

## 4.15 RECREATION

### 4.15.1 Regulatory Setting

This section presents a description of the laws, policies, and plans relevant to recreation.

#### **Imperial County Parks and Recreation Element**

The *Parks and Recreation Element* of the Imperial County General Plan provides a framework for the provision and stewardship of County parks and recreational facilities for the enjoyment of County residents and visitors. The *Parks and Recreation Element* applies to all the unincorporated land within the County.

The *Parks and Recreation Element* policy section addresses: (1) the condition and location of existing parks; (2) the classification of parks and other recreational amenities; (3) anticipated park and recreational needs by County residents and visitors; (4) the establishment, duties, and authority of a Parks and Recreation Commission; (5) the maintenance and enhancement of existing parks and recreational amenities; (6) the acquisition and development of regional, community, and neighborhood parks and recreational amenities; (7) the promotion of greater cooperation and coordination between incorporated cities, the State, and the federal government to establish joint-use parks and recreational amenities; (8) the conservation and promotion of waterbodies and adjoining areas for recreation; (9) the procurement of funding; and (10) the encouragement of park tourism and related businesses.

The *Parks and Recreation Element* provides a description of the condition and location of the existing parks within the County, anticipated park needs for the future, responsibilities of the Parks and Recreation Commission, park design and maintenance standards, park acquisition and development policies, funding mechanisms, and government cooperation.

Parks within unincorporated areas in the County are divided into the following categories:

- **Limited Park Facility:** Amenities at this type of park are minimal, with one primary function and possibly some accessory uses. This type of park may be any size and is usually located in the open desert area of the County. Examples of this type of parks include marinas, boat launching areas, and trail heads.
- **Neighborhood Park:** These parks are small (usually less than 3.0 acres) and are located within the confines of an unincorporated community and within walking distance of a residential district for ease of access by pedestrians. Typically these parks have two or three amenities, such as playgrounds or other active uses, and landscaped areas for passive, leisurely uses such as light walking or sitting. As these parks are pedestrian-oriented, they usually have only curbside parking. Often, Neighborhood Parks are referred to as Pocket Parks when they are embedded within a residential block. These parks may be maintained by the County or an Assessment District, as is typical for newer subdivisions.
- **Community Park:** Larger than a Neighborhood Park (from 30 to 80 acres), these parks are shared by the entire local community. This type of park is usually entirely within an unincorporated community and typically has a major, active, recreational use such as athletic fields or courts which the entire community uses. Numerous onsite amenities, not usually available at a neighborhood park, such as baseball fields, basketball courts, and larger picnic

areas, are located within a Community Park. These parks are easily accessible by pedestrians, bikes, or by vehicles and typically include small onsite parking facilities.

- **Regional Park:** Outside or inside a community but with ease of access from a major road, these parks are shared by the entire populace of the County. These parks are much like community parks except they are typically larger and are meant to serve the entire County. In addition to sports fields and grassy leisure areas with picnic tables, a regional park is usually distinguished by a water feature such as a pond or lake. Excepting pedestrians from nearby residential areas, Regional Parks usually are accessed by vehicle; hence, they include onsite parking facilities. Regional Parks are typically maintained by the County but may also be maintained by a city or special district.
- **State and Federal Parks:** These parks are maintained by the State or federal government. These parks are typically large pieces of land and may include hundreds of acres under wildlife preserve with designated areas for human use. These parks usually attract visitors from outside the County and typically have outdoor recreational opportunities, with trails for hiking, designated areas for camping and off-highway driving, and wildlife preserves where access is limited or prohibited. These parks are located outside the County farmland area and must be driven to, in order to access. Onsite parking is found at these parks, but usually the parking is unimproved (i.e., without pavement or designated parking stalls).

The following are goals and policies of the *Parks and Recreation Element*:

*Goal:* The County will strive to provide its populace with usable and functional landscaped parks with recreational amenities such as playgrounds and athletic fields, and facilities such as restrooms and ramadas.

*Policy:* In calculating park acreage, the County shall have a gross figure and a net figure. The gross figure shall include all developed and undeveloped parkland. The net figure shall only include improved and developed parkland and shall exclude bodies of water and undeveloped parkland.

