

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment

Boulder Canyon Project Act
All-American Canal System
Coachella Canal Unit
Riverside County, California



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Region
Yuma Area Office
Yuma, Arizona

September 2006

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to Indian tribes and our commitments to island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment

**Boulder Canyon Project Act
All-American Canal System
Coachella Canal Unit
Riverside County, California**

Prepared for:

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Region
Yuma Area Office
Yuma, Arizona**

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September 2006

Finding of No Significant Impact

Introduction

This finding of no significant impact (FONSI) describes the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) environmental conclusions regarding a proposal to implement a resource management plan (RMP) for lands associated with the Coachella Canal (Coachella Canal Area). Reclamation has prepared the Coachella Canal Area resource management plan and environmental assessment (RMP/EA), which is incorporated by reference, in accordance with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This FONSI is a separate companion document to the final RMP/EA.

Because the alternatives developed for the RMP portion of the document are general in nature, the environmental assessment (EA) portion of the document (NEPA portion) is programmatic in nature. Thus, Reclamation will complete site-specific NEPA compliance that is tiered to the final RMP/EA and this FONSI before implementation of any ground-disturbing actions covered under the RMP.

The Coachella Valley encompasses approximately 200,000 acres under various ownerships. The portion of the Coachella Canal Area covered by this RMP/EA is within Riverside County, California, and consists of about 30 miles of the canal and approximately 3,990 acres of Reclamation lands. The study area is located just north of the Salton Sea and includes areas near the communities of Mecca, Thermal, Coachella, and Indio on the east, La Quinta on the west, and ends at Lake Cahuilla, the terminal reservoir of the Coachella Canal. Approximately 35,000 acres of other Federal lands are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The State of California administers about 5,000 acres. County, city, and private lands make up the remaining 156,000 acres.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the RMP is to establish a 10-year plan detailing the management framework for the conservation, protection, enhancement, development, and use of the natural and cultural resources along the Coachella Canal while protecting the authorized Reclamation project purposes as detailed in the Boulder Canyon Project (Project) Act of December 21, 1928 (45 Statute 1057).

The RMP is *needed* to do the following:

- Provide decisionmakers with consistent direction and guidance to successfully manage the natural and cultural resources and to protect Project facilities along the Coachella Canal.
- Ensure that management of the natural and cultural resources is compatible with authorized Reclamation and Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) project purposes.
- Provide a framework to resolve land use issues and concerns related to the existing and future use of lands associated with the Coachella Canal as a result of the population growth in the Coachella Valley and surrounding area.
- Address the increasing demand for public use of the resources along the Coachella Canal while protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources.
- Update the February 1993 Coachella Canal Area RMP and make appropriate changes that may be necessary due to changes in the social, physical, environmental, and economic conditions of the area.

Alternatives Considered

- No Action Alternative (Alternative A)
- Natural Resources Conservation/Protection Alternative (Alternative B)
- Recreation, Community, and Commercial Development Alternative (Alternative C)
- Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection with Limited Recreation Development Alternative (Alternative D)

Preferred Alternative

The Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection with Limited Recreation Development Alternative (Alternative D) is selected as the preferred alternative. Alternative D focuses on a land use planning strategy that allows for limited recreational opportunities afforded by study area resources. Reclamation will ensure that public use and development are consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP and other approved planning documents and that land management decisions are made for the benefit of the Project and the general public.

As with all government entities, successful implementation of any management action or strategy is dependent on available funding and personnel as well as willing partners. Approval and acceptance of the RMP by involved agencies include a commitment by Reclamation, and other entities where appropriate, to seek financial, program, and staffing resources necessary to implement the proposed management actions.

Reclamation will expand efforts to seek trail partnerships with local government entities and local trail interest groups to help identify alternatives and local needs and expectations to maximize multi-use trail development within the study area. Strict trail development and design criteria will be used to ensure that trails and trail users do not adversely affect natural resources, wildlife, critical habitat, or CVWD project purposes. Portions of trails will be designed to accommodate multiple uses, such as hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

Reclamation will initiate a comprehensive weed control program and rehabilitate damaged and degraded habitat, including unauthorized OHV use areas and other small areas of past intense use. Reclamation will avoid impacts to undisturbed desert shrub habitat, desert washes, and other habitats that provide linkages and biological corridors. Peninsular bighorn habitat and an appropriate disturbance buffer will be protected from development. In cooperation with other entities, Reclamation will increase efforts to protect all suitable wildlife habitats from OHV use and other ground-disturbing activities.

When recreation developments take place on Reclamation lands, Reclamation will ensure that project coordinators take into account how much water will be required to create and maintain the facility and how to account for this water.

