

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.

4.6 Flooding and Hydrology

Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Recommendations. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The proposed eligibility recommendations apply only to BLM-managed public lands which are already under conservation management, such as the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC, Whitewater Canyon ACEC, wilderness areas, and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. The recommendation of eligible rivers in and of itself, or lack thereof, would have no effect on flooding or hydrology processes in the planning area.

If the proposed rivers or portions thereof were later studied and found suitable for designation, existing dams and other impoundments or diversions would be unaffected. However, Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act expressly prohibits the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) from licensing the construction of new dams, water conduits, reservoirs, powerhouses, transmission lines, or other project works under the Federal Power Act, as amended, on or directly affecting any river which is designated as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Furthermore, no federal department or agency 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 designation was established.

Visual Resource Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). No impacts to flooding and hydrology processes would occur as the VRM classifications are based on analyses of existing land uses and quality of landscapes.

Land Health Standards and Air Quality. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The implementation of land health standards would help identify specific management needs, such as improvement of soil conditions and maintenance of appropriate hydrologic conditions, within areas prone to flooding and within riparian/wetland and stream environments. Additional mitigation measures may be required to meet these standards. 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). The modification of Multiple-Use Classes or retention of existing designations would have no effect on flooding and hydrology processes. Although Multiple-Use Classes provide broad guidance with respect to permitted uses of the public lands, current laws and regulations and other actions proposed through this Plan Amendment have a greater effect on flooding and hydrology processes within the planning area.

Habitat Conservation Objectives. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). The implementation of habitat conservation objectives would help define compatible land uses within conservation areas. Additional mitigation measures may be required to meet these objectives where flood management activities are proposed within conservation areas in order to minimize impacts to sensitive species and their habitats. Such measures would likely result in increased design and construction costs, depending upon the location of the flood control facilities relative to sensitive species, multi-species habitat conservation areas, and important ecological process areas, such as sand transport corridors.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). If habitat conservation objectives are not adopted, or for areas outside conservation areas, flood management projects would still have to mitigate for impacts to listed species, cultural, and other sensitive resources. Mitigation measures would be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Additional mitigation measures related to landscape level habitat management would not likely be imposed.

Fire Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). No impacts to flooding and hydrology processes 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.

Special Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). No direct impacts to flooding and hydrology processes would occur. The designation of wildlife habitat management areas or ACECs may further protect and prevent irreparable alterations to natural hydrologic systems or processes, depending upon area-specific management prescriptions. The designation of such areas would not automatically preclude the development of necessary flood management facilities. Compatible uses within wildlife habitat management areas and ACECs would be determined based on the management prescriptions adopted for a particular special area, and would not be determined by the designation itself.

Land Tenure: Exchange and Sale Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). No impacts to flooding and hydrology processes would occur as a result of adopting or not adopting land exchange and sale criteria.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). The adoption of land tenure acquisition criteria or consideration on a case-by-case basis would result in no impacts to flooding and hydrology processes.

Management of Acquired Lands. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). No impacts to flooding and hydrology processes would occur as a result of the Proposed Plan or No Action Alternative.

Communication Sites and Utilities. Proposed Plan (Alternative B) and Alternative A. The designation of areas for wind parks, utilities, and communication sites would not in and of itself affect flooding and hydrology processes. However, the future construction of such facilities and their access roads could result in increased soil erosion and/or the alteration of existing drainage patterns, rates and/or amounts of runoff, thereby impacting surrounding lands. Where such development is proposed within conservation areas, additional mitigation measures may be required to minimize impacts to sensitive resources and hydrologic processes, consistent with habitat conservation objectives.

Alternative C. No effects to flooding and hydrology processes would occur within CVMSHCP conservation areas as no new communication sites or windparks would be allowed therein. Future construction of such facilities outside CVMSHCP conservation areas would result in the same impacts as described under the Proposed Plan.

