4.10 LAND USE AND PLANNING

4.10.1 Summary of Environmental Consequences

For the No Action Alternative with continuation of existing inflows, there would be few direct effects on land use. Significant land use impacts would occur under the No Action Alternative and all restoration alternatives with reduced inflows because large land areas would be exposed by reductions in the surface elevation of the Sea. During Phase 1, the least land exposure would occur under the No Action Alternative.

Alternatives 1 and 5 would result in less than significant impacts to on-shore land use since the affected areas would be relatively small, and most on-shore disturbance would be temporary. Significant land use impacts would occur under alternatives 2, 3, and 4 because of incompatibilities between restoration activities and existing land use plans. All restoration alternatives also would have indirect effects that could be considered beneficial to land use in that the value of areas designated for residential, urban, and recreational uses would be greatly enhanced.

4.10.2 Significance Criteria

Significant land use impacts would occur if land use changes associated with an alternative would conflict with adopted land use plans or policies in affected jurisdictions.

4.10.3 Assessment Methods

Existing land uses, as described in Chapter 3, form the basis for assessing the significance of changes in land use under each of the alternatives. Potential impacts to land use were assessed by comparing proposed changes in land use under each of the alternatives to current and planned uses of these and the surrounding areas. Applicable land use planning documents are described in Chapter 3.

4.10.4 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative with a continuation of the current inflow conditions there would be no direct effects on existing land use. Under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows, significant impacts to land use would be expected. Under either scenario, potential indirect land use impacts may result from continued degradation of the Sea.

Effect of No Action Alternative with Continuation of Current Inflow Conditions

No significant land use impacts would occur under the No Action Alternative and with a continuation of the current flow conditions. The level of the Salton Sea would be expected to remain relatively constant under these conditions and although minor variations in elevation may occur, adjacent land uses would not be significantly impacted since variations would be comparable to historic conditions.

Rising salinity levels under the No Action Alternative may affect the economic viability of the area, which may indirectly result in alterations in land use patterns. These effects

would be expected to be diffuse and limited in area, and would not be considered significant.

Effect of No Action with Reduced Inflows (1.06 maf/yr)

Significant impacts would be expected under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows. By the end of Phase 1, if the average inflow to the Sea is reduced to 1.06 maf/yr, the level of the Salton Sea would be expected to drop by approximately 7 feet from its current elevation and approximately 37 square miles of submerged lands would become exposed. This effect may be beneficial to owners of land that was submerged by the Sea, such as the Torres Martinez Tribe. Nevertheless, the overall effect of a large decrease in Sea level would be negative because current land use patterns and land use planning around the Sea are based on a relatively constant Sea level at approximately the current elevation. A substantial drop in Sea level leading to large new land areas would alter the current land use patterns and significantly impact current land use planning around the perimeter of the Sea.

4.10.5 Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would not have any significant land use impacts unless the average inflow to the Sea is reduced. There would also be beneficial land use effects associated with restoration of the Sea and stabilization of surface elevation. With reduced inflow conditions, the effects of Alternative 1 would be less severe than the effects of the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows.

Effect of Alternative 1 with Continuation of Current Inflow Conditions

Construction and operation of the north and south evaporation ponds, and the pupfish pond under Alternative 1 would result in less than significant land use impacts. The construction of the ponds would occur within the Sea and, although inundated land under a variety of ownership would be affected, construction of the ponds would be a use compatible with the current and planned uses of the Salton Sea. In addition, inundated lands are not part of current land use planning or use and therefore the impact to these lands would be less than significant.

Approximately 280 acres of on-shore area would be temporarily affected by construction activities, including areas for storage and staging of construction equipment, a borrow area for construction materials, and a haul road extending from the borrow areas south to approximately the Salton Sea Test Base. The potentially affected area would include private land, land administered by the US Navy and BLM, land withdrawn by Reclamation, and land belonging to the Torres Martinez Tribe. Affected area in Imperial County may include land designated as open space, urban, government, and agriculture. Permitted uses in open space areas include limited recreation, single-family, and residential. Permitted land uses in the West Shores/Salton City Urban Area range from recreation/open space to high-density residential and commercial uses (Imperial County 1997). Permitted uses on government land (Salton Sea Test Base) are discussed below.