Environmental Commitments (Mitigation)

Reclamation has found that the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the environment. There will be minimal effects to regional economy, visual quality, and environmental justice. There are no impacts to Indian trust assets. No mitigation is required for these four resource areas, at this time. The following mitigation measures will be adopted, as required, to reduce impacts:

Surface Water and Ground Water

- Prior to implementing a proposed project, proponent will prepare and have a storm water pollution prevention plan onsite to prevent and/or minimize a spill or storm event impacting the project vicinity.

Land Use

- All new land use authorizations/crossing agreements will need to comply with NEPA, Endangered Species Act (ESA), and National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, when required.
- When other entities prepare environmental documents for Coachella Canal Area lands, Reclamation will ensure that such environmental documents are reviewed by Reclamation and that they are in compliance with appropriate NEPA guidelines.
- In cooperation with the Service and other involved entities and when implementing the management actions identified under the specific management actions for natural and cultural resources in chapter 6, evaluate different study area parcels for their value as corridors and linkages for sensitive species.

Vegetation and Wildlife

- See Special Status Species.

Special Status Species

- Prior to all proposed projects, site-specific NEPA and ESA compliance will be conducted. Should potential habitat for special status species be identified in the affected environment, surveys will be conducted to ascertain presence/absence of special status species and to determine habitat quality, and detailed protective measures will be developed and implemented. At that time, assessment of the quality and quantity of the affected vegetation and general wildlife community will be determined.
- To the extent possible, surface-disturbing projects will be located outside of high-valued/occupied habitat of special status species and be timed to avoid mortality. Prior to construction, a protection plan will be developed specific to the vegetation, wildlife, and special status species within or adjacent to the project area.

- Project work areas in and near habitat for special status species will be clearly marked to avoid impacts, and a biological monitor will coordinate with construction personnel to ensure that all protective measures are implemented.
- Project proponents will develop a habitat restoration plan that includes collecting and replacing topsoil; preparing seedbeds, seeding with native plant species, weed control, erosion control, and regularly monitoring the effectiveness of such measures.
- Existing roads and previously disturbed areas will be used for travel and equipment storage to the maximum extent possible.
- If adverse effects remain after the project proponent has implemented onsite mitigation measures, compensation will be made for residual effects.
- Any recreational site development will require public information on the value of special status species and habitat as well as restrictions against collecting, harassing, and harming. Trail development will avoid direct impacts to occupied habitat.

General natural resource management mitigations include:

- Protect high-value vegetation communities and general wildlife habitat with signs, interpretation, fencing, OHV restrictions, road closures, and enforcement of dumping.
- Develop a restoration plan to control invasive plants, establish stands of native plants, repair OHV damage, clean up illegal dump sites, and conduct monitoring to determine restoration success.
- Identify key habitat and disturbance buffers to protect Peninsular bighorn. Restrict all developments in key habitats and allow only passive recreation use in adjacent buffer habitat. Implement seasonal closures if necessary and install interpretive signs. Formulate stipulations (poisonous plant restrictions) for land exchanges and recreational developments near key habitat.
- Develop an invasive plant management plan that includes inventory, determination of control feasibility, integrated control of target species in selected areas, facilitation of research of experimental control methods, and long-term monitoring.
- Protect and restore riparian oasis by fencing, cleanup of dump sites, surface water improvements (quantity and quality), cottonwood/willow plantings, and salt cedar control.

- Protect and restore mesquite hummocks by fencing, cleanup of dump sites, surface mesquite plantings, and control of noxious weeds.

Recreation

- Recreation facility development will complement the surrounding landscape as much as practical and follow strict design and construction criteria, guidelines, and standards.
- Carrying capacity limits and user demand will be properly determined before major facility developments occur.
- Regulatory and informational signage will be posted throughout the area, informing the public of the rules and regulations governing the use of the federally owned lands within the study area.

Transportation

- Under all alternatives, easements, rights-of-way, or other instruments to authorize transportation routes will contain specific stipulations to protect existing resources, decrease potential conflicts with adjacent landowners, and prevent land use conflicts within the study area.

Air Quality

- Prior to construction activities, site specific environmental compliance will be completed.
- Dust control measures will be implemented, such as surfactants and other chemical stabilizers, wheel washers for construction equipment, watering down of all construction areas, limiting truck traffic to non-peak hours to reduce fugitive particulate matter emissions.

Cultural Resources

Reclamation, working alone or in partnership with State and/or local government agencies or private entities, will continue to comply with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Federal undertakings, and Reclamation will consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and area Indian tribes, as required by 36 Code of Federal Regulations 800, as revised, to locate and identify any cultural resources within the study area's parcels before initiating any Federal undertaking.