*Goal:* The County shall provide 5.0 net acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents.

*Goal:* To achieve the target of 5.0 acres per 1,000 people, the County will actively work to reopen closed parks, improve and/or expand existing parks, and establish new parks.

*Goal:* The County will work to establish a new regional park along McCabe Road.

*Policy:* New development shall include the dedication of 1.0 acre of improved parkland for every 50 housing units (provided directly or as an in-lieu fee).

*Goal:* The County will seek greater cooperation between cities and special districts to ensure adequate funding of joint-use parkland areas.

*Policy:* If the park includes native natural habitat and plant species, those shall be maintained and incorporated within the park to the extent feasible.

*Policy:* To promote water conservation, all vegetation installed shall follow xeriscape principles for reduced total water consumption.

*Goal:* The County shall try to reopen all its parks and acquire new parkland.

### **National Environmental Policy Act**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) that requires federal agencies to consider environmental values in the decision-making process. The federal agencies must consider environmental impacts and consequences of proposed actions and reasonable alternatives that could potentially reduce impacts (USEPA 2014a).

### **California Environmental Quality Act**

CEQA is a State document that is part of the California Code of Regulations. CEQA requires projects to undergo environmental review; depending on the potential effects, a more substantial review may need to be conducted in the form of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). In an EIR, mitigation measures are proposed for any potentially significant impacts in order to reduce the level of impact, and feasible alternatives are considered (CNRA 2014). This EIR has been prepared as a Programmatic EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15168. Completion of the Programmatic EIR would allow future individual renewable energy projects to “tier” off this environmental document. The proposed Project would be implemented on a “project-by-project” basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Future renewable energy projects developed per the proposed Project would need to be reviewed in the context of this Programmatic EIR to determine if additional environmental documentation would be required.

### **Quimby Act**

The 1975 Quimby Act was passed in order to require the provision of parkland and open space for recreational use. The act requires developers to set aside land, donate conservation easements, or pay fees for park improvements. The Quimby Act allows for the constant provision of parks for California communities. The Quimby Act standards adopted in jurisdictions typically require the provision of 3 to 5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents (CDPR 2002). The Quimby Act is the County’s primary means of acquiring park area and open space. The Act is designed to ensure “adequate” provision of parkland and open space through the Quimby Act Standards. Through these standards, the County can require developers to provide land for parks, donate for conservation easements, or pay in-lieu fees for the creation or rehabilitation of recreational facilities.

### **Imperial County General Plan**

The *Land Use Element* of the Imperial County General Plan provides guidance regarding the distribution, general location, and extent of uses for land involving housing, agriculture, business, open space, industry, and public facilities. The *Land Use Element* contains overviews of the County’s specific plan areas including Gateway of the Americas Specific Plan Area, Glamis Specific Plan Area, Holtville Air Strip Specific Plan Area, Mesquite Lake Specific Plan Area, Heber Specific Plan Area, and Wonderstone Aggregate Specific Plan Area. Specific Plans noted in the *Land Use Element* include Rio Bend Specific Plan, Imperial Lakes Specific Plan, McCabe Ranch 2 Specific Plan, Brookfield/101 Ranch Specific Plan, Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan, and River Front Specific Plan.

The *Land Use Element* goals and objectives related to recreation include the following:

*Goal 3:* Achieve balanced economic and residential growth while preserving the unique natural, scenic, and agricultural resources of Imperial County.

*Objective 3.1:* Maintain and improve the quality of life, the protection of property and the public health, safety, and welfare in Imperial County.

*Objective 3.2:* Preserve agriculture and natural resources while promoting diverse economic growth through sound land use planning.

*Objective 3.6:* Recognize and coordinate planning activities as applicable with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the California Desert Conservation Plan.

*Objective 3.7:* Establish a continuing comprehensive long-range planning process for the physical, social, and economic development of the County.

*Objective 3.12:* Plan the County urban areas to have physical features, such as urban green belts, parks, or geographic/topographic features that distinguish one community/city from another to avoid the future bland mega-city such as the Los Angeles basin.

