

3.8 VISUAL RESOURCES

The Salt Wells geothermal leasing area is characteristic of the Great Basin environment; desolate, sunny, and brush-strewn valley floors are interspersed with barren and bleached alkali playas, bordered by often barren, but frequently colorful, elongated and steep mountain ranges (BLM 1974).

Higher elevations support sagebrush, juniper, and pinyon pine providing visual diversity and contrasting darker color along ridgelines in the distant background. Vegetation on the valley floor grows low and evenly and primarily consists of monochromatic desert brush (US Navy 2000). Although these areas are sparsely populated, fences, utility lines, roads (paved and dirt), historic trails, trailer houses on private lands, mines, and road signs are present (BLM 1974).

The form, line, color, and texture of the Great Basin landscape are influenced by the arid climate. The hills are gold and brown, and the blue sky can be dotted with white clouds and thunder clouds at times. Sunlight is a dominating element in the area, and whirling winds create dust funnels (US Navy 2000; BLM 1974).

The proposed project would occur in an area of Salt Wells administered by the BLM. No BLM visual resource management classes have been established for this area. Although no BLM visual resource management classes have been established yet for this area, projects of this nature are generally required to meet Visual Resource Management Class III objectives in such a situation. The Visual Resource Management Class III objective is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Sensitive receptors in the project area include drivers looking south from Highway 50 and people recreating in the area. Recreational activities in the area include people visiting the historic trails and off-highway vehicle drivers.