

**IMPERIAL COUNTY  
CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE  
ELEMENT  
INITIAL STUDY/ NEGATIVE DECLARATION**

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IMPERIAL COUNTY  
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
801 MAIN STREET  
EL CENTRO, CA 92243

**OCTOBER 2015**

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# **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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This document is an Initial Study that provides justification for a Negative Declaration pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for Imperial County's *Conservation and Open Space Element* (proposed project or Element). The proposed project consists of an update to the existing *Conservation and Open Space Element* (1993, as amended). This effort is required to ensure that the General Plan can balance the needs for future development and conservation efforts while remaining consistent with other County land use and environmental goals, policies, and programs. The Element serves as the primary policy statement for the conservation of the natural and cultural resources and open spaces of Imperial County.

It should be noted that the Element does not include any specific development proposals, land use or zoning changes, or other changes to the way the County processes future development proposals. While future discretionary development proposals will be evaluated for consistency with the goals, objectives, policies, and programs contained in the Element, they will also be subject to CEQA review as they currently are.

The Initial Study and Negative Declaration is a public document to be used by Imperial County, acting as the CEQA lead agency, to determine whether the proposed project may have a significant effect on the environment. If the lead agency finds substantial evidence that any aspect of the project, either individually or cumulatively, may have a significant effect on the environment that cannot be mitigated, regardless of whether the overall effect of the project is adverse or beneficial, the lead agency is required to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR).

If the County finds no substantial evidence that the proposed project or any of its aspects may cause a significant impact on the environment, a Negative Declaration is to be prepared with a written statement describing the reasons why the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment and therefore why it does not require the preparation of an EIR.

The vehicle for substantiating a Negative Declaration is the Initial Study Checklist. Based on the CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, the County's checklist includes 17 environmental topic areas and associated queries that the proposed project is evaluated against. For each question on the checklist, one of four boxes is checked: "no impact," "less than significant impact," "less than significant impact with mitigation incorporated," or "potentially significant impact." Substantial evidence for each determination is provided in discussion form for each topic.

Completion of the checklist (contained in Chapter 3.0 of this document) resulted in all determinations for the proposed project being "less than significant impact." All future land use decisions that meet the definition of a project under CEQA must be analyzed and potential environmental impacts disclosed to the public. Where projects are found to result in potential for environmental impacts, feasible mitigation measures must be identified and implemented or an alternative project adopted that lessens the impacts while still achieving the primary project goals. The updated Element would not result in changes to any of these processes or detract from their effectiveness. Rather, the goals, objectives, policies, and programs within the Element would serve as the guiding principles for the preservation and conservation of sensitive resources and open space in Imperial County.

The Element was specifically crafted to ensure the future conservation of open space and the preservation of sensitive natural and cultural resources in the County. The Element specifically addresses biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, mineral resources, regional aesthetics, air quality and climate change, and open space and recreation. All of the goals, objectives, policies, and programs within the Element were developed to protect and enhance these important resources for future generations. Together, they help ensure that conservation, preservation, and enhancement of natural and cultural resources are focal points in the evaluation and decision-making process for future development proposals and land use planning.

Given the above factors, the proposed project does not have the potential to result in direct, indirect, or cumulatively considerable significant adverse impacts to the environment and meets the conditions specified in CEQA for a Negative Declaration.

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## **2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

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### 2.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### PROPOSED PROJECT

The entirety of the *Conservation and Open Space Element* (proposed project or Element) constitutes the project description. Accordingly, it is included as **Appendix A** and is considered a necessary companion to the summary description of the proposed project contained in this chapter.

Imperial County received a grant from the California Energy Commission to update the 1993 *Conservation and Open Space Element* of the Imperial County General Plan. This effort is required to ensure that the General Plan can meet the needs for future development while remaining consistent with other land use and environmental goals. The General Plan is the guiding document for land use decision making in the County. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is the official conservation guide for all County decision-makers, including the County Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and Airport Land Use Commission. It also serves as a guide to the private sector, business community, investors, and developers in the County. It should be noted that the Element does not include any specific development proposals, land use or zoning changes, or other changes to the way the County processes future development proposals. While future discretionary development proposals will be evaluated for consistency with the goals, objectives, policies, and programs contained in the Element, they will also be subject to CEQA review, as they currently are.

Two mandatory elements of a General Plan are addressed in the County's *Conservation and Open Space Element*, namely, conservation (Conservation Element—Government Code Sections 65302(d) and Public Resources Code Sections 2762 and 2763) and open space (Open Space Element—Government Code Sections 65302(e) and 65560, et seq. and Public Resources Code Section 5076). Together, the *Conservation and Open Space Element* is concerned with the following environmental resources:

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

The Element's main goals are to promote the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of the environmental resources listed above with a particular emphasis on scarce or sensitive resources or resources that require special control or management. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is adopted to prevent wasteful exploitation of natural resources and ensure they are kept in thoughtful stewardship for future generations.