*Goal 4:* Preserve and enhance distinctive historic desert towns and newer communities.

*Objective 4.1:* Preserve and enhance existing urban and rural communities.

*Objective 4.2:* Encourage distinctive community identities.

*Objective 4.3:* Maintain and require compatible land uses within the existing communities.

*Objective 4.4:* Limit the establishment of nonresidential uses in predominantly residential neighborhoods and require effective buffers when appropriate nonresidential uses are proposed.

*Goal 8:* Coordinate local land use planning activities among all local jurisdictions and State and federal agencies.

*Objective 8.1:* Coordinate with federal, State, and municipal agencies when planning for the acquisition and improvement of public parks and assure compatibility with adjacent communities and private property.

*Objective 8.2:* New developments shall provide improvements to meet the added demands for parks and recreational facilities.

*Objective 8.4:* Ensure that all future proposed private and public facilities are adequate to meet expected population growth and the needed additional services around local cities.

*Goal 9:* Identify and preserve significant natural, cultural, and community character resources and the County's air and water quality.

*Objective 9.1:* Preserve as open space those lands containing watersheds, aquifer recharge areas, floodplains, important natural resources, sensitive vegetation, wildlife habitats, historic and prehistoric sites, or lands which are subject to seismic hazards and establish compatible minimum lot sizes.

### **California Desert Conservation Area Plan**

The California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan was originally created by BLM in 1980 to serve as a guide regarding land use management for the desert area. The CDCA covers over 15.2 million acres of desert, including public lands. The goal of the CDCA Plan "...is to provide for the use of public lands, and resources of the California Desert Conservation Area, including economic, educational, scientific, and recreational uses, in a manner which enhances wherever possible—and which does not diminish, on balance—the environmental, cultural, and aesthetic values of the Desert and its productivity..." (BLM 1999).

The CDCA Plan includes a Recreation Element that recognizes the broad range of recreational opportunities that can be found in the desert. Goals found in the Recreation Element include the following:

1. Provide for a wide range of quality recreation opportunities and experiences emphasizing dispersed undeveloped use.
2. Provide a minimum of recreation facilities. Those facilities should emphasize resource protection and visitor safety.
3. Manage recreation use to minimize user conflicts, provide a safe recreation environment, and protect desert resources.
4. Emphasize the use of public information and education techniques to increase public awareness, enjoyment, and sensitivity to desert resources.
5. Adjust management approach to accommodate changing visitor use patterns and preferences.
6. Encourage the use and enjoyment of desert recreation opportunities by special populations and provide facilities to meet the needs of those groups (BLM 1999).

### **California Parklands Act of 1980**

The California Parklands Act of 1980 is included in the California Public Resources Code, Section 5096.141-5096-145. The California Parklands Act recognizes the responsibility of the state to provide recreational opportunities and facilities for the residents of California. According to the California Parklands Act of 1980, "...when there is proper planning and development, parks, beaches, recreation areas and recreational facilities, and historical resources preservation projects contribute not only to a healthy physical and moral environment, but also contribute to the economic betterment of the state, and, therefore, it is in the public interest for the state to acquire, develop, and restore areas for recreation, conservation, and preservation and to aid local governments of the state in acquiring, developing, and restoring such areas as will contribute to the realization of the policy declared in this chapter..."

Overall, the California Parklands Act of 1980 identifies the importance of available parkland and recreational areas throughout the State for use by residents and visitors. The California Parklands Act also recognizes the importance of funding in order to provide new and to improve existing recreational facilities and parkland areas.

#### **4.15.2 Existing Environmental Setting**

Parks and recreation in Imperial County are enhanced by the natural resources of the Sonoran Desert, including the mountains, sandy hills, the Colorado River, and the Salton Sea. Due to the varied terrain throughout the County, abundant opportunities for recreation exist, such as hiking, boating, and off-highway activities. In addition, multiple parks are located within the urban areas of the County.

