

2.6 Open Space and Recreation

This section discusses the existing open space and recreational resources in Imperial County. The regulatory environment and existing conditions have been assessed and analyzed to determine associated constraints and opportunities for siting potential alternative energy sources and updating the *Conservation and Open Space Element* for the County.

2.6.1 Terminology

The following is a summary of recreation terminology discussed in this section:

- **Environmental Impact Statement** – A document required by the federal NEPA for major projects or legislative proposals using federal money and significantly affecting the environment. An EIS describes the environmental implications of a project and lists alternative actions. The report informs decision-makers and the public of the alternatives that would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the environment.
- **Environmental Impact Report** – A document required under CEQA that assesses a proposed project's impacts on the environment and proposes mitigation measures.

2.6.2 Regulatory Environment

The following is a list of laws, policies, and plans relevant to recreation.

Federal

- National Environmental Policy Act
- National Park Service Organic Act
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)

State

- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
- California Desert Conservation Area Plan
- California Parklands Act of 1980
- Quimby Act (California Government Code Section 66477)

Local

- Imperial County General Plan, *Parks and Recreation Element*

2.6.3 Existing Conditions

Parks and recreation in Imperial County are enhanced by the natural resources of the Sonoran Desert, including the mountains, sandy hills, Colorado River, and Salton Sea. Because of the varied terrain throughout the County, abundant opportunities for recreation exist, such as hiking, boating, and off-highway activities. Many of these opportunities are located on land under federal or state jurisdiction, but multiple smaller parks are located in the urban areas of the County.

Open Space

Much of Imperial County is open space. Open space is considered any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to preservation of natural resources, outdoor recreation, and protection of the public health and safety (ICPDS 1993). The state and federal governments manage large amounts of open space in Imperial County, the largest being the California Desert Conservation Area under BLM jurisdiction. Many of the areas in the California Desert Conservation Area are managed either for the preservation of natural resources or for outdoor recreation or both, including a number of wilderness areas shown on Figure 2.6-1 and a number of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. As part of the DRECP, the BLM has identified acreage in Imperial County that it would designate for conservation, as part of either the National Landscape Conservation System or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (see Figure 2.2-7 in subsection 2.2). While these designations would not eliminate all uses in the Conservation Area, they would ensure the areas remain primarily open space.

In addition, numerous open space areas are managed by the State or a natural resource agency such as the USFWS or the CDFW to protect recreation and natural resources. In general, the majority of Imperial County outside of the Imperial Valley and the military lands is dedicated to open space and recreation.

Specific open space areas dedicated to natural resource protection in Imperial County include (BLM et al. 2014):

- Jacumba Wilderness (BLM)
- Fish Creek Mountain Wilderness (BLM)
- Little Picacho Wilderness (BLM)
- Indian Pass Wilderness (BLM)
- Little Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness (BLM)
- Imperial Wildlife Area (CDFW)
- Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS)
- East Mesa ACEC (BLM)
- Lake Cahuilla ACEC (BLM)
- Pilot Knob ACEC (BLM)
- San Sebastian Marsh/San Felipe Creek ACEC (BLM)
- West Mesa ACEC (BLM)
- Coyote Mountain Wilderness (BLM)
- North Algodones Dunes Wilderness (BLM)
- Picacho Peak Wilderness (BLM)
- Palo Verde Mountain Wilderness (BLM)
- San Felipe Creek Ecological Reserve (CDFW)
- Coyote Mountains Fossil Site ACEC (BLM)
- Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (California State Parks)
- Indian Pass ACEC (BLM)
- North Algodones Dunes ACEC (BLM)
- Plank Road ACEC (BLM)
- Singer Geoglyphs ACEC (BLM)
- Yuha Basin ACEC (BLM)

Specific open space areas dedicated to recreation are described below. There is one Special Recreation Management Area on BLM-managed land in Imperial County: the Imperial Sand Dunes Special Recreation Management Area. These areas are land units where recreation and visitor services are the primary resource management consideration and specific management is required to protect recreation opportunities. This area is open to off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding, backpacking, camping, road bicycling, hiking, equestrian use, photography, picnicking, and wildlife view (BLM et al. 2014).

Parks

The Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department (ICPDS) operates five parks: 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, barbecue grills, campsites, walking trails,

boating and fishing opportunities, and open space for passive recreation (ICPDS 1993). Table 2.6-1 describes the specific amenities at these parks.

Table 2.6-1. Imperial County Parks and Recreation

Park/Recreation Area	Acres	Amenities/Activities
Sunbeam Lake Park	117	Small lake and lagoon, picnic tables, barbecue stands, shaded areas, restrooms, fishing, swimming, jet skiing, and boating
Wiest Lake Park	63	Lake for fishing, campsites, barbecue pits, recreation hall, picnic tables, and restrooms with showers
Red Hill Marina Park	10	Recreational vehicle (RV) hookups, camping area, boat launch, picnic tables, and restrooms
Ocotillo Community Park		Basketball court, baseball field, walking path, and community center
Palo Verde Park	13.6	Boat ramp, restrooms, storage structure

Source: Chambers Group 2014

Other park facilities not operated by the County are listed in Table 2.6-2. Figure 2.6-1 shows the locations of parks, recreation, and open space throughout the County.

