

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter addresses the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on elements of the human environment from actions proposed in the CDCA Plan Amendment. This chapter is organized by environmental element, followed by a description and comparison of impacts from the relevant plan element alternatives.

Land use plans, such as the CDCA Plan Amendment, developed in accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, provide landscape level decisions for managing the BLM-administered public lands. As a result, the impact analysis for land use plans level actions tends to be cumulative by nature.

4.10 Air Quality

Air quality is an issue of regional concern in the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan area. In addition to discussions and assessments set forth in this section, refer to Appendix C for a more detailed discussion of BLM's proposed air quality management strategy, a summary of the Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan, and an air quality conformity analysis and determination for the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment.

Air Quality Management Strategy. The efficacy of the air quality management strategy is directly related to the impact of the selected alternative under each of the plan elements for the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment. The following is a summary description of the more pertinent plan elements affecting the efficacy of the alternative air quality management strategies, followed by an air quality impact analysis of each plan element.

Alternative A. Under air quality management strategy Alternative A, BLM would be opting to keep open the currently available motorized-vehicle route network. Installation of new communication sites, wind parks, and sand and gravel mining operations would be permissible throughout the Coachella Valley. Authorized uses would still need to be in compliance with Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan and would include applicable measures to minimize fugitive dust emissions. Where feasible, BLM would install sand fencing to reduce the amount of sand flow and PM10 emissions off of the public lands.

Alternative B. Under the Alternative B, BLM would be making a concerted effort to reduce PM10 emissions from the BLM -managed public lands, especially upwind of sensitive receptors, while still allowing for a reasonable level of multiple use of the public lands. The currently available motorized-vehicle route network would be reduced by 36%, and all informal off-highway vehicle “free-play” areas on public lands upwind of sensitive receptors (i.e., residents of the Coachella Valley) would no longer be available for such activities. Installation of new communication sites, wind parks, and sand and gravel mining operations would be restricted to designated areas. These designated areas contain the best available resources for communication sites, wind parks, and

sand and gravel mining, so as to not hamper the needs of the community for infrastructure. Where feasible, BLM would install sand fencing to reduce the amount of sand flow and PM10 emissions off of the public lands.

Alternative C. This alternative is highly restrictive of multiple uses in an effort to reduce PM10 emissions from all public lands, even those downwind of sensitive receptors. The currently available motorized-vehicle route network would be reduced by 63%, making some areas inaccessible by vehicle. No off-highway vehicle “free-play” activities would be allowed anywhere on public lands in the planning area. No new communication sites, wind parks, and sand and gravel mines would be allowed on the public lands. BLM would install sand fencing to reduce the amount of sand flow and PM10 emissions off of the public lands.

Alternative D. Absent a Bureau-initiated air quality management strategy, projects on BLM-lands would still be required to comply with National Ambient Air Quality Standard for PM10; however a greater economic burden would be placed on private interests to attain the PM10 standard valley wide.

Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Recommendations. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). The Proposed Plan includes eligibility recommendations to determine the appropriateness of designating Wild and Scenic Rivers within the planning area. Prospective designations would apply only to BLM-managed public lands already under conservation management, including ACECs, wilderness areas and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. Future potential designation of Wild and Scenic Rivers is not expected to result in air quality impacts.

No Action Alternative (D). No impacts to air quality would result from deferring Wild and Scenic River eligibility recommendations..

Visual Resource Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). The designation of Visual Resource Management classes (Proposed Plan) or assignment on interim VRM classes on a project-specific basis (No Action) will not, in and of itself, affect air quality. It is anticipated that future actions to preserve important visual and scenic components would not have an adverse impact on air quality.

Land Health Standards. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). Implementation of land health standards, especially minimizing soil erosion, would help to reduce potential PM10 emissions by maintaining healthy landscapes.

Multiple-Use Classification. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). Regardless of the Multiple-Use Classes assigned, future projects on BLM-managed lands would be subject to environmental review per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 , the Clean Air Act, and State Implementation Plans for improving air quality. Designation of Multiple-Use Classes under the Proposed Plan and Alternative C, or retention of current classifications (No Action), would not, in and of itself, affect air quality. Subsequent actions to use or conserve lands in the planning

area would likely reduce air emissions, through application of air quality management requirements for permitted uses and implementation of Habitat Conservation Objectives. All projects, including sand and gravel mining and off-highway vehicle open area management on Class “I” lands, must conform to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards and would likely include mitigation measures to reduce air quality impacts.

