

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PREFACE

The County of Imperial is rich in natural and cultural resources. The landscape is dominated by native desert habitat and stark topographic features. Prime soils, Colorado River water, and year-round sunlight facilitate productive agricultural operations. Natural mineral resources are extracted for commercial purposes. The wide expanses of open space are useful for military maneuvers and recreational activities.

Population growth and subsequent development have intensified the rate of resource use and regional environmental degradation. Urban expansion is decreasing the amount of land available for agriculture and mineral extraction. The pollution of air and water has diminished regional aesthetics, limited recreational opportunities, and threatened public health. Native desert biological communities are being impacted by accelerated human activity in Imperial Valley.

The Conservation and Open Space Element is the official conservation guide for all decision makers including the County Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, Airport Land Use Commission, and various Departments in addition to other Federal, State, or County governmental decision-making bodies. It shall also serve as a guide to the private sector, business community, investors, and developers in the County.

This Conservation and Open Space Element is concerned with the following environmental resources:

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Mineral Resources
- Regional Aesthetics
- Air Quality and Climate Change
- Open Space and Recreation

Separate elements have been prepared for the conservation of water, agricultural, and renewable energy resources. These three types of resources are critical to the long-term economic stability of Imperial County. In addition, the issues surrounding these resources are particularly complex. The Water Element, Agricultural Element, and Renewable Energy and Transmission Element contain focused goals and objectives, and an implementation program specific to each resource.

The implementation of this Element does not negate the environmental review process required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). While a proposed project may conform to the Conservation and Open Space Element, it may still be subject to environmental impact assessment pursuant to CEQA and NEPA. This

Element supports environmental review for proposed projects in addition to determining the extent that proposed projects promote the Element goals and objectives.

B. PURPOSE OF THE ELEMENT

The County is charged with the responsibility of conserving environmental and cultural resources while encouraging economic development and growth. The Conservation and Open Space Element identifies goals and policies to ensure the managed use of environmental resources. The goals and policies are also designed to prevent limiting the range of resources available to future generations.

The purpose of the Conservation and Open Space Element is to:

- Promote the protection, maintenance, and use the County's natural and cultural resources with particular emphasis on scarce resources and resources that require special control and management.
- Prevent the wasteful exploitation, destruction, and neglect of the State's natural and cultural resources.
- Recognize that natural resources must be maintained for their ecological value as well as for the direct benefit to the public.
- Protect open space for the conservation of natural and cultural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, and public health and safety.

C. APPLICABILITY

The Conservation and Open Space Element applies to all unincorporated land within the County of Imperial. Each incorporated City must adopt its own general plan and subsequent conservation and open space elements. It is the intent of the County to be consistent and supportive of complementary plans of incorporated areas. Since natural and cultural resources characteristically cross political boundaries, planning for the use and conservation of resources requires cooperation between various governmental divisions and departments. When an area falls under more than one jurisdiction, each should consider the Conservation and Open Space Element goals and programs of the other jurisdiction when making decisions. All public and private projects are subject to this Element.

It is not the intent of this Element to impose any restriction on the use of any private land which would constitute a taking or a damaging of property for public use. In the event that the County Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, or an official of the County determines that the application of any provision of this Element to any private property constitutes such a taking, the restrictions should be modified or waived to the extent necessary to avoid the taking or damaging.

It is specifically not the intent of this Element to preclude the placement, construction, or the use of one single-family residence on any parcel that existed as a legal parcel of record at the time of the adoption of the Element, and no individual or public safety hazard or danger would result from such placement or construction. Furthermore, the inventory of conservation issues and subsequent policy discussed in this Element are not intended to be all inclusive and may be amended when additional information or studies become available or are required.