

# **Biological Inventory of the Coachella Canal Area Appendix**

**April and September 2004**

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## Introduction

While fairly extensive wildlife and vegetation data exists for much of the Coachella Valley through the *Draft Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan* effort and Bureau of Land Management's *Proposed California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley and Final Environmental Impact Statement*, that data does not extend to Reclamation parcels in the Coachella Valley. cursory field reconnaissance was conducted for the 1993 resource management planning effort, but no in-depth field surveys have been conducted on Bureau of Reclamation land. Wildlife and habitat surveys were designed to provide up-to-date and comprehensive wildlife, vegetation, and habitat suitability information essential to the resource management planning process.

The purpose of the wildlife and vegetation data collection is to identify species present and relative abundance, including threatened and endangered species; determine the presence and condition of habitats, including high value habitats; identify potential and existing threats to habitats; identify potential management options; and prepare GIS map layers.

## Study Area

The study area encompasses parcels A through T, which lie adjacent to or near the Coachella Canal (map 1.2).

## Methods

Reclamation obtained the most recent property boundaries for Reclamation lands within the Coachella Valley and a geographic information system (GIS) specialist prepared land ownership maps and global positioning system (GPS) coordinates. For survey purposes, Reclamation divided the properties into 38 biological inventory parcels on the basis of geographical area rather than by the patchwork of fee title, withdrawn, or easement boundaries (map 5.4).

Biological surveys of all of the Reclamation properties were conducted April 19–23, 2004. Three biologists, a wildlife technician, and a botanist technician composed the crew. Morning bird surveys, using timed area searches, were conducted from dawn until 11 a.m. Units that were surveyed were selected to be representative of the habitats present. A total of 21 units were surveyed. Species diversity and relative abundance were calculated for each unit surveyed. The remaining 17 units were visited by a combination of walking and roadside observations.

Data collected for all units consisted of the following:

- Bird species (heard or observed).
- Wildlife species (sightings, tracks, scat, burrows).
- Vegetation (listing of abundant, common and uncommon species).
- Categorization of each unit into vegetation series using *A Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf, 1995) and into habitat types as defined by the *Draft Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan* (CVMSHCP/NCCP).
- Categorization of any sand habitats present into active dunes; stabilized and partially stabilized desert dunes; stabilized and partially stabilized desert sand fields; stabilized shielded desert sand fields; active desert sand fields; ephemeral desert sand fields; or mesquite hummocks as defined by the CVMSHCP/NCCP.
- Identification of habitat linkages, degree of fragmentation.
- Identification of habitat condition, including off highway vehicle (OHV) trails, dumps, domestic pets, human activities. Identification of threats and damage to wildlife habitat.
- Recommendations from a resource management perspective were prepared for each unit concerning overall wildlife value, potential for restoration, need for protection of unique or high value habitats, habitat potential for special status species, and need for subsequent threatened and endangered species surveys.

## Results

Bird detections from each parcel are listed in table 1. Reclamation usually conducted morning bird surveys, consisting of an area search with three biologists for 4 days. As time and conditions allowed, Reclamation surveyed additional sites. During the heat of the day, Reclamation conducted roadside surveys,

stopping to walk and inspect areas with the best habitat. Most of habitat was creosote bursage with patches of saltcedar and some areas of dense forbs usually invasive species. However, these areas were heavily used by migrating birds. In many cases, Reclamation observed species such as lazuli bunting, MacGillivray's warbler, yellow warbler, Wilson's warbler, warbling vireo, and Pacific-slope flycatcher actively foraging in the weedy cover, saltcedar and paloverde. They used these as rest stops/foraging areas along their migrations. These areas, while small, appear to take on a very important role for migrants, and Reclamation needs to identify these and protect them as much as possible. It could also provide a good template for habitat enhancement as well.

The more common birds observed throughout the sites included northern mockingbird, phainopepla (in mistletoe-infested mesquite), verdin (usually in paloverde), black-tailed gnatcatcher, mourning dove, ash-throated flycatcher, greater roadrunner, house finche, Gambel's quail, black-throated sparrow, and Say's phoebe. Black-throated sparrows (a common resident of desert shrub) included recently fledged young. Reclamation also observed Gambel's quail broods about a week old.

The best habitat for birds appeared to have more vegetative structure and included stands of paloverde, smoke trees, and other native species and usually had relatively high bird densities. These included parcels 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Sites on the east side of the Coachella Valley were pretty heavily impacted by canal construction, illegal dumping, OHV use, and borrow areas adjacent to levee. Reclamation found the most extensive dunes and mesquite hummocks on parcel 27 on the south end—this is a relatively well-protected site as the dump road is fenced—especially compared to the other side of the dump road that is hugely impacted by massive OHV use. Reclamation found sign of abundant phainopepla use in honey mesquites and observed round-tailed ground squirrels in adjacent sand deposits of mesquite hummocks. Other sand formations were observed in parcel 37 but have been especially impacted by dumping. A small mesquite hummock area exists on the north end of parcel 26 immediately adjacent to Interstate 10. Round-tailed ground squirrels were present at this site. Another potentially high quality mesquite hummock exists immediately adjacent to Dillon Road to the north on parcel 26 but has been heavily impacted by OHVs, squatter camps, and dumping. Round-tailed ground squirrels were present here as well. Parcel 30 included a nice dune formation and was a continuation of the clay hills but also was heavily impacted by OHVs. The only surviving plant appeared to be creosote bush. This site appeared to have minimal bird, reptile, or small mammal activity.

### **Acoustic Bat Surveys**

Acoustic bat surveys were conducted using an Anabat II bat detector coupled to a zero-crossing analysis interface module (ZCAIM). Bat calls were recorded

directly onto a compact flash card. Two units were deployed in nearby habitats and ran continuously from dusk to dawn, recording all bat calls during a 10-hour period. The units were retrieved and downloaded the following day and relocated to the next study area. Samples were obtained during April and again during September 2004.

### ***Call Analysis***

The minimum frequency, duration, and shape of each call sequence (bat pass) was compared with reference calls from libraries of positively identified bats from throughout the Western United States, following the method outlined in Thomas et al. (1987). A bat pass is defined as a call sequence of duration greater than 0.5 millisecond (ms) and consisting of more than two individual calls (Thomas, 1998; O'Farrell and Gannon, 1999).

There were 15 bat species recorded in the study area (table 2). Several characteristic calls of both the California myotis and western pipistrelle are nearly identical. Overlapping calls were placed in the myocal/piphes species group as done by Betts (1998) and Rainey et al. (2003). The western small-footed myotis and cave myotis also have overlapping call characteristics which, when encountered, were placed in the 40-kilohertz (kHz) Myotis species group.

### ***Bat Activity***

Parcel 1 (at the Lake Cahuilla County Park) had the highest total number of bat passes (258) and the highest measure of bat activity as measured by bat passes per hour (23.5). The majority of calls were western pipistrelles (237). This parcel also had the largest number of mastiff bat passes (9). This site also had the largest number of feeding buzzes of all the parcels surveyed (21). Parcel 7 had the second highest number of bat passes (155), the majority of which were the calls of western pipistrelles.