Separate elements have been prepared for the conservation of water, agricultural resources, and renewable energy resources. These three types of resources are critical to the long-term

## 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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economic stability of Imperial County. In addition, the issues surrounding these resources are particularly complex. The *Water Element*, *Parks and Recreation Element*, *Agricultural Element*, and *Renewable Energy and Transmission Element* contain focused goals and objectives, and an implementation program specific to each resource. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to give focus to specific resource areas, while overall being consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and programs in these other elements, as well as the remaining elements of the County's General Plan.

### EXISTING SETTING

Much of the physical setting information used in this Initial Study is incorporated by reference from the *Baseline Environmental Inventory Report, Imperial County Conservation and Open Space Element Update* (Aspen Environmental Group 2015). The report is included as **Appendix B** and is considered a necessary companion to the summary description for the physical setting of Imperial County. This section of the Initial Study is intended to provide a summary of the physical conditions that are most relevant to the environmental evaluation of the Element.

Imperial County extends over 4,597 square miles between Riverside County to the north, Mexico to the south, San Diego County to the west, and Arizona to the east. The County has diverse and abundant scenic visual resources such as deserts, mountains, the Salton Sea, and dunes. The deserts of Imperial County are found in Yuha Desert, West Mesa, lower Borrego Valley, East Mesa, and Pilot Knob Mesa. Cultural features in the Yuha Desert include large earth sculptures, or geoglyphs, constructed by prehistoric Native Americans.

Mountains are a significant visual resource in Imperial County. The eastern foothills of the Peninsular Range run along the southwest side of the County. These foothills include the In-Ko-Pah or Jacumba Mountains, Coyote Mountains, and Fish Creek Mountains. The Superstition Mountains and Superstition Hills, located in West Mesa southeast of the lower Borrego Valley and west of Westmorland and Brawley, are visible looking north from Interstate 8 (I-8) west of El Centro and from State Route (SR) 86 between El Centro and the Salton Sea.

The Salton Sea is located in the northwestern portion of the County and extends into Riverside County. The Salton Sea has been sustained by agricultural drainage from the Imperial, Coachella, and Mexicali valleys; rainfall; storm runoff from the surrounding mountains; and groundwater inflow.

The Salton Sea fluctuates in size and capacity but is currently about 35 miles long and 15 miles wide, has a surface area of 376 square miles, and contains about 7.5 million acre-feet of water. Water levels at the Salton Sea have dropped from a highstand surface elevation of 227 feet below sea level to the present elevation at 235 feet below sea level due to reduced water inflow. As inflows to the Salton Sea continue to decrease, the shallow perimeter areas of the lakebed are exposed to the dry, desert winds, creating occasionally severe dust storms that contribute to air quality concerns in the County. While water levels at the Salton Sea have already dropped 8 feet from its highstand surface elevation, some future water level projections have reported an expectation that the lake's water level will fall an additional 3 to 20 feet in coming years because of drought conditions, rapid evaporation, and decreased amount of runoff as a result of increased water conservation.

A diverse range of biological resources can be found in Imperial County. Of the total 2,942,080 acres in the County, approximately 215,220 are designated as sensitive habitat. Sensitive vegetation and habitats are a conservation priority for local, State, and Federal regulatory agencies because they have limited distribution and support a variety of sensitive plants and

wildlife. The County supports over 400 species of wildlife that are dependent on these vegetation communities, including agriculture, which provides important foraging habitat for multiple birds and small mammals. Currently 23 wildlife species are listed or are candidates for listing under the State or Federal Endangered Species Acts.

Many locations in Imperial County are also identified as having important prehistoric, historic, and Native American cultural resources. To date, 14,860 prehistoric and historic period resources have been recorded in Imperial County. Of those, 12,398 are archaeological sites and the rest are either isolates or historic structures. Because the entire County has not been surveyed, additional sensitive prehistoric and historic period cultural resource are likely to exist throughout Imperial County. Apart from indigenous culture, Imperial County also has history from Spanish colonization, known as the Spanish period (1769 to 1821), the Mexican period (1821 to 1848), and the American period (1848 to present). Identified historic period built-environment and archaeological resources represent a range of activities including, but not limited to, mining, transportation, and ranching/homesteading and are represented throughout the County.

Agriculture is another prominent feature in the County, with approximately 538,326 acres, or 19 percent, of the total land classified as farmland. Lands classified as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance, and Unique Farmland are concentrated in an approximately 30-mile-wide column near the center of the County, extending from the southern edge of the Salton Sea to the United States-Mexico border.