Table 2.6-2. Other Parks and Recreation in Imperial County

Park/Recreation Area	Area	Amenities/Activities
Plaster City Off-Highway Vehicle Area (BLM)	41,000 acres	Off-highway vehicle recreation area over a variety of terrain
Superstition Mountains (BLM)	13,000 acres	Open area with sand dunes, rocky trails, and hard pack desert terrain; OHVs are not allowed on Wheeler Road
Devil's Canyon Trail (BLM)	Approximately 3 miles	Rugged trail that requires a Special Recreation Permit for non-competitive motorized vehicle use
Arroyo Salado (BLM)	7,200 acres	OHV recreation and primitive camping
Heber Dunes Park (leased by the County to California Department of Parks and Recreation)	323 acres	Off-highway vehicle recreation on the sand dunes in the park, picnic tables, barbecue stands, and restrooms
Pioneer's County Park (Imperial County Historical Society)	22 acres	The Pioneers Museum and Cultural Center, outdoor exhibits, a train station building, and restrooms
Heber Community Park (Heber Public Utility District)	<1 acre	Baseball field on the edge of a residential development
Salton City Park (Salton Community Services District)	11 acres	Picnic tables, barbecue areas, a basketball court, a swimming pool, restrooms, and a covered playground area
Osbourne Park (BLM)		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
Heber Neighborhood Parks (privately maintained in residential developments)	<1 acre each	Landscaped areas and playground equipment
Martin Flora Park (Salton Community Services District)	1 acre	Picnic tables and restrooms
Salton Sea State Recreation Area	14 miles of shoreline	Camping, boating, fishing, water skiing, kayaking, birdwatching, photography, and hiking
Picacho State Recreation Area	Along 8 miles of the Colorado River	Boating, hiking, fishing, camping along the Colorado River

Table 2.6-2. Other Parks and Recreation in Imperial County

Park/Recreation Area	Area	Amenities/Activities
Anza-Borrego Desert State Park	Approximately 600,000 acres (only a portion located in Imperial County)	Visitor Center, wildflower season, hiking, camping, and interactive programs and events
Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation and Wilderness Area (Glamis) includes the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness (25,895 acres) (BLM)	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
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

Source: Chambers Group 2014; BLM 2010b, 2014b; BLM et al. 2014

Trails

Multiple trails are present in Imperial County; some traverse long distances, while others are smaller scenic loops. Table 2.6-3 lists some of the major trails in the County.

Table 2.6-3. 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
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
Ironwood Nature Trail	4.5 miles round trip	Visitor Center, views of the Salton Sea, nearby swimming area, 30-stop nature trail
Rock Hill Trail	2 miles round trip	Walking trail through multiple habitats, nearby picnic area
Michael Hardenberger Trail	½-mile trail	Walking loop around a freshwater pond that provides nesting habitat for the endangered Yuma clapper rail

Source: Chambers Group 2014

2.6.4 Constraints and Opportunities

This section discusses the potential constraints due to recreation regulatory requirements and existing conditions and potential opportunities for the COSE.

2.6.4.1 Constraints Due to Regulatory Requirements

Federal Land Policy and Management Act

Much of the County is under management of the BLM working under the confines of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The BLM is mandated under this act to allow a variety of uses on their land and specifically to provide multiple-use and sustained-yield management of desert resources. Uses of these resources can diminish conservation and open space.

Imperial County General Plan

The Imperial County General Plan considers the County's physical and cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, and business climate. It provides a balance of land use policies and programs that seek to maintain the "quality of life" in the region. It must balance the desire for conservation and open space with the need for economic development, public infrastructure needs, and social concerns. This balance can result in targeting areas for development that might otherwise be appropriate for conservation and open space.

