

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.

4.14 Utilities, Public Services and Facilities

Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Recommendations. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The proposed recommendation of eligible rivers in and of itself, or deferral of eligibility recommendations, would have no effect on transportation facilities or regional circulation systems on BLM-managed public lands in the planning area. If the rivers, or portions thereof, were later studied and found to be suitable for designation, existing roads, access ramps, bridges, culverts and other facilities would be unaffected. However, per Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) would be expressly prohibited from licensing the construction of new dams, water conduits, reservoirs, powerhouses, transmission lines, or other project works under the Federal Power Act on or directly affecting any river which is designated as a component of the national wild and scenic river system. Furthermore, no Federal agency or department would be permitted to assist by loan, grant, license, or otherwise in the construction of any water resources project that would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which such a designation was established. In this regard, the development of new utilities along these rivers would be restricted.

Visual Resource Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The designation of VRM classifications in and of itself, or assignment of interim classifications when projects are proposed, would have no impact on utilities and public services on BLM-managed public lands as the classifications would be based on analyses of existing land uses and landscape quality. However, should a utility development project be proposed in the future, the degree of contrast between the existing landscape and the proposed project (Contrast Rating) would be compared with the VRM classification to determine whether the anticipated level of contrast is acceptable. If the allowable contrast level is exceeded, the project would need to be redesigned or abandoned, or mitigation measures would need to be implemented to reduce critical impacts to acceptable levels. This process has the potential to limit the extent and increase the costs of future utility development on BLM-managed public lands in the planning area.

To minimize potential adverse effects of the VRM classification system on utilities, the Proposed Plan would designate all BLM-managed public lands associated with existing and future development of wind energy facilities and sand/gravel mining sites as VRM Class 4, whether inside or outside the CVMSHCP conservation areas. VRM Class 4 is one of the least restrictive classifications, which allows any contrast to attract attention and be a dominant feature of the landscape in terms of scale, but requires it to repeat the form, line, color, and texture of the characteristic landscape. Mitigation measures and project redesign may be required to assure that future utility development meets this standard. Such action may result in increased costs to utility project developers.

Land Health Standards and Air Quality. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). Land health standards are directed at promoting healthy landscapes and achievement of Federal and State air quality standards. To achieve these standards, utility projects would likely need to implement site-specific mitigation measures, such as improvements to soil, drainage, and vegetation, implementation of Best Management Practices to minimize impacts to air and water quality, and special construction, design, or operational techniques. Such measures can be expected to result in increased costs to utility project developers. However, land health standards may not be used to permanently prohibit allowable uses established by law, regulation, or land use plans.

Multiple-Use Classification. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). No impacts to utility development would occur. Utility development would still be allowed in Multiple-Use Classes “L,” “M,” and “I,” but would continue to be prohibited in Multiple-Use Class “C,” which applies only to wilderness areas.

Habitat Conservation Objectives. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Implementation of the proposed habitat conservation objectives would define compatible uses within conservation areas, and may require site-specific mitigation measures to be implemented where utility development occurs within conservation areas. This will likely increase costs to the utility developer; costs would depend upon the location of the utility improvements relative to sensitive species, habitat conservation areas, and ecological processes, such as sand transport corridors.

The commercial film permitting process would not be affected. Filming activities on public lands would need to comply with habitat conservation objectives as applicable, as well as current regulations and policies.

Alternative A and No Action (D). If the proposed habitat conservation objectives were not adopted, or for land outside conservation areas, utility projects would still have to mitigate for impacts to listed species, cultural and other sensitive resources. Mitigation measures would be determined on a project-by-project basis. However, additional mitigation measures related to landscape level habitat management would not likely be imposed.

The commercial film permitting process would not be affected. Filming activities on public lands would need to comply with current regulations and policies.

Fire Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). No impacts to utilities would occur as the fire management categories are based on analyses of existing land uses and vegetation types, with priority placed on protecting life and property. With regard to public services, the proposed fire management categories under the Proposed Plan would clarify BLM's fire management and response strategy for various habitat types on BLM-managed lands in the planning area.

Alternative A and No Action (D). Fire management in accordance with the CDCA Plan and the District-wide Fire Management Plan would not affect public services.