With regard to geologic conditions, the County is underlain by three natural geomorphic provinces: the Peninsular Ranges, the Colorado Desert, and the Mojave Desert. Each of these provinces is a naturally defined geologic region that displays a distinct landscape or landform with defining features based on geology, faults, topographic relief, and climate. Existing conditions for geologic activity in Imperial County include earthquakes, the principal geologic activity affecting public safety in the County. The County contains several major active faults, including the Brawley Fault Zone, the Coyote Creek Fault and the Elmore Ranch Fault (in the San Jacinto Fault Zone), the Elsinore Fault, the Imperial Fault, the Laguna Salada Fault (in the Elsinore Fault Zone), the San Andreas Fault, the Superstition Hills Fault, and the Wienert Fault (in the San Jacinto Fault Zone).

Various types of soils are found in Imperial County. Soils in the County are formed by stratified alluvial deposits. A large portion of the County includes fine-textured lakebed sediments, and approximately 28 soil types are found throughout Imperial County. The clay material deposited in riverine environments during the formation of the Colorado River delta terrace is the source of Holtville and Imperial soils. Niland soils occur in clayey lakebed. Several large gullies have formed from runoff water leading into the Salton Sea.

A number of mineral resources in Imperial County are currently being extracted. Mineral deposits are an important natural resource that contribute to the economic development of the State and the County and provide essential raw materials for construction projects throughout the region. Several issues influence the extraction of mineral deposits in Imperial County, including the location of geologic deposition, the potential for impacts to the environment, and land use conflicts. As a result, the extraction of mineral resources is limited to a relatively small number of sites throughout the County.

Air quality in the County is affected by various sources, including vehicular traffic, agricultural operations and burning, electric generating facilities, other light industrial facilities, and blowing dust. Air quality in the County is also affected by air pollutants transported from the more urbanized South Coast Air Basin to the northwest, the San Diego County Air Basin to the west,

## 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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Mexico to the south, and Arizona to the east. Similarly, wind blowing in a northeast direction transports pollutants from Mexicali into Calexico.

Air quality in the County is under the jurisdiction of the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (ICAPCD). The ICAPCD is the local air quality agency and shares responsibility with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) for ensuring that State and Federal ambient air quality standards are achieved and maintained in Imperial County. Air quality in the County is measured at monitoring sites in Calexico, El Centro, Niland, Westmorland, and Brawley. Pollutant levels often exceed State and Federal ambient air quality standards throughout the County. For instance, the State standard for particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) was exceeded at the Niland monitoring station on 100 days in 2012, 145 days in 2013, and 124 days in 2014. The majority of emissions in the County are generated by unpaved roads, farming operations, fugitive windblown dust, and burning of agricultural waste.

Additionally, as inflows to the Salton Sea continue to decrease, the shallow perimeter areas of the lakebed are exposed to dry desert winds, creating occasionally severe dust storms. Fugitive dust is emitted by means of saltation (bouncing) of sand particles from upwind sources, in which the sand particles bounce along the exposed playa and dislodge other particles which begin saltation themselves, dislodging still more sand particles. The longer the unbroken dust emissive areas, the greater the particulate emissions and severity of dust storms. Complicating the situation is the fact that Salton Sea mud contains substantial amounts of arsenic and selenium and heavy metals such as chromium, zinc, and lead. These chemicals could be attached to the fine particles of sediment and, as the lake evaporates, could expose people to increased health risks.

### 2.2 PUBLIC OUTREACH

A public outreach and participation program was designed and implemented as part of the process for updating the *Conservation and Open Space Element*. The program was implemented to gain input from public agencies, stakeholder groups, and other members of the community regarding issues of concern for conservation and open space in the County. This input constituted a key component in the planning process to help ensure the updated Element contained responsive, practical, and effective goals, objectives, policies, and programs. Input was received both in person at community workshops and via written correspondence. Five community workshops were held as follows:

- Tuesday, March 17, 2015, 2–4 p.m. at the Ocotillo Community Center in Ocotillo
- Tuesday, March 17, 2015, 6–8 p.m. at the County Administrative Center in El Centro
- Wednesday, March 25, 2015, 10 a.m.–noon at the Salton Community Services in Salton City
- Wednesday, March 25, 2015, 2–4 p.m. at the Brawley Chamber of Commerce in Brawley
- Thursday, April 30, 2015, 1:30–3:30 p.m. at the County Administrative Center in El Centro

A questionnaire was posted on the County's website, and community stakeholders were e-mailed to provide input on the planning process as well as to provide contact information for other stakeholders for the County to contact. Advertisements for the community meetings and instructions for providing input to the County via the web were posted at libraries and other locations throughout the County.

A number of common themes and areas of importance for conservation and open space emerged during the public participation program. These included concerns related to the conservation of biological resources including migratory bird habitat, water resources including groundwater, seeps, and springs, access to recreation areas for fishing, hunting, and off-road vehicle use, cultural heritage and education, air quality and dust mitigation, and the shrinking of the Salton Sea and related biological and public health concerns.