Reclamation will do the following:

- In consultation with the SHPO and area Indian tribes—and on the basis of class I survey information—develop a research design for conducting class II or III surveys (1) to determine areas of high or low potential for cultural resources, including traditional cultural properties, (2) to determine sources of impacts, and (3) to define additional investigation or protective actions appropriate for each site. The research design will serve to support request for funding to implement necessary actions.
- Conduct intensive surveys of areas with high potential for cultural resources and/or any areas scheduled for ground-disturbing or potentially ground-disturbing activities to locate cultural resources. During ground-disturbing activities, Reclamation will make every effort to avoid significant cultural resources.
- During construction, if cultural resources are discovered, ensure that work in the immediate areas ceases until a qualified archeologist evaluates the site, takes appropriate measures, and consults with the SHPO.
- Ensure that any project-specific agreements regarding cultural resources are included as specifications in construction contracts and inform construction contractors about the presence of cultural resources within or near the project area and about their protection under Federal and State laws.
- When granting right-of-use authorizations on or across Reclamation-owned lands, review the proposal for potential effects on cultural resources and ensure the entity receiving the right-of-use authorization complies with all applicable cultural resource laws for any activities within the boundaries of the right-of-use authorization.
- Specific mitigation cannot be identified until the intensive surveys are completed, to determine if cultural resources eligible for the *National Register of Historic Places* (Register) are present. The following mitigation strategies presume that one or more cultural properties will be determined eligible for the Register and will be affected by the proposed action. The exact nature of mitigation will be determined in consultation with the SHPO and others, as appropriate, and documented in a memorandum of agreement with the consulting and interested parties.
- Periodically monitor Register-eligible or unevaluated sites to assess impacts and the need for investigative or protective action.
- Place protective materials over portions of sites affected by erosion or trail construction or use to prevent additional disturbance.

- Recover site data through systematic surface collection or excavation and provide resulting reports to the professional community and interested public.
- Consult further with area Indian tribes about appropriate actions to protect endangered traditional cultural property sites and implement those actions where reasonable and feasible.
- Incorporate information about cultural resources into brochures and other educational materials created for use in the study area.

Finding

The results of the analysis determined that implementation of the Coachella Canal Area Resource Management Plan, as described under the Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection Alternative (Alternative D), would not have significant impacts on the human and natural environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.

Approved:



Jim Cherry, Manager
Yuma Area Office

9-1-06
Date

**Coachella Canal Area
Resource Management Plan/
Environmental Assessment
Acronyms and Abbreviations**

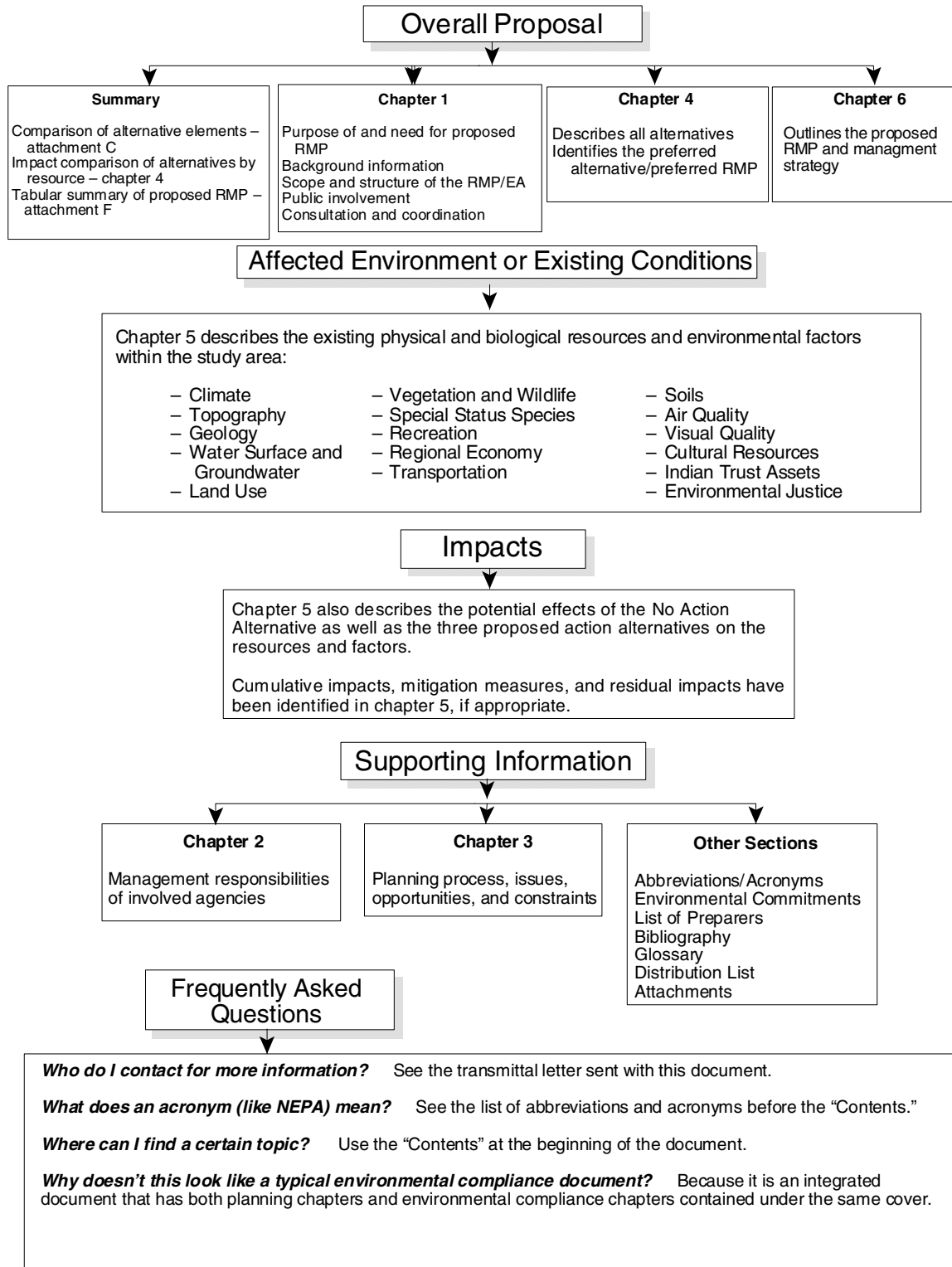
ABC/M	Activity-Based Costing/Management
ACEC	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
APE	Area of Potential Effect
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
Coachella Canal Area	lands associated with the Coachella Canal
CCA	Comprehensive Condition Assessments
CCAA	California Clean Air Act
CDCA	California Desert Conservation Area (relates to Plan Amendment)
CDF	California Department of Finance
CDFG	California Department of Fish and Game
CDPR	California Department of Parks and Recreation
CDWR	California Department of Water Resources
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CMP	Congestion Management Program
CO	carbon monoxide
Council	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
CRHP	California Register of Historic Places
CSP	Commercial Services Plan
CVMSHCP/NCCP	<i>Draft Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan</i>
CVRPD	Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District
CVSIP	Coachella Valley State Implementation Plan
CVWD	Coachella Valley Water District
EIC	Eastern Information Center
ESA	Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended
FCI	Facility Condition Index
FONSI	finding of no significant impact
GIS	geographic information system
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
GSA	General Services Administration
Interior	U.S. Department of the Interior
MA	management areas
MEA	Master Environmental Assessment
mph	miles per hour
msl	mean sea level
MWD	Metropolitan Water District
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act

