These management prescriptions are described in Appendix D.

Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment Route Inventory Process. An inventory of existing routes on public lands within the Planning Area was initiated in 2001. The inventory process is described below:

1. Digital (computer based) U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 1:24,000 topographic maps (Digital Raster Graphics, or DRGs) were acquired and displayed on a computer monitor.
2. A digital map of BLM-managed lands was superimposed on the USGS maps.
3. All routes depicted on the USGS maps that occur on BLM-managed lands were digitized (“traced”). This created a digital “coverage” or “data layer” of the route network.
4. The route network coverage was superimposed on digital imagery/aerial photographs (Digital Orthophoto Quarter Quads, or DOQQs). The aerial photographs that comprise the digital imagery were taken in 1996 and provide more recent information than depicted on the USGS maps.
5. Routes appearing in the digital imagery that were not depicted on the USGS maps were digitized as additions to the digital route network coverage.
6. The complete digital route network was printed on 1:24,000 USGS topographic.
7. To determine the accuracy and completeness of the digital route network coverage, the following steps were undertaken:
  - (a) all routes depicted in the digital route network coverage were driven;
  - (b) locations of routes on BLM-managed lands that were not depicted on the digital route network coverage were recorded;
  - (c) routes depicted on the digital route network coverage that no longer exist were identified; and
  - (d) routes were added to the digital route network coverage to reflect observations made in the field, and routes no longer in existence were identified“ as non-routes.”
8. USGS topographic maps depicting the revised digital route network coverage were printed.
9. The public was afforded an opportunity to comment on the accuracy and completeness of the route inventory for BLM-managed lands. Map sets and comment sheets were made available at the Palm Springs and Palm Desert Public Libraries, and BLM offices in Palm Springs and Riverside. In addition, map sets were furnished to selected groups for review.
10. Based on public comments and subsequent on-site inspection, the digital route network coverage was adjusted accordingly.

Throughout the public comment period for the Draft Plan Amendments and EIS, comments were accepted regarding accuracy and completeness of the route network.

Route Designation Revisions. Decisions affecting vehicle access, such as area designations and specific route limitations, are intended to meet present access needs and protect sensitive resources. Future access needs or protection requirements may necessitate changes in these designations or limitations, or the construction of new routes. For mining operations, additional access needs will be considered in accordance with regulations pertaining to surface management of public lands under the U.S. Mining Laws (43 CFR 3809). Access needs for other uses, such as roads to private lands, grazing developments, or communication sites, would be reviewed on an individual basis under the authority outlined in Title V of FLPMA and in accordance with appropriate regulations. Each proposal would be evaluated for environmental effects and subjected to public review and comment. As present access needs become obsolete or as considerable adverse impacts are identified through the monitoring program, area designations or route limitations may be revised. In all instances, new routes for permanent or temporary use would be selected to minimize resource damage and use conflicts consistent with the criteria at 43 CFR 8342.1.

Motorized-Vehicle Route Designations. The mileage of vehicle routes crossing public lands within the planning area, excluding the NECO overlap area, is not large, totaling only 143 miles, 73 miles of which are currently available for access by the general public. (Route designations for the NECO overlap area are deferred to that CDCA plan amendment process.) The route network includes portions of major maintained dirt roads (e.g., Long Canyon Road, Dos Palmas access road), utility right-of-way routes (e.g., powerline roads), and routes established by continued recreation use. The route network on the floor of the Coachella Valley is currently affected by the non-attainment status of the Coachella Valley under the Clean Air Act, in part due to dust emissions from unpaved routes and off-highway vehicle use.

Parts of the route network are already closed to public vehicle access to protect existing communications facilities, energy generation facilities, water percolation facilities, biological values in wildlife preserves, or wilderness values in wilderness areas. The route network also includes features such as short spur routes, hill-climbs, and redundant (or multiple) routes leading to the same location. The current status of the route network in the planning area is summarized in Table 3-5. For more detailed information on specific routes or roads in the Coachella Valley, see Appendix D.

Table 3-5: Current Status of Routes on Public Lands

Area	Miles of existing routes available for use on BLM lands	Miles of closed routes (outside wilderness)
Coachella Valley	73	70 (BLM lands only; includes existing closures in Big Morongo Canyon ACEC and Dos Palmas ACEC, and routes not available for use per rights-of-way, Federal Register Notices, or activity plans, or access precluded by other parties)
		Routes in wilderness are closed to casual use by statute. Mileage of routes is undetermined.
NECO overlap (designations deferred to the NECO CDCA plan amendment process)	140 (estimated)	0 (pre-NECO decision)
		Routes in wilderness are closed to casual use by statute. Mileage of routes is undetermined.

Access on many of the public land roads is related to private land use decisions due to intermingled ownerships. Most routes in the Coachella Valley cross multiple ownerships. For this reason, many route locations and uses have developed over time in coordination with local jurisdictions as land uses were approved. Because the route network involves limited mileage and is related to established uses, including public utilities, the range of options to substantially alter the route network is limited.

Dunn Road in the Santa Rosa Mountains was established by trespass in 1966. The status of the road was settled in 1975 in U.S. District Court by placing specific requirements on American Land Company (defendant) to limit and control access to the road. The road has been controlled by a locked gate since that time. In 1997, BLM acquired the parcel in Cathedral City Cove, which includes the northern gate controlling access to Dunn Road. In August of 2000, BLM completed a temporary closure on Dunn Road maintaining the controlled access provided by the locked gate pending a decision in this plan amendment. Dunn Road also crosses private land and landowners have at times denied access across their land to permitted public land users. Vehicle use of public land portions of Dunn Road is also related to use of tributary routes such as the Dry Wash route, an access route from Royal Carrizo, and short spur routes along the road.

The Dunn Road has been used for multiple purposes. It serves as an important fire control access for BLM, U.S. Forest Service, California Department of Forestry, and City of Palm Springs. Law enforcement and land use compliance assessments are by BLM, U.S. Forest Service, Riverside County, and City of Palm Springs. Search and rescue use is by Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and Riverside County. Administrative use for land management projects such as tamarisk control, cultural survey or monitoring is by Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, California Department of Fish and Game, and private

landowners. Although these administrative uses are very important, they result in fairly low vehicle use levels, historically averaging less than five visits per month except when a project or fire is ongoing.

Recreation use has accounted for most of the historic use of Dunn Road. Commercial jeep touring was a permitted use, allowing a public access option to the area for those who did not hike, ride horses, or ride mountain bikes. Jeep tours were a permitted use from 1989 to June of 2001 when lawsuit requirements and denial of access by a private landowner eliminated the use. Between September 1995 and June 1999, the permittee conducted tours for more than 42,000 customers. Most tours occurred from January to June (69%), no tours were conducted in July and August, with the remaining tours from September to December (31%).

Currently, two right of way applications are in process for the Dunn Road. Both are from public agencies for the purposes of obtaining legal access to support flood control and administrative uses of the road.