No Action Alternative (D). If no areas were designated at this time, mitigation measures would be taken into consideration on a project-by-project basis, and potential land use conflicts may arise within conservation areas.

Sand and Gravel Mining. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternative A. The designation of areas for sand and gravel mining, in and of itself, will not result in impacts to flooding and hydrology processes (Proposed Plan). However, the future development of such mining facilities may result in the alteration of existing drainage patterns, rates and/or runoff quantities, thereby impacting surrounding lands. Where such development is proposed within conservation areas, additional mitigation measures may be required to minimize impacts to sensitive resources and hydrologic processes, consistent with habitat conservation objectives (Proposed Plan and Alternative A).

Alternative C. Future development of mining facilities outside CVMSHCP conservation areas may result in the alteration of existing drainage patterns, rates and/or runoff quantities, thereby impacting surrounding lands.

No Action Alternative (D). If no areas were designated at this time, mitigation measures would be determined on a project-by-project basis, and potential land use conflicts may arise within conservation areas.

Livestock Grazing. Proposed Plan (Alternative A) and No Action Alternative (D). If grazing is continued, soil erosion would still need to be minimized and appropriate hydrologic processes would still need to be maintained to meet the rangeland health assessment standards. Seasonal rest periods and similar techniques would be employed.

Alternatives B and C. Discontinuing grazing use on all or a portion of the Whitewater grazing allotment would minimize soil erosion and associated alterations in drainage patterns and runoff quantities on steep slopes where cattle graze.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternative C. Due to the limited number of wild horses and burros occupying the Palm Canyon and Morongo Herd Management Areas, deletion of these HMAs would have only a limited impact on minimizing soil erosion and associated alterations in drainage patterns, rates, and/or runoff quantities.

Alternative A and No Action (D). Maintaining the existing horses within Palm Canyon would continue the soil erosion process and associated hydrologic effects occurring on steeper slopes.

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. The designation of areas as “open” (Alternative A only) to motorized vehicles would increase soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects, such as alterations in drainage patterns and rates, which could result in broader flooding/hydrology implications on surrounding lands. The elimination of vehicular “free-play” activities on public lands at Windy Point, Indio Hills, Iron Door, and Drop 31 (Alternatives B and C) would reduce soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects, such as drainage patterns and rates.

No Action Alternative (D). Existing OHV use would continue current levels of soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects, such as alterations in drainage patterns and rates, which could result in broader flooding/hydrology implications on surrounding lands.

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. The designation of currently available routes as “open” or “limited” to motorized vehicles would maintain soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects, such as alterations in drainage patterns and rates, which could result in broader flooding/hydrology implications on surrounding lands. The designation of currently available routes as “closed” to motorized vehicles would minimize soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects, such as drainage patterns and rates.

No Action Alternative (D). Existing OHV use would continue current levels of soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects, such as alterations in drainage patterns and rates, which could result in broader flooding/hydrology implications on surrounding lands.

Special Recreation Management Area. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Designation or non-designation of the Meccacopia SRMA, in and of itself, would result in no impacts to flooding or hydrology processes.

Stopping, Parking and Vehicle Camping. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A and B), Alternatives C and No Action (D). Limiting stopping, parking, and vehicle camping to

specific zones would reduce soil erosion and associated hydrologic disturbances, such as alterations to drainage patterns and rates.

Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Strategy. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). There would be no impact on flooding and hydrology under any alternative.

Hiking, Biking and Equestrian Trails. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Although some soil erosion and alterations in drainage patterns and rates can be attributed to trail use and new trail development, these occurrences are also a product of trail design, quality of trail maintenance, weather conditions, and other factors. Proposed limitations on trails use within Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat would result in only minimal reductions in soil erosion and associated hydrologic effects. Mitigation measures to minimize soils and hydrologic impacts would be addressed as site-specific trail projects are proposed.

No Action Alternative (D). Continuing use of all trails may result in some soil erosion and alterations in drainage patterns and rates.