As a result, these concerns and issues of importance are reflected in the goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the updated Element. This Initial Study and Negative Declaration, along with the companion documents contained in **Appendices A** and **B** noted above, will also be available for public review. The County will consider all additional comments received during this process before taking action on adoption of the Initial Study, Negative Declaration, and *Conservation and Open Space Element*.

## 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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### REFERENCES

Aspen Environmental Group. 2015. *Baseline Environmental Inventory Report, Imperial County Conservation and Open Space Element Update.*

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## **3.0 INITIAL STUDY**

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3.1 NEGATIVE DECLARATION

On the basis of the following Initial Study:

- I find that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because of the incorporated mitigation measures and revisions in the project have been made by or agreed to by the project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect (1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and (2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

#### 3.2 INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>1. AESTHETICS.</b> Would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to promote land use decisions that preserve scenic vistas and other significant visual resources within the County. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects; therefore, no direct impacts would occur. Indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the Element would be beneficial, as the following goals, objectives, policy, and programs would become governing principles for future land use decisions:
- Goal 5: The aesthetic character of the region shall be protected and enhanced to provide a pleasing environment for residential, commercial, recreational, and tourist activity.
  - Objective 1.1: Encourage uses and activities that are compatible with the fragile desert environment and foster conservation.
  - Objective 5.1: Encourage the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the desert and mountain landscape.
  - Objective 5.2: Utilize the Code Enforcement process to eliminate visually dilapidated buildings that impact the visual character of rural communities.
  - Policy: Develop planning programs to conserve and protect visual resources and scenic views from incompatible development and land uses.
  - Program: Through the development review and CEQA process, encourage designs that are compatible with the natural landscape and with recognized historical character, and discourage designs that are clearly out of place within rural areas.
  - Program: Through the development review and CEQA process, encourage designs that emphasize native vegetation and conform grading to existing natural forms.

Encourage abundant native landscaping that screens buildings and parking lots and blends development with the natural landscape.

- Program: Amend the Land Use Ordinance, and/or Community Area Plans, as applicable, to enact or revise ordinance standards to protect scenic resources. Adoption and implementation of scenic protection standards shall not interfere with agricultural uses on private lands. Standards for land use permits, including industrial and processing uses, and subdivisions should include visual assessments by qualified experts; visually effective setbacks near highways and roadways; siting in unobtrusive locations; and standards for height, architectural design, landscaping, lighting, and signs. The standards should emphasize avoiding visual impacts through alternative locations and designs where feasible. Establish consistent Countywide Viewshed Protection Standards.

Accordingly, adoption of the Element would result in less than significant impacts with regard to effects on a scenic vista.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to promote land use decisions that preserve scenic vistas and other significant visual resources within the County, including trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway. The portion of State Route (SR) 78 from the junction with SR 86 near Julian to the San Diego County line is eligible for a future scenic highway designation. That area is considered scenic because of its desert characteristics and view of Salton Sea. However, the Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects; therefore, no direct impacts would occur. Indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the Element would be beneficial, as the following goal, objectives, and programs would become governing principles for future land use decisions:

- Goal 5: The aesthetic character of the region shall be protected and enhanced to provide a pleasing environment for residential, commercial, recreational, and tourist activity.
- Objective 4.5: Preserve significant geological features such as rock outcroppings, the Algodones Dunes, Imperial Sand Dunes, Salton Buttes, and Shell Beds in Yuha Basin.
- Objective 9.1: Develop programs in association with County, State, and Federal agencies and the Salton Sea Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to restore the Salton Sea.
- Policy: Develop a Scenic Highway program that identifies scenic highways for future State-designation and visual resource preservation.
- Program: Preserve existing California fan palms in natural settings and other individual specimen trees which contribute to the community character and provide wildlife habitat.
- Program: Rock outcroppings which serve as significant boulder habitat for sensitive biological resources should be considered within open space easements.
- Program: Work with property owners to preserve prominent ridgelines and scenic backdrops through open space agreements, contracts, or other appropriate instruments along designated scenic corridors.

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

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- Program: Program: Coordinate with Caltrans to identify the candidate roads and highways for future scenic highway designation. The potential candidates considered eligible for designation include:
  - Interstate 8
  - State Route 78
  - State Route 111
  - County Highway S-22
- Program: Coordinate with Caltrans and the County to develop a scenic corridor program that establishes specific guidelines for identifying scenic corridors and analysis for new projects in the vicinity. At a minimum, the guidelines should:
  - a) specify the features that need to be protected through a site-specific analysis of each Viewshed
  - b) state why it is important to protect those features
  - c) where applicable, establish specific mapped boundaries that define the minimum area necessary to protect the identified features
  - d) identify the type of inappropriate development that should be regulated
  - e) involve area property owners
  - f) be accompanied by an economic assessment

Therefore, adoption of the Element would result in less than significant impacts with regard to effects on a scenic vista.

- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) and b) above. There are no land use changes or specific projects proposed as part of the proposed project, and the Element has been specifically developed to prevent damage to scenic resources. All future land use decisions and discretionary development projects will be subject to consideration under the goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the Element and would be required to comply with environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** There would be no impact related to light and glare that would affect views in Imperial County resulting from the adoption of the Element. Existing light and glare may be created day or night from various residential, commercial, and industrial uses throughout the County. Potential sources of glare during the day may include surface water, motor vehicles either parked or traveling on surrounding roadways, paved surfaces, building windows, and solar facilities. At night, light sources include street lamps, accent and security lighting on buildings, parking lot lighting, vehicle headlights, transmission lines, some park facilities, and the flashing lights on the wind turbines in Ocotillo. The Element does not propose any land use development, and any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions; therefore, no direct impacts would occur. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<p><b>2. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES.</b> In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997), prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the State’s inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board. Would the project:</p>				
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to nonagricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forestland (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g)).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Result in the loss of forestland or conversion of forestland to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment, which due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forest to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* does not propose any land use changes or specific development projects. As such, adoption of the project would not result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use. Further, the following goal, objective, and policy in the Element seek to protect agriculture and farmland:

- Goal 1: Environmental resources shall be conserved for future generations by minimizing environmental impacts in all land use decisions and educating the public on their value.
- Objective 8.1: Confine future urbanization within adopted Urban and Community areas.
- Policy: The County shall discourage urban development on State-designated important agricultural lands including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance.

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

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- Program: Recognize the incompatibility of small parcels to agricultural uses by adopting and enforcing large minimum acreage requirements in agricultural zones (excluding the A-1 Zone).
- Program: Relate minimum acreage requirements in each zone to soil characteristics, climate, water availability, crop types, existing land use ownership patterns, and proximity to urban development.
- Program: Encourage development of agriculturally related industries, such as packing and processing, on marginally productive lands.
- Program: Continue a fee or assessment on new development which converts land presently in agricultural use. The revenue could be used to purchase development rights or fee title to other land still in production or open space, as deemed necessary.
- Program: Agricultural lands shall require a minimum parcel size of 40 acres for the conservation and protection of productive agricultural lands.

The Element does not constitute a change from existing requirements and processes for converting farmland and contains policies to conserve agriculture in the County. Therefore, impacts are less than significant.

- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract, as it does not propose rezoning or changes to Williamson Act rules of procedure. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not conflict with existing zoning or result in rezoning of forestland, timberland, or any land zoned Timberland Production. No proposed land use changes or development projects are included in the Element, and any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not result in the loss of forestland or conversion of forestland to non-forest use. No development projects or land use changes are being proposed in the Element. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not result in any changes to the environment that could result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forest to non-forest use. No projects or changes to land are being implemented with the proposed project that would result in conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forest to non-forest use. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>3. AIR QUALITY.</b> Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. Would the project:				
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is nonattainment under applicable Federal or State ambient air quality standards?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Create objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to promote land use decisions that will not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan. The Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (ICAPCD) is the local air quality agency and shares responsibility with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) for ensuring that State and Federal ambient air quality standards are achieved and maintained in Imperial County. ICAPCD responsibilities include monitoring ambient air quality, planning activities such as modeling and maintenance of the emission inventory, and preparing clean air plans. Indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the updated Element would be beneficial to air quality and related public health concerns in the County, as the following goal, policies, programs, and objectives would become governing principles for future land use decisions:

- Goal 7: The County shall actively seek to improve the quality of air in the region.
- Objective 7.1: Ensure that all facilities comply with current Federal, State, and local requirements for attainment of air quality objectives.
- Objective 7.2: Develop management strategies to mitigate fugitive dust. Cooperate with all Federal, State, and local agencies in the effort to attain air quality objectives.
- Objective 7.3: Work cooperatively with the EPA and CARB in evaluating air quality monitoring in Imperial County.
- Objective 7.4: Enforce and monitor environmental mitigation measures relating to air quality.