Acronyms and Abbreviations (continued)

NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NO ₂	nitrogen dioxide
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
O ₃	ozone
OHV	off highway vehicle
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
O&M	operation and maintenance
Pb	lead
P.L.	Public Law
Project	Boulder Canyon Project
Reclamation	Bureau of Reclamation
Register	<i>National Register of Historic Places</i>
RMP/EA	resource management plan and environmental assessment
RO&M	review of operation and maintenance
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
R&B	Rehabilitation and Betterment
SCAG	Southern California Association of Governments
SCAQMD	South Coast Air Quality Management District
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
SIP	State Implementation Plan
SO ₂	sulfur dioxide
SSAB	Salton Sea Air Basin
Stat.	Statute
SWPPP	storm water pollution prevention plan
USGS	United State Geological Survey
U.S.C.	United States Code
USGS	United States Geological Survey
°F	Fahrenheit

HOW TO READ THIS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN/ ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This resource management plan (RMP)/environmental assessment (EA) is an integrated planning and National Environmental Policy Act compliance document. The schematic below will help you locate the information you are most interested in.



Executive Summary

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared this draft resource management plan and environmental assessment (RMP/EA) for lands associated with the Coachella Canal (Coachella Canal Area). The Coachella Valley encompasses approximately 200,000 acres under various ownerships. The portion of the Coachella Canal Area covered by this RMP is within Riverside County, California, and consists of about 30 miles of the canal and approximately 3,990 acres of Reclamation lands. The study area is located just north of the Salton Sea and includes areas near the communities of Mecca, Thermal, Coachella, and Indio on the east, La Quinta on the west, and ends at Lake Cahuilla, the terminal reservoir of the Coachella Canal. Approximately 35,000 acres of other Federal lands are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The State of California administers about 5,000 acres. County, city, and private lands make up the remaining 156,000 acres.

Authority

Title 28 of Public Law 102-575, section 2805 (106 Statute 4690, Reclamation Recreation Management Act of October 30, 1992), provides Reclamation with authority to prepare resource management plans.

Proposed Federal Action

Preparation and implementation of a resource management plan are Federal actions. The 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 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider the potential impacts of a Federal action on the environment before implementing the proposed action.