##### **Parks**

Five parks are operated by the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department (ICPDS). These include Sunbeam Lake Park, Wiest Lake Park, Red Hill Marina Park, Ocotillo Community Park, and Palo Verde Park. These County parks offer a variety of passive and active recreation opportunities, including playground equipment, basketball courts, picnic tables, barbeque grills, campsites, walking trails, boating and fishing opportunities, and open space for passive recreation (ICPDS 2013a). Table 4.15-1 describes the specific amenities at these parks.

Other park facilities not operated by the County include Heber Dunes Park, Pioneer's County Park, Heber Community Park, Salton City Park, Osbourne Park, Seeley Park, two privately managed neighborhood parks in Heber, a neighborhood park in Salton City, the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, Picacho State Recreation Area, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation and Wilderness Area, North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, and Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area (Table 4.15-2)(ICPDS 2013b; BLM 2013b, 2013c; California State Parks 2013). Figure 4.15-1 displays the locations of the parks and recreation areas throughout the County.

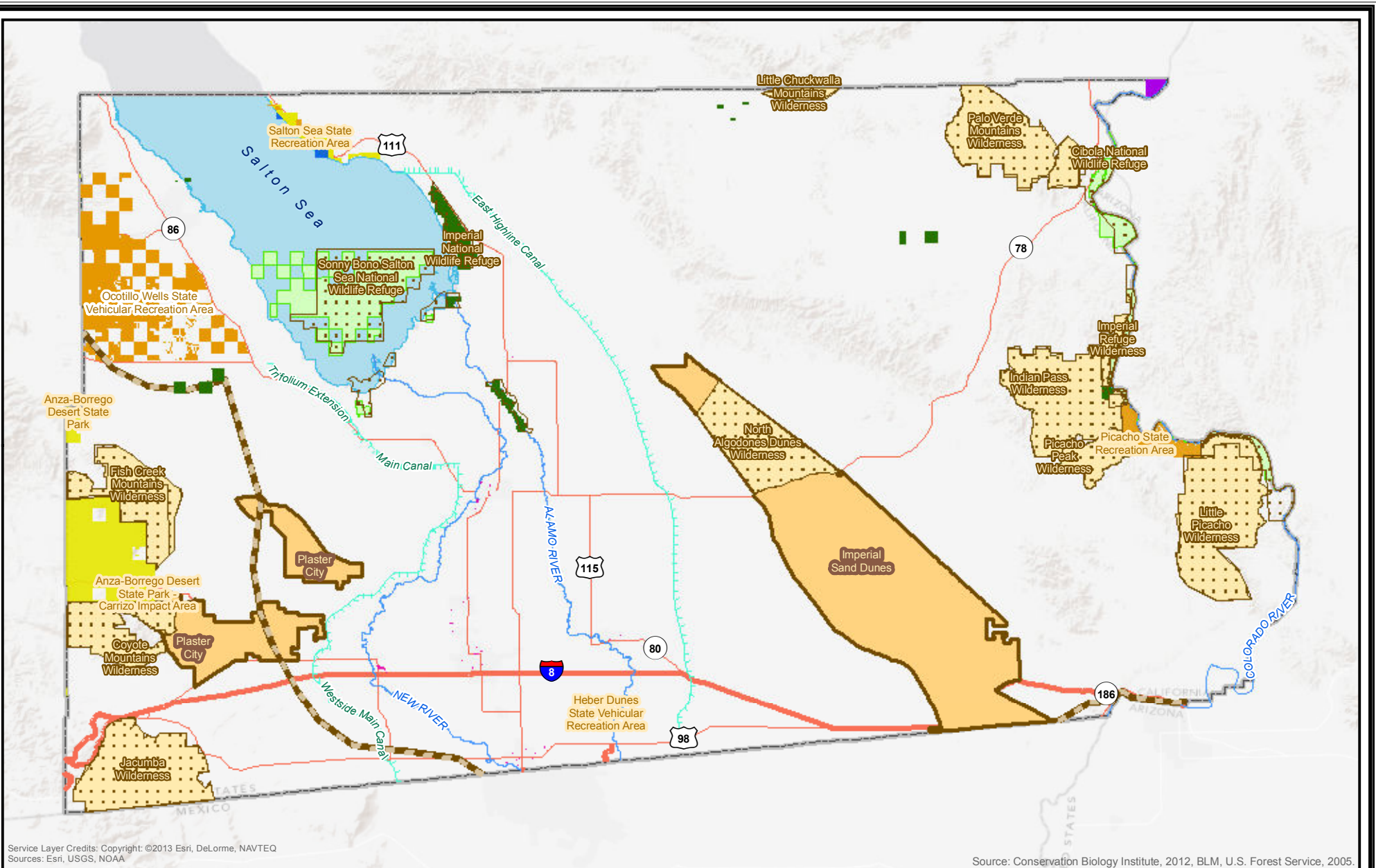
**Table 4.15-1: Imperial County Parks and Recreation**