Special Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B and C. Designation of areas as ACECs or wildlife habitat management areas would not directly impact utilities and public services on BLM-managed public lands in the CDCA planning area. The designation of such areas would not result in automatic closures of utility sites or operations. Any potential closures would be proposed through a separate action, based on protection of sensitive cultural or natural resources. Efforts would be made to accomplish such protection without unnecessarily or unreasonably restricting public lands from uses that are compatible with that protection.

No Action Alternative (D). Utilities and public services on BLM-managed lands would not be impacted by maintaining current ACEC boundaries. Management of them is determined by the existing ACEC management plans.

Land Tenure: Exchange and Sale Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). Implementation of the proposed land tenure exchange and sale criteria, or lack thereof, would not impact utilities or public services. The BLM would still have the option to retain utility development sites in public ownership. BLM may consider exchanges or sales of land, including land with utilities, if all the criteria described in Chapter 2.4.9 are met.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). Implementation of the land tenure acquisition criteria, or lack thereof, would not impact utilities or public services. Any proposed acquisitions would have to meet the criteria set forth in Chapter 2.4.10.

Management of Acquired Lands. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). The Proposed Plan would not impact existing utilities or public facilities on BLM-managed public lands in the planning area. However, should the BLM acquire new lands that already contain utilities or public facilities, the proposed action would require that they be managed in accordance with management practices on surrounding lands. Where surrounding lands are managed for the protection of sensitive cultural or natural resources (such as in an ACEC), this could result in the need for additional mitigation measures and associated costs to utility operators.

No Action Alternative (D). If no guidance for managing acquired lands were provided at this time, acquired and formerly withdrawn lands are subject to applicable land and minerals laws when an opening order is issued and published in the Federal Register.

Communication Sites and Utilities. Proposed Plan (Alternative B). The Proposed Plan would minimize land use conflicts (such as noise, traffic, construction and operational activity) between sensitive natural resource areas and more intensive windparks and communication sites. However, it would also limit windpark and communication development locations and opportunities on BLM-managed public lands in the planning area.

While opportunities for new wind parks and communication sites would be limited to designated areas, the best lands for these uses are included in the proposed designations. Designating areas for communication sites and wind parks would help to minimize potential land use conflicts.

Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). If no areas were designated at this time, sensitive resources would still need to be taken into consideration when evaluating the compatibility of land use proposals on the BLM-managed lands; however, this evaluation would occur on a project-by-project basis. Potential land use conflicts may arise within conservation areas. Although impacts to sensitive resources would likely be mitigated, any off-site mitigation would indicate incompatible land uses within conservation areas.

Sand and Gravel Mining. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The Proposed Plan or other alternatives would not impact utilities or public services.

Livestock Grazing. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). Discontinuing livestock grazing on all or a portion of the Whitewater Canyon grazing allotment (Proposed Plan, Alternatives B and C) or current management of the allotment (No Action) would not affect utilities or public services.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The transfer of BLM parcels within the Palm Canyon Herd Management Area (HMA) to the Agua Caliente Tribe of Cahuilla Indians (Proposed Plan), the proposed deletion of the Palm Canyon and Morongo HMAs (Proposed Plan and Alternative C), or retention of the HMAs would not impact utilities or public facilities.

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The Proposed Plan or other alternatives would not impact utilities or public services.

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. Given that the designation of motor vehicle routes would be based, in part, on analyses of existing land uses, no impacts to existing utilities or public facilities would

occur. Where access to future utility sites is necessary, it would be provided under rights-of-way, with terms and conditions to facilitate conformance with the land health standards, habitat conservation objectives, air quality management strategy, and criteria described in Chapter 2.4.12.

No Action Alternative (D). Same as the Proposed Plan and other alternatives, except that currently available routes would not be designated open, and certain unavailable routes would not be designated closed.

Special Recreation Management Area. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Designation or non-designation of the Meccacopia SRMA would not impact utilities, public facilities, or public services.

Stopping, Parking and Vehicle Camping. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A and B), Alternatives C and No Action (D). The Proposed Plan or other alternatives would not impact utilities or public facilities or services.

Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Management Strategy. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). No impact on utilities, public facilities or services would result.

Hiking, Biking and Equestrian Trails. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). No impacts to utilities or public facilities would result from the Proposed Plan or No Action Alternative.