Purpose of and Need for Federal Action

The *purpose* of the RMP is to establish a 10-year plan detailing the management framework for the conservation, protection, enhancement, development, and use of the natural and cultural resources along the Coachella Canal while protecting the authorized Reclamation project purposes as detailed in the Boulder Canyon Project (Project) Act of December 21, 1928 (45 Stat. 1057).

The RMP is *needed* to do the following:

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- Provide a framework to resolve land use issues and concerns related to the existing and future use of lands associated with the Coachella Canal as a result of the population growth in the Coachella Valley and surrounding area.
- Address the increasing demand for public use of the resources along the Coachella Canal while protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources.
- Update the February 1993 Coachella Canal Area RMP and make appropriate changes that may be necessary due to changes in the social, physical, environmental, and economic conditions of the area.

Public Involvement and Agency Consultation and Coordination

Throughout the development of this RMP/EA, Reclamation made a concerted effort to involve interested parties, including agencies, special interest groups, and individuals in planning for the environmental, land, recreation, and wildlife resources within the Coachella Canal Area.

Reclamation also conducted agency consultation and coordination in the course of developing this document, including consultations required by section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and its implementing regulations; and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Reclamation also consulted with BIA and area tribes about Indian trust assets within the study area. In addition, Reclamation contacted several adjacent landowners and gathered information about existing and future uses of those lands.

Responsibilities of Other Entities Within the Study Area

Reclamation maintains primary jurisdiction of the lands and associated resources within the study area; however, management of some resources, such as wildlife, are the responsibilities of other entities. In addition to Reclamation, several

Federal agencies have responsibilities within the study area, including BIA, BLM, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). At the State level, the California Department of Fish and Game provides expertise and assistance on special status species and critical habitat as well as other wildlife related matters. The California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and area Indian tribes have an interest in the Coachella Canal Area because Reclamation is required to consult with SHPO and area tribes concerning the identification of cultural resources within the study area.

At the local level, Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District operates and maintains Lake Cahuilla County Park. Park lands are leased by the county from CVWD, which leases the lands from BLM and Reclamation. The Coachella Valley Water District provides water related services in the Coachella Canal Area. The 123-mile-long Coachella Canal delivers Colorado River water from the All-American Canal to irrigate agricultural land in the Coachella Valley, primarily to an area known as Improvement District 1, where virtually all of the valley's nearly 60,000 acres of cultivated farmland are located. Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District (CVPRD) has a lease agreement with Reclamation for the development of three separate areas on Coachella Canal Area lands for recreation.

On lands adjacent to the study area, other Federal, State, and local entities also have management responsibilities. These entities include BIA; BLM; Service; National Park Service; California Department of Fish and Game; Riverside County; CVRPD; Coachella Valley Association of Governments; and the cities of La Quinta, Coachella, Indio, and Mecca.

Planning Issues

To identify issues and concerns regarding management of the study area, this planning effort incorporated a public involvement process. In addition, Reclamation resource specialists collected and evaluated existing resource data and reviewed Reclamation programs and policies. Reclamation identified issues and concerns similar to those the public identified. Reclamation then grouped these issues and concerns into eight "issue categories." The issue categories helped to (1) define the scope of the issues and concerns, (2) develop specific goals and objectives to address the issues and concerns, and (3) formulate management actions to accomplish the goals and objectives. This RMP/EA addressed the following issue categories:

- General Management
- Land Use
- Partnerships
- Boulder Canyon Project Act
- Natural and Cultural Resources

- Recreation Management
- Public Information and Education
- Public Health and Safety

Management Opportunities

Opportunities exist within the study area to enhance, protect, and interpret the natural resources of the area, and opportunities exist to provide a range of recreation opportunities and facilities while not negatively affecting existing natural resources. Pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, opportunities exist to implement management actions that would include systematic site evaluation and protection and interpretation of cultural resources for public education and enjoyment. Cost-sharing opportunities for recreation purposes with other Federal, State, and local agencies could increase the capability of Reclamation to successfully manage the Coachella Canal Area. Public-private partnerships with profit and non-profit organizations should be considered in any future planning activities. Formation of local citizen and advisory groups and local organizations and individuals could directly or indirectly support management of the area. Funding through grants and cooperative agreements is important if Reclamation, as well as other land managing entities, wish to meet future recreation demand.

Management Constraints

When agencies address management changes and other actions, they are constrained by their respective legislative authorities, budgets, personnel, current policies, and environmental limitations. The ability of land management agencies to manage environmental and recreational resources will always depend on maintaining sufficient personnel and on the ability of the agencies to obtain adequate funding to operate and maintain facilities and programs, as well as to protect and enhance existing opportunities and resources.

