

4.12 SOCIOECONOMICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Proposed Action

Direct Impacts

No residents, minority or low-income populations, or businesses would be displaced, and no property would be acquired as a direct result of construction and operation of the proposed exploratory wells.

Constructing the temperature gradient wells could have a beneficial effect on the surrounding economy by employing construction workers for installing access roads and well pads, and operating the drill rigs. Construction would employ approximately six workers for six to eight weeks; drilling the first set of five wells would employ six workers for seven to ten days at each well; and drilling the two or three deep exploration wells would employ six workers for up to six months total duration.

Most of the workers would not be local, although some locals may obtain employment in road and pipeline construction. The increase in employment of personnel involved in well construction would be temporary, over the duration of the construction. Expenditures for equipment, materials, fuel, lodging, food, and other needs would stimulate the local economy over the duration of exploration (Whittome 2006). Additional workers would likely be employed for road construction and drilling water wells (if approved).

The nearest tribal lands are the Walker River Indian Reservation, which is about 9.9 miles south of the project area, and the Fallon Indian Reservation, which is approximately 10.7 miles north of the project area. Any potential physical effects of constructing and operating the proposed facility would be unlikely to affect these populations.

Construction and operation of the proposed wells could affect nearby recreational resources, which also could affect the economies of the areas in which the recreational resources are located if fewer visitors use the resources (and spend fewer dollars in the local economy). Revenues associated with recreational activity (such as bird watching, mountain biking, and hiking) could decline if these activities were reduced or eliminated. There are no recreation areas or areas of critical environmental concern within the project area; however, the Pony Express National Historic Trail is about 1.5 miles south of the southernmost drill site. Minor long-term effects could be expected from the alteration of the viewscape from the Pony Express Trail; however, a reduction in dispersed visitation would not be expected to result in adverse economic impacts, since the nearest economic center is the city of Fallon, which is approximately 16 miles from the project area.

Ranchers and shepherds rely on portions of the Salt Wells geothermal leasing area for grazing. The level of local economic impact of geothermal leasing activities on grazing would depend on the extent to which reducing the grazing areas would reduce the size or health of a permit holder's herds or require that a permit holder lease or purchase additional lands. As identified in Section 4.7, Range Resources, the Proposed Plant Site and access roads could

cause a reduction of less than 1 AUM in the Rock Springs and Bass Flat Grazing Allotments. These impacts would not affect the economic livelihood of ranchers and herders.

No long-term increases in population or growth would be induced through construction or operation of the wells, and demand for schools would not increase. Land values for private tracts of land bordering geothermal development areas could increase, based on the development potential, and possible profitability, exhibited on adjacent geothermal lands. Potential increased land values for adjacent private land could provide indirect revenue to Churchill County.

Overall, the potential risk for impacts on socioeconomic resources or environmental justice resulting from the Proposed Action would be very low.

Indirect Impacts Based on a Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario

If a power plant were to be developed, expenditures for equipment, materials, fuel, lodging, food, and other needs would stimulate the local economy over a longer duration of time than under the Proposed Action. Operation of a full power plant would also bring greater revenue to the local economy. A greater area of land would be disturbed for plant construction and operation increasing the risk of impacts to recreational resources. The level of local economic impact of geothermal development activities on grazing would depend on the extent to which reducing the grazing areas would reduce the size or health of a permit holder's herds or require that a permit holder lease or purchase additional lands.

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

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would take place, and there would be no impacts on socioeconomic resources and no environmental justice impacts in the project area.