The Toro Canyon area (parcel 8 and Parcel 9) had the highest number of species present (10). This area is one of the most pristine of all the parcels in Reclamation ownership, consisting of a diverse alluvial fan habitat. It is likely that bats commute from the rocky cliffs of the nearby canyon and mountains to agricultural areas to the east.

The only western yellow bat recorded on Reclamation parcels was one pass on parcel 9 near Toro Canyon. This is a specialist of palm trees, often roosting in the dry fronds that hang down from the canopy. It faces threats from habitat modification, especially as fronds are often trimmed in urban areas. An acoustic survey was also conducted in September in the Coachella Valley Preserve to determine the relative abundance of bat species in pristine undamaged habitats. Western yellow bats, as expected, were abundant, with 51 bat passes recorded.

The Coachella Valley Preserve also had the second highest number of bat passes of any of the surveyed sites (174) and the second highest bat passes per hour (14.5).

Acoustic bat surveys of several of the Reclamation parcels indicated a diverse bat community present at least as diverse, if not more so than that found on the pristine Coachella Valley Preserve. In addition to other wildlife species, the Reclamation parcels provide valuable habitat for at least 15 species of bats in the Coachella Valley. As this valley continues to experience accelerated human population growth, the habitat present in the Reclamation parcels will become increasingly important refugia for bats as well as other wildlife species.

## Literature Cited

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Coachella Canal Area  
Resource Management Plan/  
Environmental Assessment

Table 1  
BIRD SPECIES OBSERVED DURING BIOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF RECLAMATION PARCELS  
Count in Biological Inventory Parcels - April 2004

SPECIES	STATUS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	17	20	21	22	24	25	26	27	29	30	37
American kestrel <sup>+</sup>	R			1	1										1					2							
Anna's hummingbird	R	1																									
Ash-throated flycatcher <sup>+</sup>	NM	1	1		1				1		3	1	1		1	1	1		2					1			
Barn swallow <sup>+</sup>	NM								5			2							1								
Black phoebe <sup>+</sup>	R							1				2	1														
Brewer's blackbird	R											1															
Brewer's sparrow	NM								3	1		26	4														
Black-chinned hummingbird <sup>+</sup>	NM	1															1							1			
Black-headed grosbeak	NM																		1								
Black-tailed gnatcatcher <sup>+</sup>	R	1		1	1					6						1							1				
Black-throated gray warbler	NM																								7		
Blue grosbeak <sup>+</sup>	NM																							1			
Black-throated sparrow <sup>+</sup>	R					5				4																	
Blue-gray gnatcatcher	NM											2															
Bullock's oriole <sup>+</sup>	NM																		1					1			
Cactus wren <sup>+</sup>	R			1																							
Cassin's kingbird <sup>+</sup>	NM						1																				
Cedar waxwing	W																			1							
Chipping sparrow	NM																								1		
Cliff swallow <sup>+</sup>	NM											20		1											1		
Cooper's hawk <sup>+</sup>	R																	2									
Common ground dove <sup>+</sup>	R											1															
Common raven <sup>+</sup>	R		1			1			1			1															
Costa's hummingbird <sup>+</sup>	NM							2																			
Double-crested cormorant	R							1																			
European starling <sup>+</sup>	R				1																						
Gamble's quail <sup>+</sup>	R	2						1		6	3						1		3			1	2	1	1	1	
Great-blue heron	R							2																			
Great-horned owl <sup>+</sup>	R								1																		
Great-tailed grackle <sup>+</sup>	R		1																								
Greater roadrunner <sup>+</sup>	R				1														1		1		1	2	1		1
House finch <sup>+</sup>	R	5	2		3				2	4		14		1	2	2	4	20	2	10				7			
House wren	NM																								2		
Killdeer <sup>+</sup>	R	2						2				1												1			
Lazuli bunting	NM																		1	3							
Lesser goldfinch <sup>+</sup>	NM											1															
Lark sparrow	NM								6			1						1									
Loggerhead shrike <sup>+</sup>	R	2								1		1															
MacGillivray's warbler	NM		1	2								5	1													1	
Mourning dove <sup>+</sup>	R	9	1	1	7	1			13	4	3	24	6		1		1	20	20	12			1	4	5		
Northern mockingbird <sup>+</sup>	R	3	2		2				3	9		10	1		3	1	4				1		1	2	2		3
Olive-sided flycatcher	NM									1																	
Phainopepla <sup>+</sup>	R				2				11	7															12		
Pacific-slope flycatcher	NM																								3		
Red-tailed hawk <sup>+</sup>	R										1				1												
Rock wren <sup>+</sup>	R	1	1		2																						
Say's phoebe <sup>+</sup>	NM	1			1			1		1	1	1					1										
Verdin <sup>+</sup>	R	1	1	4	9				1	3					2				1				2	8			
Warbling vireo	NM									1																	
White-crowned sparrow	W											2							1		1						
White-throated swift	NM																										1
White-winged dove <sup>+</sup>	R									2																	
Western kingbird <sup>+</sup>	NM				2					2		7							1		5		2				
Wilson's warbler	NM			1														2						3			
Yellow warbler <sup>+</sup>	NM																								5		
Yellow-rumped warbler	NM																								1		

(R - Year-long resident; W - winter resident; NM - neotropical migrant landbird)  
(\* breeds in habitat associations of Reclamation's parcels)

**Table 2. Summary of Acoustic Bat Surveys of Reclamation Parcels**

Species	Units Surveyed in										Units Surveyed in		Coachella Valley Preserve <sup>1</sup>
	April 2005										September 2005		
Common Name	1	7	8	9	21	37	3	(Facing E)	(Facing W)	9	9		
Antrozous pallidus	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
Coryhinus townsendii	0	1	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Eptesicus fuscus	1	1	0	0	0	4	3	2	1	2	1	14	
Lasiurus cinereus	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Lasiurus xanthinus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	51	
Myotis californicus	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	
Myotis ciliolabrum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	
Myotis lucifugus	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	
Myotis velifer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Myotis yumanensis	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	2	3	2	2	
Nyctinomops femorosaccus	4	8	6	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	
Nyctinomops macrotis	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	
Pipistrellus hesperus	237	138	37	13	31	21	53	33	44	33	44	49	
Tadarida brasiliensis	0	2	4	0	0	1	0	0	5	0	5	0	
40 kHz Myotis (spp.)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	
M. californicus/P. hesperus	0	0	3	0	5	10	0	0	1	0	1	48	
Eumops perotis	9	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	4	3	4	0	
<b>Total Number Bat Passes</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>174</b>	
<b>Bat Activity (#bat passes/hr)</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>14.5</b>	
<b>Total Number Species</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Feeding Buzzes</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Not on Reclamation land - serves as a reference condition.



# Attachment

## Parcel 1



### Plant Community Classifications

Dominant species include blue paloverde, *Cercidium floridum*; cheesebush, *Hymenoclea salsola*; brittle bush, *Encelia farnosa*; creosote, *Larrea tridentata*; and white bursage, *Ambrosia dumosa*.