Alternative Formulation

Reclamation developed planning criteria to help formulate and select combinations of land uses and management actions (alternatives) that could be reasonably implemented. Based on the planning criteria, each action alternative would do the following:

- Meet the public need as expressed during the planning and NEPA compliance process (e.g., during open houses, public meetings,

and in correspondence) and meet the goals and objectives formulated in response to the issues and concerns identified.

- Comply with applicable Federal, State, and county laws, regulations, and policies, while not interfering with authorized Reclamation project purposes.
- Maintain Coachella Valley Water District's ability to operate and maintain the Coachella Canal.
- Allow for continued recreation management pursuant to existing agreements with Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District and Riverside County and provide for possible expansion of recreation activities on Coachella Canal Area lands.
- Allow compatible uses of Reclamation lands.
- Provide for partnership opportunities and shared responsibilities.
- Balance user needs, environmental protection, and anticipated funding and personnel limits.
- Be achievable within the 10-year life of the resource management plan.

Using these planning criteria as a guide, Reclamation ultimately developed three action alternatives (i.e., alternatives that prescribe a change in resource management) and a No Action Alternative, as required by the Council of Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA. The No Action Alternative describes the management of the study area if a new RMP were not implemented. Reclamation decided to include a preponderance of elements from the No Action Alternative in the preferred alternative because Reclamation must continue to manage the Coachella Canal Area lands for the congressionally authorized primary purposes of the Boulder Canyon Project Act and because the limited land base within the study area does not allow for the maximization of recreation facilities, programs, and opportunities. In addition, actions included in the modified preferred alternative related to the protection and conservation of the natural and cultural resources will not adversely affect Boulder Canyon Project Act purposes and are consistent with other efforts in the Coachella Valley to protect the existing natural resources pursuant to the *Draft Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP/NCCP)*.

Reclamation formulated the following alternatives:

- No Action Alternative (Alternative A)
- Natural Resources Conservation/Protection Alternative (Alternative B)

- Recreation, Community, and Commercial Development Alternative (Alternative C)
- Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection with Limited Recreation Development Alternative (Alternative D)

Some key actions common to all alternatives include the following:

- Continue to operate the lands within the study area for the primary purposes authorized by the Boulder Canyon Project Act.
- Continue to manage lands according to Reclamation's Policies and Directives and Standards; Federal laws, rules and regulations; Executive orders; and State and county laws, regulations, and ordinances.
- Continue to conduct site-specific NEPA compliance for proposed lands uses to ensure that surface and ground water quality and other natural resources are protected.
- Continue to seek non-Federal entities to manage recreation on Coachella Canal Area lands.
- Continue to consider applications for specific land uses submitted by potential recreation partners, private developers, and utility companies, etc.
- Continue to allow only those land uses that do not adversely affect Reclamation project features or the delivery of water by CVWD.
- Continue to honor the terms and conditions of the existing agreements with CVWD, CVRPD, and Riverside County, as well as the land use authorizations dealing with, among other things, utility, road, and bridge crossings.
- Continue to consult with the Service pursuant to the Endangered Species Act concerning threatened and endangered species and special status species and associated habitats. Coordination with the Service on projects that may affect listed and sensitive species or their habitats will be initiated early in the process.
- Continue to prohibit land uses that adversely affect threatened and endangered or other special status species or critical habitat unless proper mitigation measures are achieved and all environmental clearances have been obtained.
- Ensure that Reclamation actions are consistent with other planning efforts in the Coachella Valley, including, but not limited to, the CVMSHCP/ NCCP when compatible with Project purposes and as required by applicable laws and regulations.

- Continue to consult with the California State Preservation Officer under sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Reclamation will coordinate with BIA and 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.
- Continue to consult with area Indian tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs concerning Indian trust assets, Indian sacred sites, and traditional cultural properties.
- Use parcels B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, and R for potential borrow pits to be used for Project purposes.
- Use all canal access roads for operation and maintenance purposes and use parcels G, I, J, K, L, M, Q, R, S, and T for protective dike purposes.

No Action Alternative (Alternative A)

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would continue to manage the lands and resources within the Coachella Canal Area according to Reclamation's Policies and Directives and Standards; Federal laws, regulations and Executive orders; and State and county laws, regulations, and ordinances. In cooperation with CVWD, Reclamation would ensure that the congressionally authorized Boulder Canyon Project Act purposes are protected and that any land uses authorized on Coachella Canal Area lands are compatible with those authorized purposes. In perpetuity, Reclamation would continue to honor its contractual obligations with CVWD in its effort to care for, operate, maintain, and replace Coachella Canal appurtenant water delivery structures, facilities, and protective works. Reclamation would continue its current management of windblown sand habitat and associated special status species, desert wash and other habitats that provide linkages and biological corridors, Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat and disturbance buffers, and cottonwood-willow oases. Reclamation would not conduct additional recreation planning and would continue its current level of management of off highway vehicle (OHV) use.