<b>Park/Recreation Area</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Amenities/Activities</b>
Sunbeam Lake Park	117.0	Small lake and lagoon, picnic tables, barbeque stands, shaded areas, restrooms, fishing, walking trails/paths, jet skiing, and boating (ICPDS 2013b).
Wiest Lake Park	63.0	Lake for fishing, campsites, swimming, boating, jet skiing, barbeque pits, recreation hall, picnic tables, and restrooms with showers (ICPDS 2013b).
Red Hill Marina Park	10.0	RV hookups, camping area, boat launch, picnic tables, and restrooms (ICPDS 2013b).
Ocotillo Community Park		Basketball court, baseball field, walking path, and community center (ICPDS 2013d).
Palo Verde Park	13.6	Boat ramp, restrooms, storage/shade structure (ICPDS 2008c).

**Table 4.15-2: Other Parks and Recreation in Imperial County**

<b>Park/Recreation Area</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Amenities/Activities</b>
Heber Dunes Park (California Department of Parks and Recreation)	323 acres	Off-highway vehicle recreation on the sand dunes within the park, picnic tables, barbeque stands, and restrooms (ICPDS 2013b).
Pioneer's County Park (Imperial County Historical Society)	22 acres	The Pioneers Museum and Cultural Center, outdoor exhibits, a train station building, and restrooms (ICPDS 2013b).
Heber Community Park (Heber Public Utility District)	< 1 acre	Baseball field on the edge of a residential development (ICPDS 2013d).
Salton City Park (Salton Community Services District)	11 acres	Picnic tables, barbeque areas, a basketball court, a swimming pool, restrooms, and a covered playground area (ICPDS 2013d).
Osbourne Park (Bureau of Land Management)		Acts as an access point to the Imperial Sand Dunes area for off-highway vehicles; the park has a small shade structure with a picnic table and a storage room (ICPDS 2008c).
Heber Neighborhood Parks (privately maintained within residential developments)	< 1 acre each	Landscaped areas and playground equipment (ICPDS 2008c).
Salton City Neighborhood Park	1 acre	Picnic tables and restrooms (ICPDS 2008c)
Salton Sea State Recreation Area	14 miles of shoreline	Camping, boating, fishing, water skiing, kayaking, birdwatching, photography, and hiking (CDPR 2013a).
Picacho State Recreation Area	Along 8 miles of the Colorado River	Boating, hiking, fishing, camping along the Colorado River (CDPR 2013b).
Anza-Borrego Desert State Park	Approximately 600,000 acres	Visitor Center, wildflower season, hiking, camping, and interactive programs and events (CDPR 2013c).
Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation and Wilderness Area (Glamis), Bureau of Land Management	Approximately 214,700 acres	Off-roading, hiking, camping, photography, passive recreation, Approximately 1.1 million visitors in 2012; and an average of 1.3 million visitors per year over the last 10 years (BLM 2013b).
North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, Bureau of Land Management	25,895 acres	Primary and secondary dunes in one of the largest dune complexes in the continent, plants and wildlife (BLM 2013c).
Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area	85,000 acres	Desert area open for off-highway vehicle recreation, includes a visitor center, self-guided tours, and multiple geologic points of interest (California State Parks 2013).





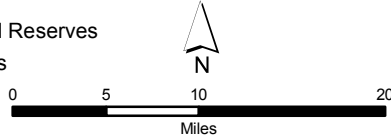
Service Layer Credits: Copyright: ©2013 Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ  
Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA

Source: Conservation Biology Institute, 2012, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, 2005.