2.6.4.2 Constraints Due to Existing Conditions

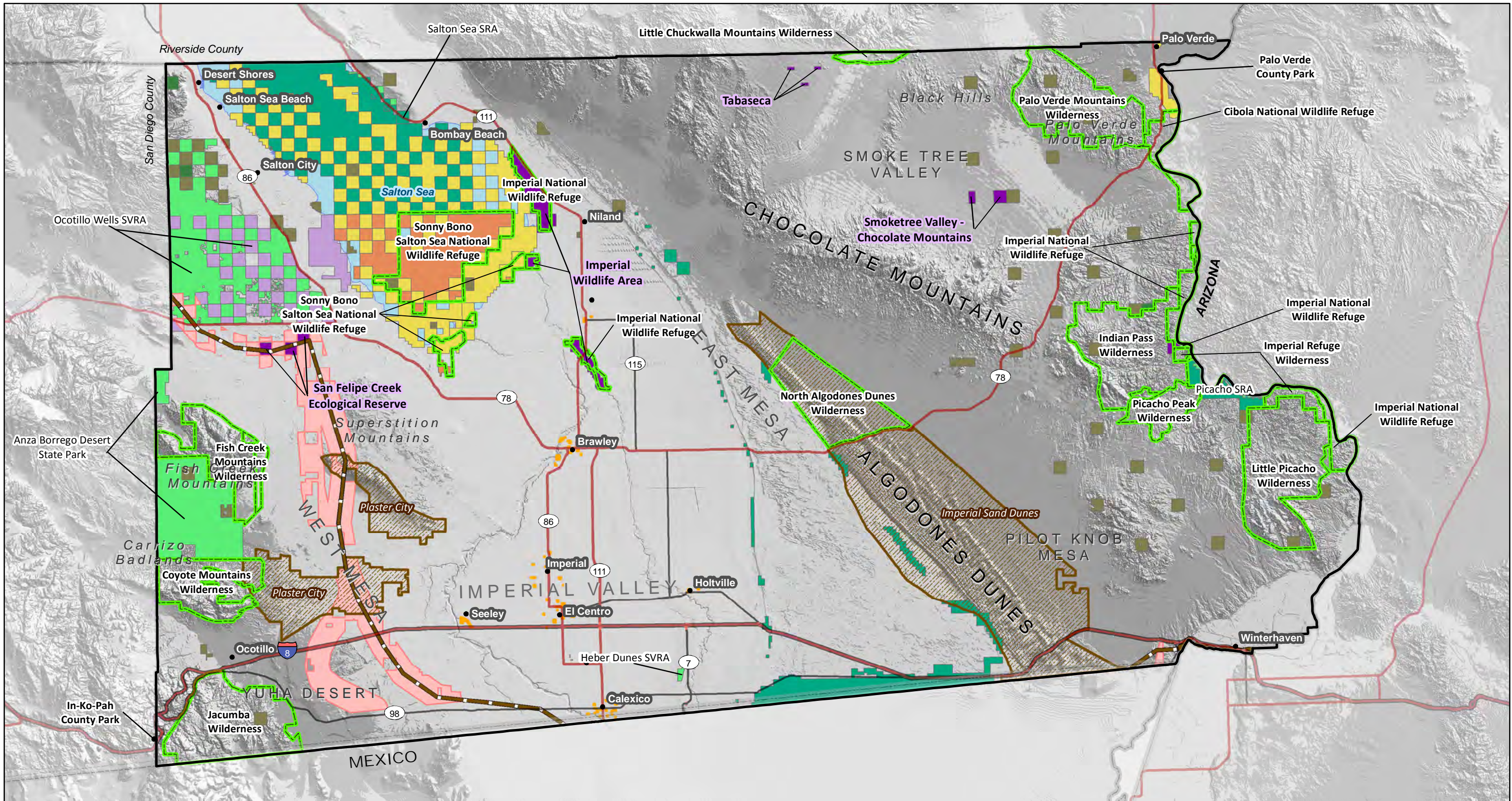
Many of the areas that could be targeted for open space and recreation are not on lands under County jurisdiction. Much of the areas under County jurisdiction are targeted for agriculture or development, although some smaller areas can be appropriate for local recreation.

Proper buffers should be provided in areas where views are part of the recreational value of the park or open space area. This includes the recreational facilities mentioned above, including the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation and Wilderness Area (Glamis), Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, and North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, among others.

2.6.4.3 Opportunities

Land under County jurisdiction primarily consists of the urban areas that are actively used for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes as well as areas under agricultural production and renewable energy development. Open space and recreational resources are limited, particularly in the Imperial Valley. However, as noted in the County General Plan *Parks and Recreation Element*, the County has established a goal to actively work to reopen closed parks, improve and/or expand existing parks, and establish new parks. These goals provide opportunities in Imperial Valley for smaller parks near to residences.

The County also has an opportunity to target private inholdings on lands under federal or state jurisdiction for open space or recreation. For example, the County could designate several parcels in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area as open space. In addition, the Imperial Irrigation District is currently in the process of coordinating the preparation of a HCP/NCCP with CDFW and USFWS, which also may be an opportunity for open space designations.



	Major Highways	Imperial County Boundary	Federal Off-highway Vehicle Area		County Parks	US Bureau of Land Management
	Highways	Juan Bautista de Anza Trail	Wildlife	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Non-Governmental Organization	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Major Roads	BLM Trail Areas			California Department of Parks and Recreation	Other State	Bureau of Reclamation
				City Parks	Special District	

0 7.5 15 Miles Source: CPAD, USGS, NPS

Figure 2.6-1

Imperial County
Recreation and Open Space Areas