**Series<sup>1</sup> dominated by trees:** Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

**Series dominated by shrubs:** Creosote bush-white bursage series

This series (the creosote bush series) is often considered part of the creosote bush scrub, which can be thought of as a collection of series. In the creosote bush series, creosote bush dominates; white bursage may be present but not as important shrub. (See Creosote bush-white bursage series.)

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<sup>1</sup> Series classification based on *A Manual of California Vegetation*, J.O. Sawyer and Tod Keeler-Wolf.

### **Special Habitats**

Small pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields present and Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Approximately one-half of the parcel has been heavily disturbed, appearing to have been scraped. Also piles of soil have been dumped. Some revegetation is occurring on this disturbed area. The eastern portion is mostly undisturbed

### **Disturbance Factors**

Excavation for flood control, light equestrian use, illegal dumping, borrow pits, light OHV use.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected to continuous habitat to the west and the Santa Rosa Mountains.

### **Wildlife Notes**

(See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.) Wildlife typical of desert habitat observed in relatively high abundance, which included lizards and active small mammal burrows. Relatively high bat densities included western pipistelles and mastiff bats.

### **Recommendations**

Continue passive light recreation use and low impact trails. Restore borrow pits and illegal dumps; control OHV use. Use as a Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer area.

## Parcel 2



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush predominates on rock hillside, while cheesebush and white bursage predominates on the bajada with some paloverde. Interspersion of desert washes and rock outcrops.

*Series dominated by trees:* Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series.

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote bush series on hillside  
Four-wing saltbush series on the bajada

### Special Habitats

Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.

### General Habitat Condition

Relatively light disturbance

### Disturbance Factors

Recreational use; adjacent residential subdivision. Hydrology altered by flood control structures.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

The desert wash is connected with extensive upstream washes but represents downstream end. The slopes are connected with the entire mountain range and associated Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat.

### **Wildlife Notes**

(See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.)

### **Recommendations**

Passive recreation use; nature study. Wildlife water source development could be an enhancement if placed at base of rocky slopes.

## Parcel 3



### Plant Community Classifications

Unit has been scraped, probably used as a borrow area for the levee. There is a stand of paloverde mixed with tamarisk and honey mesquite adjoining a dense stand of saltbush & cheesebush. There is some saltbush colonizing the scraped area.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Four-wing saltbush series

### Special Habitats

None observed.

### General Habitat Condition

Area mostly disturbed for excavation of levee. A small desert riparian area dominated by paloverde and salt cedar is in fairly good shape and is probably supported by irrigation at adjacent subdivision.

### Disturbance Factors

Levee borrow pit, dumping, OHV use.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Isolated from adjacent habitat by subdivision

### **Wildlife Notes**

(See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species). Migrating and resident birds were using the desert riparian strip.

### **Recommendations**

Maintain riparian strip as bird habitat and visual buffer.

## Parcel 4



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush, saltbush, and some ocotillo with a patch of honey mesquite. There is a well developed stand of paloverde on the north end of the unit. There are also patches of mature Tamarisk. On the west side of the levee in the NW portion of the unit is a stand of paloverde with atriplex. There is an area with stabilized sand fields.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series  
Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote bush series  
Creosote bush-white bursage series (includes ocotillo)

### Special Habitats

Pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields. Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.

### General Habitat Condition

A relatively undamaged bajada exists in the middle of the parcel.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Heavily impacted areas on the south half of the parcel (formerly the Ranch of the Seventh Mountain) with concrete slabs, building materials, bare areas, dumps, and OHV use. Some development has occurred on the northern portion including a water or sewer treatment plant, a Bureau of Land Management trail (Boo Hollow), the construction of a levee).

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected to continuous habitat to the west and the Santa Rosa Mountains.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate and remove dumps. Should limit development to serve as Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer. Inventory and protect sand habitat.



## Parcel 5



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Dominant plants include cheesebush, bursage, brittle bush, catclaw, and bebbia.

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Catclaw acacia series

### **Special Habitats**

Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Relatively undisturbed.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Areas is between flood control dikes, which may alter hydrology. Some dead trees. OHV trailing.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected to continuous habitat to the west and the Santa Rosa Mountains.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Maintain as Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.

## Parcel 6



### **Plant Community Classifications**

A rocky hill consisting of mostly bare rocks and soil with scattered creosote-bursage with a few ocotillo.

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote-white bursage series

### **Special Habitats**

Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer and rocky outcrops with small caves for critter cover.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Relatively undisturbed.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Old mines, flood control dikes.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected to continuous habitat to the west and the Santa Rosa Mountains.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Maintain as Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer. Protect rock outcrops and cave habitat for wildlife cover and raptor perch.

## Parcel 7



### Plant Community Classifications

In the relatively undamaged upland area outside of the borrow area is creosote bush/bursage. Old tamarisk trees in a scraped area at the base of the levee.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

Pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields. Adjacent treatment ponds provide aquatic habitat and water source. Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer area.

### General Habitat Condition

Relatively undisturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

OHV trails, levee construction, sedimentation, dumping.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected to continuous habitat to the west and the Santa Rosa Mountains.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Maintain as Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer. Clean up dump.

## Parcels 8 and 9



### Plant Community Classifications

This is a low bajada interspersed with desert wash.. It consists of paloverde, smoke trees interspersed with creosote/white bursage. Along the western edge of the parcel, it grades to large boulders interspersed with barrel cactus. Mature tamarisk in the scraped borrow area at the base of the levee.

*Series dominated by trees:* Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series  
Tamarisk series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.

### General Habitat Condition

Relatively undisturbed and fairly isolated, especially on the western side.

### Disturbance Factors

A few OHV trails and minor illegal dumps.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected to continuous habitat to the west and the Santa Rosa Mountains.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. Relatively abundant and diverse wildlife observed during survey

### **Recommendations**

Maintain as Peninsular bighorn sheep buffer.



## Parcels 12-17



### Plant Community Classifications

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series  
Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote-white bursage series  
Mixed saltbush series

### Special Habitats

Some small, isolated pockets of sand.

### General Habitat Condition

Mostly disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

Parcels on the east side of Coachella Valley adjacent to the canal are generally heavily disturbed by flood control dikes, canal construction, powerlines, OHV use, and illegal dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation, and invasive plants. There are some undisturbed sites to the east of the canal.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal right-of-way and adjacent agriculture to west. Connected to vast desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Clean up dumps; control OHV use; restore vegetation; and control noxious weeds.

## Parcels 18 and 19



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Parcel east of canal is mostly scraped and barren of vegetation. Parcel west of canal is very low in plant cover. Such low plant abundance exists that it is not placed into a vegetation series. Potential is probably creosote-white bursage series and mixed saltbush series.

### **Special Habitats**

Not observed.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Severely degraded.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Scraped for borrow material and/or flood control? OHV use and dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation and invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 20



### Plant Community Classifications

Area consists of some mature salt cedar near the levee with some paloverde, with some invasive grasses and forbs. Intact desert shrub on eastern edge of unit.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series  
Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

Pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields.

