

3.5 WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Wildlife

Two Tetra Tech biologists conducted a reconnaissance level survey on October 16-17, 2006, and an EMPS biologist surveyed on November 29, 2006, to identify wildlife species and potential sensitive habitat at the proposed drilling and freshwater well sites. Baseline surveys were conducted in 1987-1988 near the project location (WESTEC 1988); habitat conditions have not changed significantly since these surveys were conducted. Consequently, wildlife presence within the ROI observed in 1987-1988 are likely to be similar to current conditions and are summarized below.

In general, the ROI supports wildlife species typical of the Great Basin arid desert habitats, including reptiles, rodents, lagomorphs, medium-sized carnivores, passerine birds, and raptors.

Mammals

Three species of medium-sized mammals were observed during the baseline surveys, including black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), and kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*) (WESTEC 1988). Jackrabbits were also observed during the 2006 reconnaissance survey. Four species of small mammals were captured during the baseline studies and include deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), Merriam's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys merriami*), Ord's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys ordii*), and Great Basin pocket mouse (*Perognathus parvus*) (WESTEC 1988). Mice burrows were observed during the November 2006 survey. No key game habitats occur on or near the project site.

Birds

Bird use of the area is fairly low compared to some other habitat types in the Great Basin. Typical bird species include horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), black-throated sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*), and sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*). Several raptor species were observed during the baseline surveys. These include golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), which was only observed during the winter and is not expected to nest onsite. Also observed were northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), and burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (WESTEC 1988). Several small birds were observed but unidentified during the 2006 survey. There are no sage grouse use areas on or near the project site.

Neo-tropical migratory birds

On January 11, 2001, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13186 (Land Bird Strategic Allotment) placing emphasis on conservation and management of migratory birds. The species are not protected under the Endangered Species Act, but most are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. No BLM policies have been developed to provide guidance on how to incorporate migratory birds into NEPA analysis. However, advice based on past USFWS Memoranda of Understanding lists items the USFWS believes are fundamental for the analysis of impacts to and planning for these birds. These items are: (1) effects to highest priority birds listed by Partners in Flight; (2) effects to important bird areas; and (3) effects to important over-wintering areas.

Avifaunal Biomes that are found on the site are described by Partners in Flight (Beidleman 2000; Neel 1999). The Intermountain West is the center of distribution for many western birds. Over half of the biome's Species of Continental Importance have 75% or more of their population here. Many breeding species from this biome migrate to winter in central and western Mexico or in the Southwestern biome. There are no important bird areas associated with this site. The species of concern listed by Partners in Flight that could occur in the site are associated with salt desert scrub vegetation. These include the loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*), and sage thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) (Beidleman 2000; Neel 1999). Issues related to this habitat type include physical destruction of salt desert shrubs, habitat conversion, and use of rangeland pesticides (Neel 1999).

Reptiles

A variety of lizards and snakes are expected to occur within the ROI. Typical lizard species present may include western whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris tigris*), desert horned lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos platyrhinos*), spiny lizard (*Sceloporus magister uniformis*), and side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*) (WESTEC 1988). Snake species likely to occur in the area include gopher snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*) and Great Basin rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*).