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- Objective 7.5: Coordinate efforts with Imperial County Transportation Commission (ICTC) and other appropriate agencies to reduce fugitive dust from unpaved streets.
- Objective 7.6: Explore and assess strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the County.
- Policy: Reduce PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions from unpaved roads, agricultural fields, and exposed Salton Sea lakebed.
- Policy: Work cooperatively with ICTC and other appropriate agencies to reduce vehicle miles traveled countywide in order to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Policy: Promote alternative transportation programs, policies, and development in order to reduce vehicle miles traveled and address air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Program: Implement all ICAPCD particulate matter (PM) emission controls including the Final PM<sub>10</sub> 2009 State Implementation Plan and the 2013 State Implementation Plan for the 2006 24-Hour PM<sub>2.5</sub> Moderate Nonattainment Area.
- Program: Support programs, policies, and efforts to restore the Salton Sea and reduce fugitive dust emissions from exposed playa.
- Program: Direct most new residential development away from rural and agricultural areas and concentrate it in higher density residential areas located near major transportation corridors, transit routes, community centers, and town/urban centers where resources and services are available.
- Program: Cooperate in a countywide VMT Reduction Program in partnership with the ICAPCD, SCAG, ICTC, and Imperial Valley Transit (IVT).
- Program: Review development applications to identify opportunities for connecting land uses to non-motorized routes, incorporating safe road crossings at major intersections, and including secure, weatherproof bicycle parking and storage facilities. Ensure long-term maintenance of all such facilities.
- Program: Coordinate with SCAG, ICTC, IVT, and local cities to identify and map existing and future bus lines (routes) and transit corridors for inclusion in the *Land Use and Circulation Element*.
- Program: Adopt a "Complete Streets" Ordinance to ensure that the County's streets and roads are designed and operated as a balanced, multimodal transportation network that enables safe access for all users. "All users" includes pedestrians, bicyclists, persons with disabilities, movers of commercial goods, transit vehicles, and users, and motorists of all ages and abilities.

All future discretionary projects subject to CEQA would be required to evaluate air quality impacts, as they do under existing conditions. Therefore, the Element is considered consistent with all applicable air quality plans, and impacts would be less than significant.

- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* would not result in a violation of any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation, either directly or indirectly. The Element does not include any land use changes or development projects. Any future discretionary land use decisions would be subject to air quality evaluation and mitigation under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The adoption of the proposed project would not result in a net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is nonattainment under applicable Federal or State ambient air quality standards. The Element does not include any land use changes or development projects. Any future discretionary land use decisions would be subject to the air quality evaluation and mitigation under CEQA as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not result in exposing sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. The proposed project does not include any land use changes or development projects, and any future discretionary land use decisions would be subject to air quality evaluation and mitigation under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. No development projects or land use changes are being proposed in the Element and therefore no objectionable odors would result. Any future discretionary projects and land use decisions would have to be evaluated under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Accordingly, any impacts would be less than significant.

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	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>4. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES.</b> Would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or US Fish and Wildlife Service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or US Fish and Wildlife Service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on Federally protected wetlands, as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal wetlands, etc.), through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, or other approved local, regional, or State habitat conservation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element aims to set policies to help conserve biological resources and preserve sensitive habitat and species. No development projects or changes in land use or zoning are proposed in the Element. There would be no change in review or permitting authority of regulatory agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the Element would be beneficial, as the following goal, objectives, and programs would become guiding principles for future land use decisions:
- Goal 2: The County will integrate programmatic strategies for the conservation of critical habitats to manage their integrity, function, productivity, and long-term vitality.
  - Objective 2.1: Designate critical habitats for Federally and State-listed species.

- Objective 2.2: Develop management programs, including preservation of habitat for flat-tailed horned lizard, desert pupfish, and burrowing owl.
- Objective 2.3: Support investigation of long-term climate change effects on biological resources.
- Objective 2.4: Use the CEQA and NEPA process to identify, conserve and restore sensitive vegetation and wildlife resources.
- Objective 2.5: Give consideration of sensitive species and habitat a high priority in County park acquisition and development programs.
- Objective 2.6: Attempt to identify, reduce, and eliminate all forms of pollution; including air, noise, soil, and water.
- Objective 9.3: Coordinate with US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Salton Sea JPA in developing programs to protect and restore migratory bird habitat, desert pupfish, and other sensitive or endangered species associated with the Salton Sea.
- Program: Areas designated for biological open space conservation shall include buffers, which provide important breeding and foraging habitats for native and migratory birds and animals. Such buffers shall serve to separate future development from adjacent native habitat areas to ensure the perpetual regeneration of these habitats.
- Program: Protect riparian habitat and other types of wetlands from loss or modification by dedicating open space easements with adequate buffer zones, and by other means to avoid impacts from adjacent land uses. Road crossings or other disturbances of riparian habitat should be minimized and only allowed when alternatives have been considered and determined infeasible.
- Program: Preserve and encourage the open space designation of wildlife corridors which are essential to the long-term viability of wildlife populations
- Program: Develop an environmental mitigation program that protects, and restores Salton Sea wildlife habitats as offsets to biological disturbances identified through the CEQA preview process for development projects. The program would allow the County and/or Salton Sea JPA to restore habitat through financing mechanisms including land banks and/or direct financial contributions from the developers.
- Program: Conserve the native habitat of sensitive plants and animals through the dedication of open space easements, or other means that will ensure their long-term protection and survival. Such easements shall preclude the erecting of any structures (temporary or permanent), placement of utilities, vegetation removal, or any other activities. These dedicated open space easements would also serve to reduce potential indirect impacts to sensitive biological resources that may result from human activities associated with future developments.