### General Habitat Condition

Partially disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

Flood control dikes, canal construction, powerlines, OHV use, and illegal dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation, and invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. An area with abundant green-up for forbs appeared to be attracting migrating birds.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 21



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Severely altered desert scrub with about a 1-acre stand of paloverde and saltcedar with an understory of grasses and other annuals, including weeds.

*Series dominated by trees:* Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

### **Special Habitats**

A unique 1-acre stand of highly structured paloverde.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Severely degraded.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Flood control dikes, canal construction, powerlines, OHV use, and illegal dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation, and invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.



## Parcel 22



### Plant Community Classifications

Salt cedar along edge of levee grading into more paloverdes to the east of parcel.  
Scattered creosote.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series  
Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mixed saltbush series  
Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

None observed.

### General Habitat Condition

Disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

Flood control dikes, canal construction, powerlines, OHV use, and illegal dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation and invasive plants. Some abandoned crop fields now colonized by invasive weeds. Model aircraft facility.

## **Linkages/Fragmentation**

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. Abundant mourning doves in weedy fields.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 23



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Parcel east of canal is mostly scraped and barren of vegetation. Parcel west of canal is very low in plant cover. Such low plant abundance exists that it is not placed into a vegetation series. Potential is probably creosote-white bursage series and mixed saltbush series.

### **Special Habitats**

Not observed.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Severely degraded.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Scraped for borrow material and/or flood control? OHV use and dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation and invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 24



### Plant Community Classifications

Some saltbush with scattered smoke trees and paloverde.

*Series dominated by trees:* Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mixed saltbush series

### Special Habitats

None observed.

### General Habitat Condition

Mostly degraded.

### Disturbance Factors

Heavily impacted by borrow activities.

### Linkages/Fragmentation

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 25



### Plant Community Classifications

Parcel east of canal is mostly scraped and barren of vegetation. Parcel west of canal is very low in plant cover. Potential is probably creosote-white bursage series and mixed saltbush series. There are scattered stands of saltcedar and paloverde trees.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series  
Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

### Special Habitats

Not observed.

### General Habitat Condition

Severely degraded.

### Disturbance Factors

Scraped for borrow material and/or flood control? OHV use and dumping. Habitat immediately east of levee toes is disturbed by ponding, sedimentation, and invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Revegetate, control weeds, and manage OHV use.



## Parcel 26



### Plant Community Classifications

South end of parcel consisted of salt cedar and paloverde but very little shrub or herb layer present. An oasis existed adjacent to the water tank consisting of saltcedar and a fan palm. Middle of parcel had a well developed stand of paloverde, acacia, and bursage. On the north end of parcel is a ~50 acre stabilized dune area with honey mesquite, smoke tree, and saltbush.

*Series dominated by trees:* Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mesquite series  
Mixed saltbush series

### Special Habitats

Areas with stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields.

### General Habitat Condition

Relatively undisturbed compared to adjacent eastern parcels.

### Disturbance Factors

Some light OHV use.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Fragmented by canal and agriculture to the west; connected to desert areas to east.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. Possible round-tailed ground squirrel sighting.

### **Recommendations**

Restore and protect sand dune features.

## Parcel 27



### Plant Community Classifications

Desert scrub with a cottonwood-salt cedar oasis, paloverde-smoke tree stand, and a mesquite hummock area. The area east of the landfill access road is creosote bush stand. The parcel north of Dillon Road consists of a heavily mesquite hummock, mature salt cedar stand, pure creosote bush areas, creosote bush-white bursage, and mixed saltbush communities.

*Series dominated by trees:*

- Fan palm series
- Tamarisk series
- Blue paloverde-ironwood-smoke tree series
- Cottonwood willow oasis

*Series dominated by shrubs:*

- Mesquite series
- Mixed saltbush series
- Creosote bush series
- Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

This parcel has an extensive area of mesquite hummocks, pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields, and a riparian oasis.

### **General Habitat Condition**

The south half of parcel is fenced off and semi-protected.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Dumping, homeless camp in oasis, OHV use, invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by canal and agricultural areas.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. Abundant migrating and resident birds observed in the cottonwood oasis and mesquite habitat. Abundant small mammal and reptile burrows in the mesquite hummock area.

### **Recommendations**

Should be a high-priority area. Protect and restore mesquite hummocks, other sand habitats, and cottonwood oasis. Clean up garbage, control weeds, and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 28



### **Plant Community Classifications**

This unit is fenced off. About one-fourth consists of mostly dead saltcedar, The other three-fourths consists mostly of mixed saltbush.

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mixed saltbush series

### **Special Habitats**

Pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Mostly disturbed.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Illegal dumping and fencing.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Isolated and mostly fragments with limited habitat corridors to the north and south.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Clean up dumps.

## Parcel 29



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush-white bursage, mixed saltbush series, small area of Athel tamarisk.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mixed saltbush series  
Creosote bush series  
Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

None observed.

### General Habitat Condition

Moderately disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

OHV use, dumping, powerline right-of-way.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by agricultural areas and subdivisions

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Clean up dumps and manage OHV use.



## Parcel 30



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Isolated outcrop of clay hills surrounded on the west by a housing development and golf course. Very sparse vegetation, consisting predominately of creosote bush.

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Creosote bush series

### **Special Habitats**

Stablized sand dunes.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Severely disturbed.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Heavy OHV use and invasive plants.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Isolated and fragemented from habitat on east and west sides.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

May be best left as an OHV area; otherwise, restore and revegetate.

## Parcel 31



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush-white bursage, mixed saltbush series

*Series dominated by shrubs:*    Mixed saltbush series  
   Creosote bush series  
   Creosote bush-white bursage series  
   Mesquite series

### Special Habitats

A small mesquite hummock and one isolated fan palm.

### General Habitat Condition

Moderately disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

OHV use.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by agricultural areas and subdivisions

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Manage OHV use.

## Parcel 32



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush-white bursage, mixed saltbush series

*Series dominated by shrubs:*    Mixed saltbush series  
  Creosote bush series  
  Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

Pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields.

### General Habitat Condition

Disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

OHV trails, power line right-of-way.

### Linkages/Fragmentation

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by agricultural areas and subdivisions

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Manage OHV use.

## Parcel 33



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush-white bursage, mixed saltbush series, small area of tamarisk where runoff accumulates.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mixed saltbush series  
Creosote bush series  
Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

Pockets of stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields.

### General Habitat Condition

Moderately disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

OHV use, dumping, power line right-of-way, sedimentation, invasive weeds.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by agricultural areas and subdivisions.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Clean up dumps and manage OHV use.



## Parcel 35



### Plant Community Classifications

Creosote bush-white bursage, mixed saltbush series

*Series dominated by shrubs:*    Mixed saltbush series  
  Creosote bush series  
  Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

None observed.

### General Habitat Condition

Moderately disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

Dike construction, illegal dumping, OHV trails. There is a fenced area scraped down to mineral soil on north end of parcel 35 extending to south end of parcel 36.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by agricultural areas and subdivisions.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

### **Recommendations**

Clean dumps and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 36



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Entire parcel is scraped and fenced.

### **Special Habitats**

N/A.

### **General Habitat Condition**

No habitat value except narrow strips around outside edge of fence area.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Excavation for borrow material?