Natural Resources Conservation/Protection Alternative (Alternative B)

In addition to many of the management actions included in Alternative A, Reclamation would initiate a land use development strategy that conserves and protects lands from recreation, community, and commercial development. Reclamation would ensure that public use and development are consistent with

the goals and objectives of the RMP and other approved planning documents and that land management decisions are made for the benefit of the Project and the general public.

Reclamation would limit future land use authorizations and agreements to those that benefit natural and cultural resources in the study area and phase out land uses that may adversely affect natural resources.

Reclamation would initiate a comprehensive weed control program and rehabilitate damaged and degraded habitat, including unauthorized OHV use areas and other small areas of past intense use. Reclamation also would (1) inventory all sand habitat types to ascertain their presence or absence, habitat suitability for special status species, and restoration potential and (2) avoid or minimizing impacts to undisturbed desert shrub habitat, desert wash, as well as other habitats that provide linkages and biological corridors that could affect suitable habitat. Reclamation would conduct long-term monitoring of identified suitable windblown sand habitat. As necessary, Reclamation would provide fencing to protect suitable habitat for special status species, develop a restoration plan in cooperation with other entities, and mitigate and compensate for impacts of development activity on suitable and occupied sand habitat. Peninsular bighorn habitat and an appropriate disturbance buffer would be protected from development. Reclamation would inventory all cottonwood willow habitat to determine the presence or absence of suitable habitat for special status species, evaluate if sites may have restoration potential, and conduct long-term monitoring of identified suitable habitat.

OHV use would be eliminated, except for emergency situations, and the public would be limited to using existing public roads. Reclamation would initiate a comprehensive weed control program and rehabilitate damaged and degraded habitat, including unauthorized OHV use areas and other areas of past intense use.

In consultation with the California SHPO, Reclamation would assess the adequacy of existing heritage resource inventories and conduct intensive surveys in areas not adequately covered. Reclamation would develop a systematic process for site and local monitoring of cultural resource sites and would implement systematic reporting of damages.

Recreation, Community, and Commercial Development (Alternative C)

As well as many of the management actions included in Alternative A and some of the management actions included in Alternative B, Alternative C focuses on a land use planning strategy that maximizes recreational opportunities afforded by study area resources.

Reclamation would provide private parties (concessionaires) the opportunity to supply recreation-related goods and services to the public on Coachella Canal Area lands. Reclamation would work with CVRPD, Riverside County, and other potential recreation partners to expand recreation opportunities within the study area. Potential recreation partners include other State and county as well as local city government entities. Reclamation would require non-Federal partners to prepare site-specific recreation master plans prior to any comprehensive facility development. Essentially, Reclamation would allow recreation facilities to be developed, operated, and maintained on parcels A, B, C, D, K, E, and F as long as such development(s) would not interfere with Boulder Canyon Project Act purposes or the natural and cultural resources within the study area.

Management of natural and cultural resources would be the same as under Alternative B, except that Reclamation would develop a comprehensive public archeology interpretation program. Portions of multi-use trails would be paved or hardened to provide easy access to all users, including those with disabilities. A comprehensive trail plan, sign plan, and interpretive master plan would be developed.

Under this alternative, Reclamation would prepare a comprehensive OHV plan and officially open certain study area lands for OHV use.

Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection with Limited Development (Alternative D, Preferred Alternative)

As well as the actions common to all alternatives, many of the management actions included in Alternative A, and most of the management actions included in Alternative B, Alternative D focuses on a land use planning strategy that allows for limited recreational opportunities afforded by study area resources.

Reclamation would ensure that public use and development are consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP and other approved planning documents and that land management decisions are made for the benefit of the Project and the general public.

Reclamation would expand efforts to seek trail partnerships with local government entities and local trail interest groups to help identify alternatives and local needs and expectations to maximize multi-use trail development within the study area. Strict trail development and design criteria would be used to ensure that trails and trail users do not adversely affect natural resources, wildlife, critical habitat, or CVWD project purposes. Portions of trails would be designed to accommodate a variety of uses, such as hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

All elements and management actions related to conservation and protection of natural resources included in Alternative B would be implemented under this alternative. These include initiating a comprehensive weed control program and rehabilitating damaged and degraded habitat, including unauthorized OHV use

areas and other small areas of past intense use. Reclamation would avoid impacts to undisturbed desert shrub habitat and also desert wash and other habitats that provide linkages and biological corridors. Peninsular bighorn habitat and an appropriate disturbance buffer would be protected from development. In cooperation with other entities, Reclamation would increase efforts to protect all suitable wildlife habitats from OHV use and other ground-disturbing activities.

When recreation developments take place on Reclamation lands, Reclamation would ensure that project coordinators take into account how much water will be required to create and maintain the facility and how to account for this water.