Habitat Conservation Objectives. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). The proposed objectives seek to preserve 99% or more of the important habitats identified in the planning area, including (1) sand dunes and sand fields, (2) desert scrub communities, (3) chaparral communities, (4) desert alkali scrub communities, (5) marsh communities, (6) dry wash woodland and mesquite communities, (7) riparian communities, and (8) woodland and forest communities. The proposed objectives would protect vegetative cover and limit habitat and soil disturbance. Sand fencing would be installed in sand dunes and sand fields to minimize sand flow from these areas and to reduce PM10 emissions.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Actions under these alternatives associated with habitat conservation objectives would not increase potentially adverse impacts on regional or local air quality. The CDCA Plan provides for conformance with the guidelines set forth in the 2002 State Implementation Plan for PM10, which is the primary pollutant of concern in the planning area. Management strategies for consideration of proposed uses would still require design solutions or mitigation measures that protect air quality and limit impacts to downwind sensitive receptors. Management sensitive biological resources and ecological processes would still be subject to environmental review per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Clean Air Act, State Implementation Plans for improving air quality, and conformance to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Fire Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). Adoption of the proposed fire management categories is designed to protect and enhance the variety of habitats found in the planning area. Fire suppression would be applied in a manner consistent with the preservation of these habitat values. The implementation of these fire management strategies, or management in accordance with the CDCA Plan and District-wide Fire Management Plan, is not expected to have an adverse impact on regional air quality. Any prescribed burning must be conducted in consultation with the South Coast Air Quality Management District in order to minimize potential adverse impacts.

Special Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). Regardless of the special area designation, future projects on BLM-managed lands would be subject to environmental review per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Clean Air Act, State Implementation Plans for improving air quality, and conformance to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The special area designations proposed under Alternatives A (Proposed Plan), B and C would not, in and of themselves, affect air quality. Subsequent actions to conserve lands within these special area designations would reduce air emissions. Overall, less

surface disturbance would be allowed to conserve habitat for sensitive species within these special areas, resulting in lower air emissions. Air emissions would be reduced further through implementation of the air quality management strategy, land health standards and habitat conservation objectives.

Land Tenure: Exchange and Sale Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). The Proposed Plan would establish criteria by which the appropriateness of proposed exchanges or sales of BLM lands would be judged. The goal of BLM's exchange and sale program in the Coachella Valley would be to benefit CVMSHCP conservation areas and other special are designations. Subsequent actions to conserve these special areas would reduce air emissions from the public lands, such as implementation of habitat conservation objectives. Such actions would preserve habitat and associated vegetation cover, and preclude incompatible development. Management of the designated special areas would enhance the long-term protection of regional air quality.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Under these alternatives, land exchange and sales would be considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to NEPA review, including consideration of potential adverse impacts to regional air quality.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). The Proposed Plan would establish criteria by which the appropriateness of proposed acquisitions would be judged. The goal of BLM's acquisition program in the Coachella Valley would be to benefit CVMSHCP conservation areas and other special are designations. Subsequent actions to conserve these special areas would reduce air emissions from the public lands, such as implementation of habitat conservation objectives. Such actions would preserve habitat and associated vegetation cover, and preclude incompatible development. Management of the designated special areas would enhance the long-term protection of regional air quality.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Under these alternatives, acquisitions would be considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to NEPA review, including consideration of potential adverse impacts to regional air quality.

Management of Acquired Lands. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). The Proposed Plan would provide management guidance for newly acquired and formerly withdrawn lands, precluding the need for additional planning in order to provide management direction for those lands. Subsequently, the air quality management strategy and other actions to reduce air quality impacts proposed through this Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment, would apply to those newly acquired and formerly withdrawn lands without need for additional planning.

No Action Alternative (D). Management of acquired BLM-managed lands would be subject to environmental review per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Clean Air Act, State Implementation Plans for improving air quality, and conformance to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Communication Sites and Utilities. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The issuance of new or renewed rights of way for windparks, communication sites and utilities would be required to comply with the rules and provisions of the 2002 Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan (CVSIP), as well as the habitat conservation objectives which would minimize surface disturbance. The best wind resource areas have already been developed into wind parks. No new communication sites are anticipated as satellite technologies are used more in the future. Some air emissions (although in compliance National Ambient Air Quality Standards) would nonetheless result from generation of fugitive dust (PM10) from construction activities, maintenance and use of roads, initial site disturbance for facilities (turbines, powerlines, substations, antennas, etc.).

Sand and Gravel Mining. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The issuance of new or renewed rights of way for sand and gravel mining sites would be required to comply with the rules and provisions of the 2002 Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan (CVSIP), as well as the habitat conservation objectives which would minimize surface disturbance. Existing sand and gravel operations on BLM lands are already subject to a variety of requirements to control blowing sand and the emission of fugitive dust. Under the Proposed Plan, sand and gravel mining would be restricted to State designated mineral resource zones, thereby further reducing the area of potential future PM10 emissions from sand and gravel mining. Under Alternative C, no sand and gravel mining would be allowed in the CVMSHCP conservation areas, virtually eliminating the potential for potential increases in PM10 emissions from sand and gravel mining on the public lands.

Livestock Grazing. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). The number of animal unit months (990, or 119 head of cattle) provided by the Whitewater grazing allotment would not perceptibly improve or degrade regional air quality under any of the livestock grazing alternatives. Locally, reduced grazing levels (Alternatives B and C) on the public lands would keep PM10 emissions down, in areas where trampling vegetation has reduced soil stability. In the same manner, compliance with rangeland health standards would also help to reduce localized PM10 emissions from grazing activities.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Regional air quality would not be perceptibly diminished or improved under any of the alternatives. Locally, removing the horses (Proposed Plan and Alternative C) would keep PM10 emissions down, as horses trample vegetation and contribute to accelerated soil erosion.