**Legend**

- City Park
- County Park
- National Recreation Area
- Park
- Regional Park
- State Park
- State Recreation Area
- Federal Off-highway Vehicle Area
- Documented Recreational Trails
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge
- BLM NLCS Wilderness Areas
- CDFW Wildlife Areas & Ecological Reserves
- USGS Wilderness & Wildlife Areas

**Figure 4.15-1**  
Imperial County Geothermal/Alternative Energy  
and Transmission Element Update PEIR  
Parks and Recreation Areas



## Trails

Multiple trails are present within Imperial County; some traverse long distances while others are smaller scenic loops. Table 4.15-3 lists some of the major trails within the County. Figure 4.15-1 displays the locations of the documented trails within the County but includes only some of the trails listed below.

**Table 4.15-3: Imperial County Designated Trails**

Trail	Length	Amenities/Recreational Opportunities
Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail	1,200 miles total (from Nogales, Arizona, to the San Francisco Bay Area)	De Anza Historical Marker, Historical Expedition Campsites, marked trail sections, and hiking or biking along the trail (NPS 2013)
Bradshaw Trail	70-mile-long graded trail (mostly in southern Riverside County, with small portion in Imperial County)	Views of Chuckwalla Bench and Orocopia, Chuckwalla, and Mule mountains; used as a historic overland stage route, currently used for hiking or off-road vehicle usage (BLM 2013d)
Ironwood Nature Trail	4.5 miles roundtrip	Visitor Center, views of the Salton Sea, nearby swimming area, 30-stop nature trail (CDPR 2013e)
Rock Hill Trail	2 miles roundtrip	Walking trail through multiple habitats, nearby picnic area (USFWS 2013a)
Michael Hardenberger Trail	½-mile trail	Walking loop around a freshwater pond that provides nesting habitat for the endangered Yuma clapper rail (USFWS 2013a)

### 4.15.3 Significance Criteria

The thresholds for significance of impacts for the analysis are based on the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. Consistent with the CEQA Guidelines and the professional judgment of the County’s staff and environmental consultants, the proposed Project would result in a significant impact on the environment if it would:

- Increase the use of the existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated
- Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse effect on the environment

### 4.15.4 Impacts and Mitigation

**REC-1: Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated**

#### Construction and Operation

As described in Section 4.13.4 above, the proposed Project would be limited to construction of future renewable energy facilities within the proposed overlay zones and would not construct any new housing that would result in an increase in population that could increase use of existing park or recreation facilities. Renewable energy facilities constructed under the proposed Project would meet future local and regional demand for power and would not generate excessive energy capacity that would induce

population growth. Development of future renewable energy facilities under the proposed Project may require some specialized workers from outside the region during both construction and operation; however, construction of future renewable energy facilities associated with the proposed Project would occur over a long period of time, and it is unlikely that a large number of future facilities would be developed concurrently. Consequently, it is unlikely that a substantial number of construction personnel would relocate to Imperial County at one time and thereby increase use of existing park or recreation facilities. Similarly, the number of permanent workers with specialized skills relocating to Imperial County for operation of future facilities would be relatively low and would not increase use of existing park or recreation facilities. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant, and no mitigation measures would be required.

**REC-2: Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse effect on the environment**

**Construction and Operation**

The proposed Project would be limited to construction of future renewable energy facilities within the proposed overlay zones and would not construct any recreation facilities. As described in Section 4.13.4 above, the number of new workers required for construction and operation of future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would be relatively low and would not require construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse effect on the environment. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant, and no mitigation measures would be required.

**4.15.5 Cumulative Impacts**

Implementation of the proposed Project would not result in cumulative impacts on recreation resources. As described in Section 4.15.4 above, impacts on recreational facilities associated with the proposed Project would be less than significant, and no mitigation measures would be required. Proposed and reasonably foreseeable projects within the County that would increase the use of existing recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities would require environmental documentation identifying potential impacts and mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a level less than significant prior to receiving approval from the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department. Therefore, cumulative impacts on recreational facilities would be less than significant.

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