Effects of the Alternatives

No Action Alternative (Alternative A)

Surface and ground water, and land use would be the same under Alternative A as under current conditions. Vegetation, wildlife, and special status species would continue to degrade as a result of unregulated public use, and soils would continue to experience wind erosion. Recreation, regional economy, and transportation would be the same as under current conditions, as would air quality, visual quality, cultural resources, Indian trust assets, and environmental justice.

Natural Resources Conservation/Protection Alternative (Alternative B)

Surface and ground water would be about the same or slightly better under Alternative B than under the No Action Alternative. The fewest adverse effects to land use would occur this alternative. The greatest benefits vegetation, wildlife, and special status species would occur. Public demand for open spaces, natural areas for outdoor recreation, and community recreation areas would be unmet, and public demand and need for access would be minimally met. The regional economy would be affected only slightly, if at all, under this alternative. Less wind erosion of soils would occur. This alternative would provide the maximum benefits to air and visual quality. Effects on cultural resources, Indian trust assets, and environmental justice would be the same as under the No Action Alternative.

Recreation, Community, and Commercial Development Alternative (Alternative C)

Under Alternative C, moderately adverse effects on the quantity and quality of surface and ground water would occur. Land use would be about the same as under the No Action Alternative. The greatest adverse effects on vegetation, wildlife, and special status species would occur under the alternative as a result of

its emphasis on commercial and recreational development. Public demand for open spaces, natural areas for outdoor recreation and community recreation areas would be best met under this alternative, although user conflicts would be greater. The recreation experience for those seeking solitude would be diminished. Public demand for access would be fully met. Wind erosion of soils would be moderately greater than under the No Action Alternative. The greatest adverse effects to air and visual quality would occur, and cultural resources would experience greater deterioration. Indian trust assets would not be affected. Slight benefits would occur to environmental justice because of limited, short-term employment for minority or low-income individuals.

Modified Natural Resources Conservation/Protection with Limited Development Alternative (Alternative D, Preferred Alternative)

Overall, surface and ground water would not be affected under Alternative D. Land use would be less affected than under the No Action Alternative or Alternative C, but potentially more affected than under Alternative B. Moderately adverse effects would occur to vegetation, wildlife, and special status species as a result of recreational development. However, degraded vegetation and wildlife and special status species habitat would likely improve as a result of restoration efforts. Public need and demand for urban recreation (e.g., golf courses, playing fields, tennis courts, and highly developed trails) could be partially met. Fewer user conflicts would occur than under Alternative C, and the recreation experience for those seeking solitude would be better than under Alternative C. There would be little to no effect on the regional economy. The effect on transportation would be the same as under Alternative B. Less wind erosion of soils would occur than under the No Action Alternative. The effects on air quality would be about the same as under the No Action Alternative; visual quality would be better protected than under Alternatives A or C, but not as well as under Alternative B. The effects on cultural resources would be about the same as under the No Action Alternative but with additional emphasis on careful avoidance, protection, and mitigation of recorded and undiscovered cultural resources. Indian trust assets would not be affected. The effects on environmental justice would be about the same as under Alternative C.

Plan Implementation

Implementation of the RMP is ultimately the responsibility of Reclamation contingent upon appropriations from the Congress and other funding sources, if available. Some actions may be accomplished in cooperation with other entities or organizations.

Guidance and Standards

To initiate and implement Reclamation's recreation and land management programs, specific guidance or standards will be followed. The guidance and standards are in the form of Federal laws and regulations, Executive orders, Code of Federal Regulations, existing agreements, State and local laws and regulations, best management practices, or other directives. In many instances, the Policies and Directives and Standards will be in the *Reclamation Manual* for a specific program. Reclamation will follow all Federal laws, regulations, and Executive orders, as well as the guidance provided in its published manuals.

Monitoring

To track the success of implementing management actions, monitoring activities will be initiated (i.e., how to evaluate, observe, enforce, comply, or document that a management action is achieved). Monitoring will occur on a regular basis and will be conducted by qualified personnel.

Amendments and Modifications to the RMP

Reclamation may revise or amend the RMP within the established 10-year planning period. During the implementation or monitoring phases of the RMP, Reclamation, other agencies, or the public may identify problems, deficiencies, or additional issues that should be addressed. Changes in the social, economic, physical, or environmental conditions may also necessitate changes to the RMP. Minor changes in data or material that do not conflict with the established goals and objectives would be documented by Reclamation and would not require further public involvement and NEPA compliance. Changes that would modify one or more of the prescribed decisions and require major changes to the established goals and objectives would be documented by an amendment to the RMP and may require further public involvement and NEPA compliance. Reclamation will determine the level of public involvement and NEPA compliance.

The RMP is expected to be re-evaluated at the end of the 10-year planning period to determine whether or not the RMP should be revised. The planning and NEPA process used to complete this RMP/EA will be used to prepare an updated RMP/EA if one is needed.

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