Therefore, adoption of the Element would result in less than significant impacts with regard to an effect on habitat modifications and any species that are deemed sensitive or special-status.

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- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not include any land use changes or development projects, and any future discretionary development projects or land use changes would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. The Element would not have any effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. Adoption of the Element would not result in the loss of jurisdictional waters of the State or waters of the United States. The Element does not include any land use changes or development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, the Element would result in less than significant impacts with regard to effects on Federally protected wetlands.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. Adoption of the Element would not directly or indirectly interfere with the movement of native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species. Rather, the Element specifically seeks to ensure protection of species and movement corridors through the goal, objectives, and programs listed in a) above. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance. The proposed project does not include any land use changes or development projects. Any future discretionary land use decisions would be subject to environmental review and mitigation under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above and c) in subsection 10, Land Use and Planning. The Element would not conflict with provisions of an adopted habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, or other approved local, regional, or State habitat conservation plan. Any indirect impacts that could occur from the adoption of the Element would be beneficial because of the goal, objectives, and programs listed above. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>5. CULTURAL RESOURCES.</b> Would the project:				
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in Public Resources Code Section 21084.1 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5, respectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource as defined in Public Resources Code Sections 21083.2 and 21084.1, and CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5, respectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource as defined in Public Resources Code 21074?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to guide land use decisions that preserve any historical, archaeological, or tribal cultural resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 21084.1 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects; therefore, no direct impacts would occur. Indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the Element would be beneficial, as the following goal, objectives, policy, and programs would become governing principles for future land use decisions:
- Goal 3: Preserve the spiritual and cultural heritage of the diverse communities of Imperial County.
  - Objective 3.1: Protect and preserve sites of archaeological, ecological, historical, and scientific value, and/or cultural significance.
  - Objective 3.2: Develop management strategies to preserve the memory of important historic periods, including Spanish, Mexican, and early American settlements of Imperial County.
  - Objective 3.3: Engage all local Native American Tribes in the protection of tribal cultural resources.
  - Policy: Identify and document significant historic and prehistoric resources, and provide for the preservation of representative and worthy examples; and recognize the value of historic and prehistoric resources, and assess current and proposed land uses for impacts upon these resources.
  - Program: Consider measures which would provide incentives to report archeological discoveries immediately to the Imperial Valley Desert Museum.

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- Program: Coordinate with appropriate Federal, State, local and tribal agencies to provide regular updates to the "Sensitivity Map for Cultural Resources".
- Program: Discourage vandalism of cultural resources and excavation by persons other than qualified archaeologists. The County shall study the feasibility of implementing policies and enacting ordinances toward the protection of cultural resources such as can be found in California Penal Code, Title 14, Point 1, Section 622-1/2. The County should maintain confidentiality of specific resource locations to prevent vandalism and desecration of sensitive cultural resources.
- Program: The County will use the CEQA process to conserve cultural resources and conform to Senate Bill 18 "Consultation with Tribal Governments" and Assembly Bill 52 "Consultation with Tribal Governments." Public awareness of cultural heritage will be stressed. All information and artifacts recovered in this process will be stored in an appropriate institution and made available for public exhibit and scientific review.

CEQA requires lead agencies to consider whether projects will impact unique archaeological resources. Public Resources Code Section 21083.2(g) includes a definition of unique cultural resources and criteria for determining whether a resource meets that definition. Treatment options under Section 21083.2 include activities that preserve such resources in place in an undisturbed state. Other acceptable methods of mitigation under Section 21083.2 include excavation and curation or study in place without excavation and curation (if the study finds that the artifacts would not meet one or more of the criteria for defining a unique archaeological resource). Any future discretionary land use decisions and development projects in the County would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA and be subject to consideration under the goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the Element, as is the case under existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not have a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource as defined in Public Resources Code Sections 21083.2 and 21084.1 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5. The Element does not entail any land use changes or specific development projects and has been specifically developed to preserve and protect cultural resources. Any future discretionary projects or land use decisions would be subject to consideration under the goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the Element and be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** No human remains would be disturbed as a result of adoption of the Element, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries. If human remains are encountered during any future projects in Imperial County, the California Health and Safety Code and CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(e) require that work in the immediate area must halt, the remains must be protected, and the county coroner must be notified immediately. If the remains are determined to be Native American, then the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) must be notified (typically by the coroner) within 24 hours, as required by Public Resources Code Section 5097. The NAHC would identify and contact a most likely descendant, who would be given the opportunity to provide recommendations for the treatment of the remains within 48 hours of being granted access to the site. These regulations represent no change from existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource as defined in Public Resources Code Section 21074, either directly or indirectly. The identification and protection of significant tribal cultural resources, and associated consultation with local Native American tribes, would continue to be governed by the CEQA process, Assembly Bill 52, and Senate Bill 18 where applicable. As noted previously, the Element does not contemplate any specific development projects or land use changes. Rather, the Element includes a goal, objectives, a policy, and programs that support the protection of tribal cultural resources (listed in a) above). Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

