

4.5 WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Consequences to wildlife resources generally result from impacts to individuals, populations, or from disturbance to wildlife habitat. This section describes the environmental consequences to wildlife resources. The majority of potential impacts to wildlife are associated with habitat disturbance and vegetation removal. Removing vegetation in areas used by wildlife results in a reduction of available habitat and also may cause habitat fragmentation. Habitat disturbance associated with construction activities would be temporary until vegetation becomes reestablished and would be small in relation to the surrounding habitat.

Proposed Action

Direct Impacts

As described in Section 4.4, 10.63 acres of vegetation would initially be removed in association with the proposed drill sites. If drill sites became utilized, 38.23 acres would be cleared. The amount of wildlife habitat affected by project actions would remain small compared to the amount of comparable habitat present on surrounding lands. Construction of the drill sites and new roads would add to habitat fragmentation in the project area. Wildlife species that could not tolerate fragmented habitat would be affected by these conditions.

Construction activities, such as grading, digging, and the use of heavy vehicles, could result in direct adverse impacts through killing some wildlife. It is expected that larger and more mobile wildlife species, such as kit fox and coyote, along with various bird species would be able to avoid construction equipment. Smaller, less mobile species and burrowing species may not be able to avoid equipment.

Noise generated by construction activities could potentially affect wildlife; these effects would be temporary and most likely wildlife in the project area would habituate to the noise.

Potential impacts to special status wildlife species are described in Section 4.6.

Indirect Impacts Based on a Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario

If the proposed geothermal wells indicate evidence of significant geothermal activity, it is assumed that a geothermal power plant would be constructed in the vicinity to process and deliver power. Although no such plant is proposed as part of this review, if it were constructed, impacts would be similar to those that would occur as a result of construction of the wells. However, since it is assumed that the geothermal power plant would cover an area larger than the sum of the well pads, impacts would potentially be more extensive. Impacts would include permanent loss of general wildlife habitat, habitat fragmentation from road construction and use, and noise impacts. Loss of sensitive species habitat would be avoided by performing preconstruction surveys for such habitat and avoiding such habitat if it were found.

Subsequent NEPA analysis would determine the actual impact to wildlife resources.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative there would be no impacts to wildlife resources.