

# 1. Introduction

The County of Imperial (County) received a grant from the California Energy Commission's Renewable Energy and Conservation Planning Grant Program to update the 1993 *Conservation and Open Space Element* (COSE) (ICPDS 1993) of the Imperial County General Plan (ICPDS 2009) and to perform public outreach to inform the policies and programs and to complete the environmental document required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This effort is required to ensure that the General Plan can meet the needs for future development while remaining consistent with identified land use and environmental goals. Much of the information used in this report was presented in the Renewable Energy and Transmission Element Update, Baseline Environmental Inventory Report, prepared by the Chambers Group, Inc. This information was updated and revised as appropriate. The COSE will be designed to be consistent with the new County of Imperial Renewable Energy and Transmission Element which was also completed under a California Energy Commission Grant.

As noted on the County's General Plan website:

*The Conservation Element and Open Space Element provides detailed plans and measures for the preservation and management of biological and cultural resources, soils, minerals, energy, regional aesthetics, air quality, and open space. The purpose of the Conservation and Open Space Element is to promote the protection, maintenance, and use of the County's natural resources with particular emphasis on scarce resources, and to prevent wasteful exploitation, destruction, and neglect of the State's natural resources. Additionally, the purpose of this Element is to recognize that natural resources must be maintained for their ecological value for the direct benefit to the public, protect open space for the preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, and for public health and safety.*

The regulatory environment and existing conditions of each of the following topics were analyzed to determine the potential opportunities and constraints to planning and developing conservation and open space in Imperial County. The locations of Imperial County and of the land under federal and state jurisdictions within the County are shown on Figure 1. This report focuses on the following environmental areas:

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

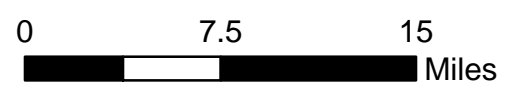
This baseline inventory report serves as an essential component for updating the 1993 *Conservation and Open Space Element* and other elements of the General Plan and for preparing the CEQA review to allow identification of potential future conservation and open space County lands that are consistent with the General Plan.

This report is being prepared at the same time as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California Energy Commission (CEC), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has been preparing the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). The

DRECP is a landscape-scale renewable energy and conservation planning effort covering more than 22 million acres in the California desert including almost all of Imperial County. It consists of three components: a BLM Land Use Plan Amendment, a USFWS General Conservation Plan, and a CDFW Natural Communities Conservation Plan.

The DRECP uses best available science to identify specific areas that may accommodate up to 20,000 megawatts of power from renewable energy projects and associated transmission over the next 25 years. The plan also identifies conservation areas, sensitive plant and wildlife species, and a strategy for their management into the future. It provides insight into areas the state and federal agencies consider important to conservation in the County. While the County *Conservation and Open Space Element* is independent of the DRECP work, it relies on the data provided in the DRECP Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement and Land Use Plan Amendment published in September 2014 where appropriate.

It should be noted that this baseline inventory report is a “snapshot” of current conditions.



Imperial County Boundary  
 State or Federal Lands

Figure 1

Imperial County  
Location and Vicinity Map