

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter addresses the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on elements of the human environment from actions proposed in the CDCA Plan Amendment. This chapter is organized by environmental element, followed by a description and comparison of impacts from the relevant plan element alternatives.

Land use plans, such as the CDCA Plan Amendment, developed in accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, provide landscape level decisions for managing the BLM-administered public lands. As a result, the impact analysis for land use plans level actions tends to be cumulative by nature.

4.13 Visual and Scenic Resources

Visual Resource Management (VRM) classifications assigned through this CDCA Plan amendment are based on existing land uses, and existing and proposed land use designations (e.g., wilderness, ACECs, conservation areas, and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument). Within VRM Class 1 areas, very limited management activities would be allowed. Substantial protection of visual resources is also afforded to VRM Class 2 areas. Activities in these VRM Class 2 areas must remain subordinate to the existing landscape, thereby limiting the degree of landscape modification allowed. The greatest flexibility for landscape modifications would be found in VRM Class 4 where management activities may be a dominant element of the landscape.

Conformance with VRM objectives would be determined through the Contrast Rating process as project proposals are submitted to the BLM. Contrast ratings measure the degree on contrast between a proposed activity and the existing landscape, and determine whether the proposed project meets applicable VRM objectives. If the proposed project exceeds the allowable contrast, BLM makes a decision to (1) redesign, (2) abandon or reject, or (3) proceed, but with mitigation measures stipulated to reduce critical impacts.

Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Within the 95,461 acres of BLM-managed lands designated as VRM Class 1 (San Gorgonio and Santa Rosa Mountains Wilderness Additions), very limited management activities would be allowed. Substantial protection of visual resources is also afforded to 97,539 acres of BLM-managed lands designated as VRM Class 2 (ACECs, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and CVMSHCP conservation areas, except for lands upon which wind energy facilities are located and/or sand and gravel mining occurs)—activities on these lands must remain subordinate to the existing landscape, thereby limiting the degree of landscape modification allowed. The greatest flexibility for landscape modifications would be found on the 12,852 acres of BLM-managed lands designated as VRM Class 4 where management activities may be a dominant element of the landscape. These Class 4 lands include wind energy and sand/gravel mining

sites, as well as all remaining public lands within the planning area boundary, except the NECO overlap area.

Within the NECO overlap area that encompasses 131,376 acres of BLM-managed lands, VRM classes would not be assigned. Conformance with proposed visual resource management objectives would be determined as project proposals are submitted to the BLM. Contrast Ratings that measure the degree of contrast between a proposed activity and the existing landscape would be prepared in the classified areas. Decisions to redesign, abandon or reject, or proceed would be based on the Contrast Rating.

No Action Alternative (D). VRM classes would not be assigned at this time (though designated wilderness areas are managed in accordance with VRM Class 1 objectives by policy). Instead, interim VRM objectives would be established for affected lands on a case-by-case basis when project proposals are submitted to the BLM—VRM objectives would not be known prior to the time actions are proposed. Contrast Ratings that measure the degree of contrast between a proposed activity and the existing landscape would be prepared relative to the interim objectives. Decisions to redesign, abandon or reject, or proceed would be based on the Contrast Rating.