In Riverside County, land uses potentially affected by construction activities include desert and planned residential reserve areas. Permitted uses in the desert areas are limited recreation, limited single-family residential, landfill, compatible resource development, or governmental uses. Planned residential reserve areas are areas set aside for future, large-scale residential development. Commercial uses to support residential development, recreation, and open space, also are permitted uses in the residential reserve areas (Riverside County 1995).

Land use on Torres Martinez Tribal lands is under the authority of the tribe. Although the counties do not have planning authority for tribal lands, they are generally designated as recreation/open space and urban land by Imperial County and agriculture and open space land by Riverside County. The land use plan for Torres Martinez Tribal lands was not available for review at the time of publication of this EIS/EIR. Nevertheless, the Tribe is an active member of the long-term management team for the Salton Sea and all actions on tribal lands would be necessarily be developed with input from the tribe to ensure it is consistent with the land use plan. Effects on tribal lands are discussed in Section 4.17, Indian Trust Assets.

Direct changes in land use under this alternative would be temporary and therefore would not conflict with the planned land uses in either county or on tribal lands.

Temporary construction activities may be a compatible use on the former Salton Sea Test Base since military uses have ceased. In addition, temporary construction activities would be compatible with the Class L (Limited Use) designation of the lands specified in the management plan proposed by BLM, USFWS, and Reclamation for post-conveyance management of the property. BLM lands that may be affected are unclassified (BLM 1981) and interim use for construction activities would be a compatible use.

Long-term indirect impacts to land use also may occur from Sea level stabilization and salinity control. Success of restoration activities may improve the economic viability of the area, and land use patterns may be altered. The value of land designated for residential, urban, and recreation could substantially increase and become better suited to its intended uses. It is assumed that land use changes in response to economic improvement would be developed consistent with existing land use plans and would be beneficial.

Effect of Alternative 1 with Reduced Inflow Conditions (1.06 maf/yr)

Significant land use changes could occur if inflows are reduced during Phase 1 to 1.06 maf/yr. During Phase 1, the effects would be more severe under Alternative 1 with reduced inflows than under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows. As discussed for the No Action Alternative, the overall effect of a large decrease in Sea level would be negative because current land use patterns and planning are based on a relatively constant Sea level at approximately the current elevation. Under Alternative 1, the area exposed at the end of the Phase 1 planning period (2030) is projected to be 95

square miles, compared to 37 square miles that would be exposed under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflow.

Construction of the displacement dike under reduced inflow conditions would require extension of the haul road. An additional 175 acres of on-shore area would be temporarily affected by this construction, consisting mostly of agricultural lands in the Imperial Valley. Land use changes would be temporary and therefore would not conflict with planned land uses. In-Sea construction of the displacement dike would affect inundated lands but this impact would be less than significant.

4.10.6 Alternative 2

Construction of the EES north of Bombay Beach would be incompatible with planned land uses in the area. There would be adverse effects associated with exposure of lands from reduced water surface elevations under reduced inflow conditions. There also may be beneficial land use effects associated with restoration of the Sea.

Effect of Alternative 2 with Continuation of Current Inflow Conditions

Construction of the EES system north of Bombay Beach would result in significant land use impacts. The industrial nature of the EES would be incompatible with current and planned uses in the area.

Construction of the EES would require development on approximately 4,200 acres of currently undeveloped land; approximately 2,500 acres are privately held and approximately 1,700 acres are public lands administered by BLM. Private lands would be acquired in-fee, while BLM lands required for development would be withdrawn by Reclamation. Approximately 1,200 acres are within Riverside County and 3,000 acres are within Imperial County.