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

N/A.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species.

**Recommendations**

Control noxious weeds.

## Parcel 37



### Plant Community Classifications

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series

*Series dominated by shrubs:* Mixed saltbush series  
Creosote bush series  
Creosote bush-white bursage series

### Special Habitats

Small areas with mesquite hummocks and stabilized and partially stabilized sand fields.

### General Habitat Condition

Moderately disturbed.

### Disturbance Factors

OHV use, dumping, invasive weeds, domestic dogs from adjacent homes.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Connected with extensive desert to the east. Fragmented from habitat corridors to the west by agricultural areas and subdivisions.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. Round-tailed ground squirrel observed in sand habitat.

### **Recommendations**

Protect and restore mesquite hummocks, and other sand habitats. Clean up garbage; control weeds; and manage OHV use.

## Parcel 38



### **Plant Community Classifications**

Large isolated strip of mature Athel tamarisk.

*Series dominated by trees:* Tamarisk series

### **Special Habitats**

N/A.

### **General Habitat Condition**

Disturbed.

### **Disturbance Factors**

Trash dumping and fragmentation.

### **Linkages/Fragmentation**

Isolated.

### **Wildlife Notes**

See table 1 for bird species detected and table 2 for bat species. Used as stopover habitat by migrating birds

### **Recommendations**

Pick up trash.



**Coachella Canal Area  
Resource Management Plan/  
Environmental Assessment  
Comments and Responses Appendix**

## COMMENTS AND RESPONSES APPENDIX

	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Bureau of Indian Affairs Southern California Agency Riverside, California	App-3	App-17
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office Carlsbad, California	App-5	App-17
California Department of Parks and Recreation Colorado Desert District Borrego Springs, California	App-9	App-19
Imperial County Planning & Development Services El Centro, California	App-13	
CV Community Trails Alliance Rancho Mirage, California	App-15	App-20

# Comments and Responses Appendix

The Comments and Responses Appendix contains responses from the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to written public comments received on the draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (RMP/EA) dated April 2006. Reclamation distributed approximately 250 copies of the draft RMP/EA to interested agencies, organizations, and individuals. The comment period extended from April 11, 2006, to June 2, 2006. Upon request, Reclamation extended the comment period to June 12, 2006, to allow sufficient time for certain parties to respond. Reclamation received five comment letters. The comments have been taken into consideration in preparing the final RMP/EA for distribution to the public.

This appendix includes comments from the following agencies:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs, Southern California Agency, Riverside, California
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, Carlsbad, California
- California Department of Parks and Recreation, Colorado Desert District, Borrego Springs, California
- Imperial County, Planning & Development Services, El Centro, California
- CV Community Trails Alliance, Rancho Mirage, California

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# memorandum

DATE: JUN 28 2006

REPLY TO

ATTN OF: James J. Fletcher, Superintendent, Southern California Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1451 Research Park Drive, Suite 100, Riverside, CA 92507

SUBJECT: Review Comments: Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, Riverside County, California

TO: Jim Cherry, Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Yuma Area Office, 7301 Calle Agua Salada, Yuma, AZ 85364  
ATTN: Darrell Welch, CCA RMP/EA Project Leader, fax (303) 445-6780

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, Riverside County, CA, issued in April 2006 and prepared by the US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Technical Service Center for the BOR Lower Colorado Region, Yuma Area Office. As per a phone call to your office on June 28, 2006, we appreciate your willingness to accept our review comments after the close of the comment period.

We appreciate the effort BOR extended in seeking involvement from Southern California area American Indian tribes as demonstrated in the document and note that one tribe did provide written review comments based on cultural resource concerns. As stated in the document, the draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Assessment seeks to provide broad planning for the study area and a framework to guide future project-specific environmental regulatory compliance requirements. We recognize that BOR attempted to have Tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs quantify "Indian trust assets" in the document in order to determine potential impacts to these resources that may be associated with approval of the planning document. On several occasions, we have discussed the nature of "Indian trust assets" and have conveyed the difficulty of cataloging "Indian trust assets" both from a practical standpoint (time and money) and from a fiduciary standpoint – many of what Tribes and the Bureau consider to be "Indian trust assets" do not lend themselves to description and disclosure (cultural or spiritual resources, mineral types and locations, etc).

In our March 9, 2006, letter we conveyed that "Indian trust assets" would include "real property and natural resources assets held in trust by the United States on behalf of the respective federally recognized tribes living there or affiliated by membership" and specifically cited "appurtenant surface and underground water rights" as being a type of "Indian trust asset." In as much as groundwater and surface water resources are a shared resource, are not static and can be impacted by off Reservation activities, we encourage BOR to revisit the sections of the RMP/EA that plan or provide the framework for BOR or its contractors to take actions that may impact this important Indian trust asset. Truly, it is not that "no effect to Indian trust assets have been identified under any of the alternatives" – it's that the RMP/EA deals with issues at a programmatic level. Potential impacts originating from subsequent projects that may tier to this RMP/EA have not been identified or analyzed. Accordingly, we would very much appreciate the assistance of BOR in revising the RMP/EA to recognize the limitations of the environmental clearances provided by the EA for the RMP and then work in tandem with BIA in future environmental compliance work to ensure that subsequent actions by BOR and/or BOR contractors is fully mitigated to preserve the integrity and quality of Indian trust assets in perpetuity.

1a

Should you have any questions regarding this memo, please contact me or Lisa Northrop, Natural Resources Officer, at (951) 276-6624, ext. 222 or 254.

cc Peggy Haren, BOR Study Manager, YAO

MaryAnn Green, Augustine Band of Mission Indians  
Raymond Torres, Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians  
Mike Dean, Twenty Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians  
Richard Milanovick, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians  
John A. James, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians  
Christopher Reeves, BIA-PRO Geohydrologist  
John Rydzik, BIA-PRO Division of Environmental and Cultural Resources Management and Safety Chief  
Superintendent, BIA-PSA

OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10  
GSA  
(REV. 1-94)  
5010-118  
NSN 7540-00-656-0924  
FPI-SST



# United States Department of the Interior



## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
6010 Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, California 92011

In Reply Refer to:  
FWS-ERIV-4907.1

JUN 8 2006

### Memorandum

To: Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Yuma Area Office, Arizona  
(Attn: Mr. Jim Cherry)

From: *Asst. Supv.* Assistant Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, Region 8, Carlsbad,  
California *John Aronson*

Subject: Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Assessment,  
Riverside County, California

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has reviewed the Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Assessment (RMP), received by our office on April 20, 2006. Although comments were requested by June 1, 2006, we were granted an extension by Darrell Welch, Team leader to submit comments by June 9, 2006. The primary concern and mandate of the Service is the protection of public fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. Our comments are provided under authority of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended. The Service's primary concern are the potential impacts to federally listed and sensitive species and their habitats addressed in our May 18, 2005 letter (attachment A in the RMP) and species proposed for incidental take coverage under the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSHCP) due to the RMP implementation. Site-specific National Environmental Policy Act compliance and consultation under the Act is anticipated for projects affecting federally listed species. The RMP for the Coachella Canal addresses effects on environmental resources on a programmatic level, thus our comments are also general in nature.