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations. Alternative A. Under this alternative, 2,253 acres of “open” off-highway vehicle areas on public lands (Windy Point, Iron Door, and Indio Hills) would generate PM10 emissions upwind of sensitive receptors, with average weekly usage ranging from 320 to 600 vehicles during the cooler months. Motorized vehicles traveling on unpaved roads generate PM10 emissions; the relative amount depending on the velocity of the vehicle and prevailing wind speeds. On public lands at

the 1,371-acre Drop 31 area, 250 to 500 vehicles use the area on a weekly basis. This area is downwind of sensitive receptors. The off-highway vehicle users themselves would be exposed to PM10 emissions at the Drop 31 site, the relative amount depending on the velocity of the vehicle and prevailing wind speeds.

Proposed Plan (Alternative B). Under the Proposed Plan, all historically used OHV free-play areas upwind of sensitive receptors (Windy Point, Iron Door, and Indio Hills totaling 2,253 acres on public lands) would no longer be available for “free-play” vehicular activities. Any valley-wide reductions in PM10 emissions upwind of sensitive receptors, will depend on the extent to which displaced off-highway vehicle enthusiasts use non-federal land instead of public land, change from vehicle free-play to trail experiences, or travel farther to other “open” public land areas. Establishment of an off-highway vehicle managed use area emphasizing opportunities for camping, trail riding and exploration along designated routes, trails and open washes in the Drop 31 area would be downwind of sensitive receptors. At the Drop 31 area, 250 to 500 vehicles currently use the area on a weekly basis. The off-highway vehicle users themselves would be exposed to PM10 emissions at the Drop 31 site, the relative amount depending on the velocity of the vehicle and prevailing wind speeds.

Alternative C. This alternative would eliminate 2,253 acres of off-highway vehicle “free-play” areas on public lands upwind of sensitive receptors. Any valley-wide reductions in PM10 emissions will depend on the extent to which displaced off-highway vehicle enthusiasts use private land instead of public land, change from vehicle free-play to trail experiences, or travel outside the Coachella Valley planning area to recreate. Impacts from continued OHV use of the Drop 31 area, downwind of sensitive receptors, would be the same as described under Alternative A.

No Action Alternative (D). Impacts would be the same as described under Alternative A, except that currently-used OHV areas would not be designated as “open.”

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Alternatives A and No Action (D). Under these alternatives, the currently available route network on public land (73 miles) would be available for motorized vehicle access, generating PM10 emissions up and down wind of sensitive receptors. Use of this route network is estimated to be five (5) average daily trips (ADT) on weekdays and the summer months, and 25 average daily trips during cooler weekends and hunting season. In addition to the number of average daily trips, the relative amount of PM10 emissions generated by motorized vehicles depends on the velocity of the vehicle and prevailing wind speeds.

Proposed Plan (Alternative B). Under the Proposed Plan, the currently available route network would be reduced by 36%. The relative amount of PM10 emissions generated by motorized vehicles on 47 miles of open routes would depend on the average daily trips, the velocity of the vehicles and prevailing wind speeds. Route management would include provisions to comply with the approved PM10 State Implementation Plan, such as signage, establishing cattle guards to reduce “track out” onto paved roads, 15 mile per hour speed limits on unpaved roads with 20 to 150 average daily traffic levels, and

temporary closures on high wind days (as defined by the South Coast Air Quality Management District).

Alternative C. This alternative would reduce the currently available route network on public lands by 63%, leaving 27 miles of open routes. Any valley-wide reductions in PM10 emissions upwind of sensitive receptors, will depend on the extent to which motorized vehicle users use private land instead of public land or hike to access traditional recreational areas for hunting, rock hounding, camping, bird watching, etc.

Special Recreation Management Area. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. The Proposed Plan, and Alternatives A and C, would designate the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses and adjacent public lands as the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). Management of off-highway vehicles pursuant to a Recreation Area Management Plan developed for the SRMA would be in conformance with the approved PM10 State Implementation Plan.

No Action Alternative (D). Specific management actions to reduce PM10 emissions on public lands adjacent to the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses would not be identified. PM10 emissions from current use would continue.

Stopping, Parking and Vehicle Camping. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A and B), Alternatives C and No Action (D). The impacts to air quality would be essentially the same as those identified under “Motorized Vehicle Route Designations” (see above).

Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Strategy. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Minimizing human disturbance in bighorn sheep habitat would have the concurrent benefit of reducing air quality impacts

Hiking, Biking and Equestrian Trails. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). The Proposed Plan involves the coordinated management of non-motorized trails on public lands. New trails would be developed in coordination with other agencies and jurisdictions. The Proposed Plan is not expected to have any impact on regional air quality.

No Action Alternative (D). Continued use of all trails would not impact regional air quality.