Lands within Riverside County are a checkerboard pattern of private and BLM lands. Private landholdings are designated as desert lands in the Riverside County General Plan. Development of the EES facility would be inconsistent with the current and planned uses in this area, which include limited recreation, limited single-family residential, landfill, compatible resource development, or governmental uses (Riverside County 1995). BLM landholdings in this area are unclassified in the CDP (BLM 1981). Under this designation, development of the EES may be a suitable land use.

Potentially affected land within Imperial County is a mixture of private and public ownership. Private lands are designated as recreation/open space under the Imperial County General Plan. Development of the EES facility would be inconsistent with the current and planned uses in this area, which include recreation, natural resource preservation, and protection from environmental hazards (e.g., recreational vehicle parks, resource conservation, and floodplains) (Imperial County 1997). BLM landholdings in this area are unclassified in the CDP (BLM 1981) and may be suitable for EES development.

Long-term beneficial impacts, as described above under Alternative 1, also may occur under this alternative as residential, urban, and recreational land may become better suited for these planned uses.

Effect of Alternative 2 with Reduced Inflow Conditions (1.06 maf/yr)

Significant land use changes would occur if inflow is reduced to 1.06 maf/yr. As discussed for the No Action Alternative, the overall effect of a large decrease in Sea level would be negative because current land use patterns and planning are based on a relatively constant Sea level at approximately the current level. The effects would be more severe under Alternative 2 with reduced inflows than under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows. With reduced inflow conditions, the area exposed at the end of Phase 1 is projected to be 70 square miles under Alternative 2, compared to 37 square miles under the No Action Alternative. Construction of the haul road under this alternative would not significantly affect land use, as described above under Alternative 1.

4.10.7 Alternative 3

Constructing the EES within the former Salton Sea Test Base would be incompatible with current and planned land uses. Adverse effects associated with exposure of lands from reduced water surface elevations may occur from reduced inflow conditions. Beneficial land use effects also may be associated with restoration of the Sea.

Effect of Alternative 3 with Continuation of Current Inflow Conditions

Constructing the EES on the former Salton Sea Test Base would result in significant land use impacts. As described above under Alternative 1, in-Sea construction of the pupfish pond would result in less than significant land use impacts.

Construction of the EES at this site would convert approximately 4,200 acres of currently undeveloped land in Imperial County (the same area as would be required for development of the EES north of Bombay Beach). Most land to be used for the EES would be within the former Salton Sea Test Base is administered by the US Navy. The base is closed and in the process of disposal in accordance with the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) of 1988. Final decisions on disposal have not been made and cleanup and restoration activities prior to disposal are ongoing. Long-term land use planning for the base will not be finalized until the base closure process has been completed. Construction of the EES on this property would conflict with current military land use as well as land use planning under an integrated resource management plan (IRMP) developed by BLM, USFWS, and Reclamation, and approved by BLM, which provides for management of these lands as wildlife habitat (US Navy 1996).

Additional BLM lands west of Highway 86 are unclassified under the CDP (BLM 1981). Under this designation, developing the EES may be a suitable land use. Private landholdings in the area are within Imperial County and are designated as recreation/open space. Developing the EES facility would be inconsistent with the current and planned uses in this area, which are primarily related to recreation, natural

resource preservation, and protection from environmental hazards (e.g., recreational vehicle parks, resource conservation, and floodplains) (Imperial County 1997).

Long-term beneficial impacts, as described above under Alternative 1, also may occur under this alternative as residential, urban and recreational land become better suited for the intended uses.

Effect of Alternative 3 with Reduced Inflow Conditions (1.06 maf/yr)

The effects of reduced inflows would be the same as those discussed for Alternative 2.

4.10.8 Alternative 4

Construction of the south evaporation pond and the EES at the former Salton Sea Test Base would result in significant land use impacts similar to those discussed for alternatives 2 and 3.