The proposed RMP is intended to protect and direct the management of resources along the Coachella Canal to maximize overall public and resource benefits for the next 10 years. The portion of the Coachella Canal Area covered by this RMP is within eastern Riverside County and consists of 30 miles of canal and approximately 3,990 acres of Bureau of Recreation (BOR) lands. The RMP does not address the operation or maintenance of the Coachella Canal or its protective works and water delivery facilities that have been transferred from BOR to Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD). We understand that any pre-existing authorized land uses and/or right-of-use agreements are subordinate to the project purposes, but would continue to be honored as long as they are consistent with the project needs.

Jim Cherry, Area Manager (FWS-ERIV-4907.1) 2

The RMP generally states that protection and restoration of habitat for special status species would be a priority and greater agency coordination would occur. We understand that project specific information regarding federally listed and sensitive species would be provided to the Service under section 7 of the Act. We recommend early project coordination on projects that may affect listed and sensitive species or their habitats. 2a

Approximately 600 acres of BOR-administered lands are within the Dos Palmas Conservation Area identified in the Coachella Valley MSHCP. Page 48 of the RMP states that protection and conservation of natural resources under the Preferred Alternative would be consistent with the Coachella Valley MSHCP, however it is unclear how consistency would be determined. Please include a process for determining consistency with the Coachella Valley MSHCP in the Final RMP. 2b

Maintaining habitat connectivity between blocks of habitat within the Coachella Valley is important to sustain wildlife populations and is a major biological objective in the Coachella Valley MSHCP. One such connection contemplated in the Coachella Valley MSHCP is on the Adams Ranch Project near Parcel M as defined on Map 1.2 and 6.1 in the RMP. This connection is intended to promote small mammal movement from the East Indio Hills northwest to the Thousand Palms area and the Coachella Valley Preserve. BOR lands could facilitate this movement in the northwestern portion of the Eastside Levy paralleling the Coachella Canal by maintaining and restoring natural habitat such as mesquite hummocks to function as auxiliary connections/refugia for small mammals and by permitting only passive recreation. 2c

Bighorn sheep drowning incidents have been reported by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) in the canal north of Lake Cahuilla. Fencing to protect suitable habitat is recommended in the RMP. However, as part of implementing management measures, we recommend the installation of fencing along the golf course to prevent bighorn sheep from entering into the canal. 2d

The Service informally consulted on proposed trails on BOR lands near the Parcels R, S, and T. Since that time, planning for the Travertine Project has advanced, including regional trail concepts. Implementation of the Travertine Project may require changes to the trails management concepts our agencies agreed to through informal consultation. Thus, we request that BOR work with us to ensure that trails are sited in a manner that continues to avoid and minimize effects to bighorn sheep. 2e

The following comments include specific questions or clarification on the RMP that we request be included in the Final RMP.

- Describe the incompatible land uses that are proposed to be phased out (Page 59). 2f
- Describe the anticipated funding timeline for the proposed closure and restoration of OHV road and unauthorized areas (Page 60). 2g
- Describe problematic areas of OHV use, such as the area around Dillon Road and the canal. 2h

Jim Cherry, Area Manager (FWS-ERIV-4907.1)

3

- Explain how Parcels that have been withdrawn are proposed for various uses as shown on Map 6.1 (Page 91). **2i**
- Please include coordination with the Service in addition to CDFG under Alternative D Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences for Vegetation and Wildlife (Page 93). **2j**
- Please include the following measures under Mitigation for Special Status Species in the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences Section (Page 109-110): (1) maintain corridors and linkages for sensitive species; (2) coordinate with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission to ensure that management and monitoring of BOR lands is consistent with the Coachella Valley MSHCP; and (3) provide sufficient water, if necessary, to maintain protected or restored mesquite hummocks. **2k**

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the above referenced document. We are available to meet with BOR to discuss listed and sensitive species issues on BOR lands along the Coachella Canal. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Mary Beth Woulfe at (760) 431-9440, extension 294.



June 1, 2006

Coachella Canal Area RMP  
D-8580  
Bureau of Reclamation  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007

**Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Assessment**

To whom it may concern,

The Colorado Desert District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CA State Parks) has completed its review of the Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Assessment (RMP) and is submitting the following comments and recommendations for your consideration. The Colorado Desert District oversees the 2,223-acre Indio Hills Palms property within the Coachella Valley, which abuts RMP study area. While this property is not designated as a State Park at this time, it is owned and managed by CA State Parks, and is open to the public for passive recreational activities.

CA State Parks is supportive of the Bureau of Reclamation's preferred management alternative, the Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection with Limited Development (Alternative D). The focus of the RMP should be on preserving and/or restoring the natural environment while accommodating reasonable passive recreational activities. We are also strongly supportive of the Bureau initiating a comprehensive weed management program.

CA State Parks owns property that abuts Parcel M of the Coachella Canal Area, the Indio Hills Palms unit of the Colorado Desert District. However, the RMP seems to only acknowledge local and federal lands on its land ownership map (Map 2.1). Please include State of California lands adjacent or near the canal study area in your analyses. Attached to this letter is a map showing the CA State Parks property within the canal study area. Because of its proximity to CA State Parks property, Parcel M should be the focus of habitat conservation and restoration activities, and limited passive recreation. All off-road vehicle activity should be excluded from this area, and any illegal off-road vehicle activity controlled. CA State Parks does not want the Coachella Canal area to be an entry point for illegal vehicle activities on to park lands. CA State Parks is available to coordinate enforcement actions in this area with the Bureau of Reclamation.

3a

The RMP discusses recreation within the region (Chapter 5), but fails to mention CA State Parks as an involved party in these activities. Please include a discussion of CA State Parks' role in providing recreational opportunities within the Coachella Valley. Because providing public

3b



Coachella Canal Area  
Resource Management Plan/  
Environmental Assessment

recreation opportunities is one of the primary goals of CA State Parks, there is an interest in partnering with the Bureau of Reclamation to establish hiking trails that cross the Coachella Canal property on to CA State Parks lands, specifically in the vicinity of Parcel M. The contact person with CA State Parks is Kathy Dice, Superintendent of the Salton Sea Sector of the Colorado Desert District (phone: (760) 393-3059, e-mail: [kdice@parks.ca.gov](mailto:kdice@parks.ca.gov)).

Another important responsibility of CA State Parks is to preserve, restore, and/or interpret for the public cultural resources of significance. Because the Indio Hills Palms property abuts the Coachella Canal, our archeologists would like to receive copies of any future cultural survey reports for projects or other activities within the canal study area. These reports can be sent to the District office (address above). This information will help us to better understand the history of the region, and possibly the cultural resources that may be on our own property.

3c

This concludes our comments. If you have any questions concerning these comments please contact David Lawhead, District Environmental Coordinator, at (760) 767-4315, or [dlawhead@parks.ca.gov](mailto:dlawhead@parks.ca.gov).

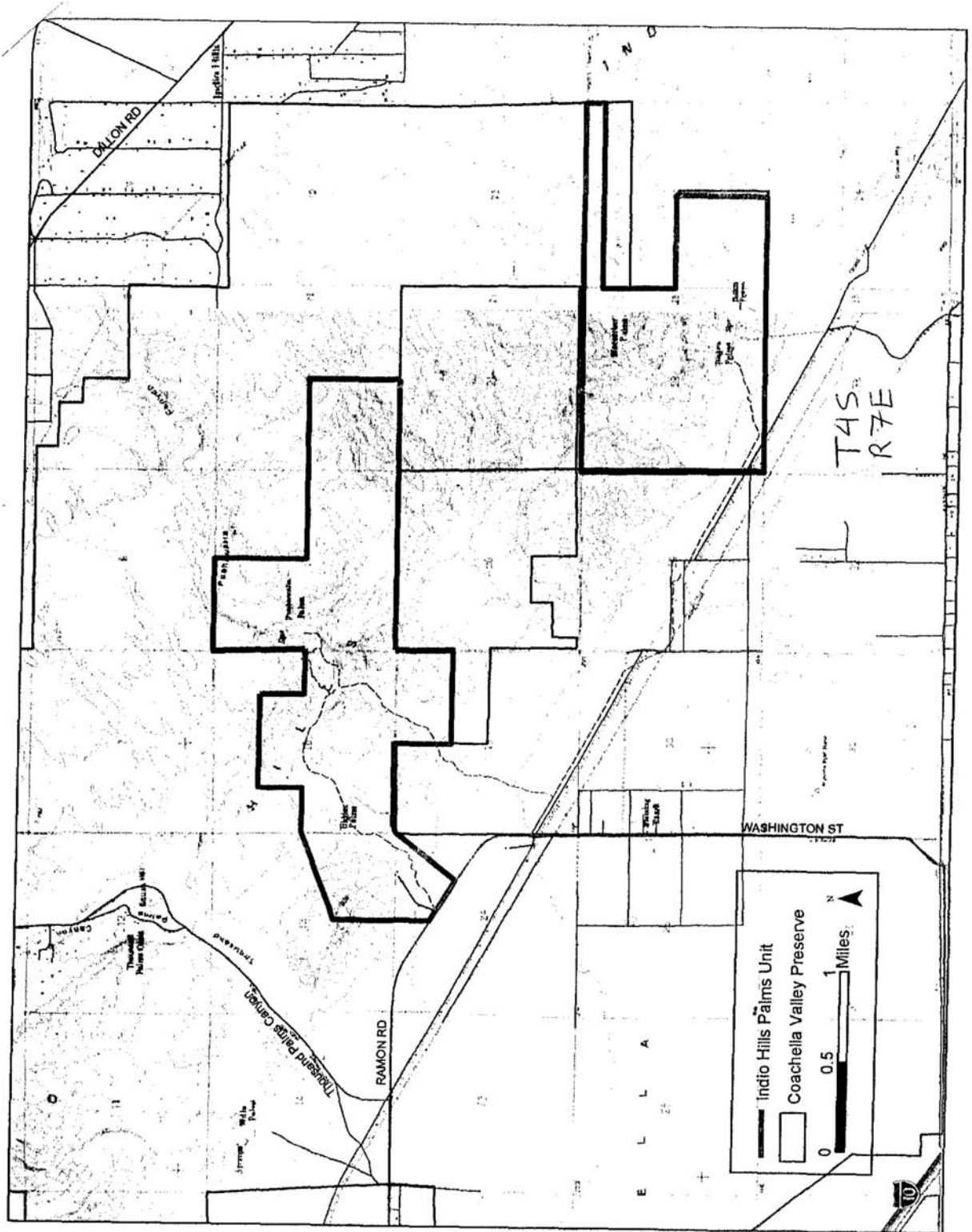
Sincerely



Michael L. Wells, Ph.D.  
District Superintendent  
Colorado Desert District

cc: Kathy Dice  
Jim Dice

attachment





IMPERIAL COUNTY

## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

PLANNING / BUILDING INSPECTION / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT / PLANNING COMMISSION / A.L.U.C.

**JURG HEUBERGER, AICP, CEP, CBO**  
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTOR

May 12, 2006

Coachella Canal Area RMP  
D-8580  
Bureau of Reclamation  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007

**SUBJECT:** Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan and  
Environmental Assessment (RMP/EA), Boulder Canyon Project  
Act- Riverside County, CA

To Whom It May Concern:

The Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department on April 17, 2006, received the Draft Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (RMP/EA) information for review and comment.

Based on the review of the Environmental Assessment and Resource Management Plan, there would appear to be no impact to Imperial County. Therefore, Planning Staff has no comment(s) at this time.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact David Black, Planner II at (760) 482-4236, extension 4313 or e-mail me at [davidblack@imperialcounty.net](mailto:davidblack@imperialcounty.net).

Sincerely,

David Black,  
Planner II

CC: Jurg Heuberger, AICP, CEP, Planning Director  
Darrell Gardner, Assistant Director  
Jim Minnick, Planning Division Manager  
File 10.110

/DB//S:Draft Coachella Canal Area RMP/EA

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(AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER)

May 30, 2006

Bureau of Reclamation  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver CO 80225-0007

Re: Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan

Dear BOR Staff:

I have reviewed the Coachella Canal Area RMP and attended two open houses in May. Above all I want to commend the BOR for doing a thorough and well-organized RMP, and for providing ample opportunity for public and agency feedback. I consider the Preferred Alternative to be a good balance between resource conservation and meeting public demand for recreation. I offer the following suggestions regarding the RMP:

- Table 4.1 on page 65 of the RMP is a summary of the effects of the various alternatives considered. In the table, under the Preferred Alternative, the recreation section states: "Public need and demand for recreation would be somewhat unmet". I find the Preferred Alternative to be more positive towards recreation than this statement implies. My understanding is that passive recreation such as nonmotorized trail development would not be prohibited. I would say that under the Preferred Alternative the public need and demand for recreation would instead be "somewhat met". 5a
- The open houses were poorly attended. Perhaps the BOR could improve their publicity effort for these programs. 5b

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



LeGrand Velez  
Director  
CV Community Trails Alliance  
135 St. Thomas Place  
Rancho Mirage CA 92270

## Responses to Comment Letters

### Response to Letter 1: Bureau of Indian Affairs

#### 1a.

Two sentences have been added to the second paragraph in Chapter 1, “Purpose of and Need for Action.” The first sentence states, “As such, Reclamation acknowledges the limitations of the environmental clearances provided by the EA portion of this document.” The second sentence added at the end of the paragraph states, “Conducting site-specific NEPA compliance for future management actions will assist Reclamation in identifying potential impacts to resources within the study area that have not been identified in this RMP/EA due to its programmatic nature.” A specific action was added to the management actions in chapter 6 and other places in the document, as appropriate. The action states, “Reclamation will coordinate with the BIA and area Indian tribes in future environmental compliance activities in a manner that protects Indian trust assets and avoids adverse impacts when possible. When adverse impacts cannot be avoided, Reclamation will provide appropriate mitigation or compensation.”