Effect of Alternative 4 with Continuation of Current Inflow Conditions

Land use impacts associated with constructing the south evaporation pond and the pupfish pond would be comparable to that described under alternatives 1, 2, and 3. The effect of construction and operation of the EES at the former Salton Sea Test Base would be the same as discussed for Alternatives 3. The long-term beneficial effects of restoration would be the same as those discussed for other alternatives.

Effect of Alternative 4 with Reduced Inflow Conditions (1.06 maf/yr)

Significant land use changes could occur if inflows are reduced during Phase 1 to 1.06 maf/yr. The effect would be greater under Alternative 4 with reduced inflows than under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows. As discussed for the No Action Alternative, the overall effect of a large decrease in Sea level would be negative because current land use patterns and planning are based on a relatively constant Sea level at approximately the current level. With reduced inflow, the area exposed at the end of Phase 1 is projected to be 80 square miles under Alternative 4, compared to 37 square miles under the No Action Alternative. Construction of the haul road under this alternative would not significantly affect land use, as described above under Alternative 1.

4.10.9 Alternative 5

Construction of the north evaporation pond in combination with the EES system would be incompatible with surrounding land uses and would result in a significant impact.

Effect of Alternative 5 with Continuation of Current Inflow Conditions

Construction of the north evaporation pond, the EES within the evaporation pond, and the pupfish pond, would occur within the Sea and, although inundated land under a variety of ownership would be affected, construction of the ponds would be compatible with the current and planned uses of the Salton Sea. In addition, inundated lands are not part of current land use planning or use and therefore the impact to these lands would be less than significant. Nevertheless, the industrial nature of the EES system

would be incompatible with current and planned land uses and would result in a significant land use impact.

Construction impacts would be similar to those described under Alternative 1. The long-term beneficial effects of restoration would be the same as those discussed for other alternatives.

Effect of Alternative 5 with Reduced Inflow Conditions (1.06 maf/yr)

Significant land use changes could occur if inflows are reduced during Phase 1 to 1.06 maf/yr. The effect would be greater under Alternative 5 with reduced inflows than under the No Action Alternative with reduced inflows. As discussed for the No Action Alternative, the overall effect of a large decrease in Sea level would be negative because current land use patterns and planning are based on a relatively constant Sea level at approximately the current level. With reduced inflow, the area exposed at the end of Phase 1 is projected to be 75 square miles under Alternative 5, compared to 37 square miles under the No Action Alternative. Construction of the haul road under this alternative would not significantly affect land use, as described above under Alternative 1.

4.10.10 Cumulative Effects

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this EIS/EIR, a number of regional projects could have long-term effects on the average annual inflow to the Sea (see Table 2.7-1). Likewise, a number of other processes could have long-term effects on the future inflows, including changes to agriculture practices, competing demands for water, and natural climatic adjustments. The most likely result of these processes is that future inflows to the Sea could be lower than current conditions. For analysis purposes, inflow is assumed to be reduced to an average annual value of 1.06 maf/yr during the Phase 1 planning period. The effects of such an inflow reduction on land use have been discussed for each alternative.

Other projects could have minor cumulative effects on land use when combined with restoration of the Salton Sea. For example, development of the Mesquite Regional Landfill and expansion of the Gold Field Mine would convert small areas of open space to industrial uses. Within the context of the Salton Basin, these areas and effects would be minor and would not alter the conclusions about land use discussed above for each alternative. Likewise, no other projects are known within the planning horizon that would significantly add cumulative effects to those that are discussed for each alternative.

4.10.11 Mitigation Measures

Actions under alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would be inconsistent with current land use planning for the affected areas. Development of either alternative would require amending these planning guidelines. Nevertheless, the scale and the industrial nature of the proposed land use would be inconsistent with planning policies and surrounding land use and could not be mitigated to a less than significant level. No mitigation measures are feasible.

4.10.12 Potentially Significant Unavoidable Impacts

The development of large areas for restoration facilities and the potential reduction in Sea level would occur under the No Action Alternative, Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4 and would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to land use. No mitigation measures are identified in the EIS that would reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.