### Response to Letter 2: United States Fish and Wildlife Service

#### 2a.

Reclamation has modified the management action that states “Continue to consult with the Service pursuant to the Endangered Species Act concerning threatened and endangered species and special status species and associated habitats.” This management action is common to all alternatives and is identified first in “Elements Common to All Alternatives” in chapter 4. Reclamation has added a sentence to this action that states, “Coordination with the Service on projects that may affect listed and sensitive species or their habitats will be initiated early in the process.” This change has also been made in other sections, as appropriate.

#### 2b.

With the understanding that Reclamation is not a signatory party or cooperating agency to the MSHCP/NCCP and that it will conduct site-specific NEPA compliance, such as consultation with appropriate entities under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, section 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act, a management action has been added to chapter 6 of the RMP/EA and other places as appropriate. The management action states that Reclamation will “Ensure that Reclamation actions are consistent with other planning efforts in the Coachella Valley including, but not limited to, the MSHCP/NCCP when compatible with project purposes and as required by applicable laws and regulations.”

#### 2c.

Please refer to the management actions in chapter 6, pages 178 and 179. The existing management actions identified by Reclamation which address, among other things, protecting, inventorying, and mapping of habitats as well as developing management strategies with other agencies to protect and restore habitats should address your concerns. In addition, Reclamation has already identified passive recreation as a land use that may occur on parcel M and many other parcels within the study area.

**2d.**

Reclamation already states it will protect critical habitat by fencing, if necessary (refer to chapter 6, page 179, third bullet). Specific actions taken on a particular parcel of land within the study area will be different and will ultimately depend on the land status (e.g., has the parcel of land been obtained by Reclamation for a right-of-way across private land; has it been withdrawn from the public domain for specific purposes; or has the land been acquired in fee by Reclamation for project purposes). To specifically address your concerns, Reclamation has added a management action in the appropriate places in the RMP/EA that states “In cooperation with golf course developers and CVWD as recommended by the Service, explore the need to install fencing to mitigate potential drownings of bighorn sheep.” As alluded to above, this can only occur on acquired or withdrawn lands within the study area.

**2e.**

In the appropriate places throughout the document, Reclamation has added a management action specifically stating that “Reclamation will cooperate with the Service to ensure that trails are sited in a manner that continues to avoid and minimize effects to Pemomsi;are bighorn sheep.”

**2f.**

At this time, Reclamation has not identified any specific land uses that are not compatible with project purposes. This is one of those management actions that may initiate another action that would be needed to achieve a desired future condition. This type of action is further explained in chapter 6 on page 171.

**2g.**

As stated in chapter 6 on page 182, “As funding becomes available, Reclamation will close and rehabilitate unauthorized OHV roads and trails as well as other degraded areas.”

**2h.**

The biological survey conducted in April 2004 revealed five parcels (27, 29, 30, 33, and 37) that were of high ecological value and at particular risk of OHV damage. The five parcels contain sand fields, dune formations and clay hills. The survey also revealed several parcels that had moderate levels of OHV use with a few roads and active trails adjacent to the canal and, in some areas, adjacent clay hills. The parcels are 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 35 and 36. Refer to the Biological Survey Parcels map following page 88 for the location of the numbered parcels referenced in this response. Reclamation has formulated several management actions that describe how it will manage OHV use on lands under its jurisdiction. Please refer to the management actions under the Recreation Management, Natural and Cultural Resources, and Partnership issue categories in chapter 6 for specific details regarding OHVs.

**2i.**

Most of the lands identified on map 6.1 have been acquired or withdrawn for Reclamation’s Boulder Canyon Project Act. Reclamation has obtained a right-of-way over the remaining lands within the study area. Reclamation has obtained the right-of-ways for specific purposes and, therefore, has limited authority to grant additional uses

on those lands. The lettered parcels identified on map 6.1 have been identified for specific purposes by the Coachella Valley Water District and Reclamation. These lettered parcels and their proposed uses have, for the most part, been carried over from the 1993 Resource Management Plan. These specific purposes include, but are not limited to, borrow pits, protective dikes, developed, passive and open space recreation as well as constructed project features. Certain parcels are currently being managed for recreational purposes under existing agreements with Riverside County and the Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District (developed recreation purposes). Other parcels have been identified for potential use(s), such as an electrical substation and water treatment facility. Possible uses for the unlettered parcels identified in map 6.1 are passive and open space recreation. In addition to the uses already identified on map 6.1, Reclamation will consider applications for specific uses submitted by potential recreation partners, private developers, and utility companies, etc. This statement has been added as a management action to the Land Use section of chapter 6 and other appropriate places in the RMP/EA. Those potential uses will only be granted or authorized upon review by Reclamation and CVWD and once all environmental compliance and coordination activities with appropriate entities such as your agency have been completed. Identified uses will be subject to modification as the needs of Reclamation and CVWD change.

**2j.**

Your name of your agency has been added to the California Department of Fish and Game reference on page 94.

**2k.**

**2k(1)** The following mitigation measure has been added to the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences section on page 111, “In cooperation with the Service and other involved entities and when implementing the management actions identified in chapter 6 of the RMP/EA, different study area parcels will be evaluated for their value as corridors and linkages for sensitive species.” The mitigation measure has also been added as a management action in chapter 6 and other places in the RMP/EA, as appropriate.

**2k(2)** Reclamation is not a signatory to the Coachella Valley MSHCP and, as such, will conduct project specific NEPA, when appropriate. Reclamation will, however, when compatible with project purposes, be consistent with MSHCP.

**2k(3)** Any use of Colorado River water within the boundary of the Coachella Canal Area RMP would be subject to availability and the approval of CVWD as the entitlement holder.

**Response to Letter 3: California Department of Parks and Recreation**

**3a.**

Reclamation has researched the location of the California Department of Parks and Recreation-owned lands shown on the attachment to your comment letter. The

referenced lands are outside the boundary/border of our land ownership map shown in chapter 2 of the RMP/EA; therefore, Reclamation will not include those lands on the map.

**3b.**

A section describing the recreation activities of the California Department of Parks and Recreation in the Coachella Valley has been added to Recreation, Affected Environment, in chapter 5. This new section describes your agency's recreation involvement or contribution in the Coachella Valley.

**3c.**

A management action stating that "Reclamation will provide cultural resource surveys to other entities, including CDPR, for their information and use" has been added to the appropriate sections of the RMP/EA.

**Response to Letter 4: Imperial County Planning and Development Services**

Response not necessary.

**Response to Letter 5: Coachella Valley Trails Alliance**

**5a.**

The statement in table 4.1 has been changed to state, "Public need and demand for urban recreation (i.e., golf courses, play fields, tennis courts, highly developed trails) could be partially met. Fewer user conflicts would occur that under Alternative C and better recreation experience for those seeking solitude than under Alternative C."

**5b.**

Reclamation sent press releases announcing the open houses to local media, and paid display advertisements for the open houses were published in two local newspapers with widespread distribution, the *Desert Sun* and the *Press Enterprise*. In addition, approximately 250 copies of the draft RMP/EA along with a cover letter announcing the open houses were distributed to interested parties. With that said, Reclamation will seek other avenues to increase public input on proposed future projects within the study area.