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	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>6. GEOLOGY AND SOILS.</b> Would the project:				
a) Expose people or structures to potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death, involving:				
i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv) Landslides?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the projects, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geological feature?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

a)

- i) **Less Than Significant Impact.** Adoption of the Element would not cause a rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects would have to refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42 and comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. The Element is intended to promote land use decisions that preserve the geography and soils of Imperial County as shown in the following goal and objectives:

- Goal 4: The County will identify and protect geologic, soil, aggregate and mineral resources for extraction while minimizing the effect of mining on surrounding land uses and other environmental resources.
- Objective 4.1: Require use of latest technologies for extraction of mineral and quarry/aggregate resources that protect the natural desert environment.
- Objective 4.2: Require that mineral extraction and reclamation operations be performed in a way that is compatible with surrounding land uses and minimize adverse effects on the environment.
- Objective 4.3: Safeguard the use and full development of all mineral deposits.
- Objective 4.4: Regulate the development adjacent to or near all mineral deposits and geothermal operations due to the potential for land subsidence.

Adoption of the Element would not result the exposure of people or structures to potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death, involving rupture of a known earthquake fault. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- ii) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See i) above. The proposed project does not expose people or structures to potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death, involving strong seismic ground shaking. No development projects or changes to land are proposed; thus, there would be no increase in potential for impacts due to seismic ground shaking. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
  - iii) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See i) above. The Imperial Valley is seismically active, but no projects or changes to land are being proposed in the Element. Thus, there would be no increase in potential for impacts due to seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction. All future development projects and discretionary land use decisions would be required to identify, evaluate and mitigate for seismic hazards as part of the environmental review under CEQA, representing no change from existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.
  - iv) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See i) above. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* does not entail any land use changes or specific development projects and has been specifically developed to preserve and protect sensitive geological resources. Any future discretionary development projects or land use would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions, and would be required to identify, evaluate, and mitigate for landslides as part of the CEQA process. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See i) above. The Element does not result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil. No projects or changes to land are being implemented with the updated Element. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they would under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
  - c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See i) above. The Element is intended to promote land use decisions that protect geological resources in the County, adopting goals, objectives, policies, and programs to protect soil and geography in the region. The Element does

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

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not propose any land use changes or include any development projects that would be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or would become unstable as a result of the projects, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they would under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not result in a project being located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994). No projects or land use changes are being implemented with the adoption of the Element. Any future discretionary development projects or land use would have to consult Table 18-1-B and comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they would under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would not result in soils being incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater, as no projects or land use changes are being implemented. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with seismic codes and environmental review under CEQA, as they would under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to promote land use decisions that protect paleontological resources in the County. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA as they are under existing conditions. The Element would not directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geological feature. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>7. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.</b> Would the project:				
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not entail any land use changes or specific development projects or have any other components that could result in the generation of greenhouse gas emissions. Rather, the Element establishes the following objective, policy and programs to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions:

- Objective 7.6: Develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Policy: Reduce County GHG emissions contributing to climate change to meet or exceed the requirements of AB 32 (Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006), Executive Orders S-3-05 and B-30-15, and any future climate-change legislation.
- Programs: Prepare, maintain, and implement a climate change action plan with a baseline inventory of GHG emissions from all sources; GHG emissions reduction targets and deadlines, and enforceable GHG emissions reduction measures.
- Programs: Establish and maintain a program to monitor GHG emissions attributable to development, transportation, infrastructure, and municipal operations and periodically review the effectiveness of and revise existing programs as necessary to achieve GHG emission reduction objectives.

Furthermore, any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, the Element would result in less than significant impacts.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. There are no land use changes or development projects proposed as part of the proposed project, and the Element seeks to result in the development of a strategy to reduce greenhouse emissions as identified in Objective 7.6. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

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	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>8. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS.</b> Would the project:				
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan area or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or a public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) For a project within the vicinity of a private airstrip, would the project result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Impair implementation of, or physically interfere with, an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would not create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials. A hazardous material accident has the potential to occur in Imperial County due to the use of industrial materials in agriculture, electricity generation, and other industries, as well as the existence of fuel tanks and major highway and rail corridors by which materials are transported in the County. However, the proposed project would not change regulations and oversight related to hazardous materials. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to

comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. The proposed project does not have any components that would result in a hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not have any components that would result in hazardous emissions or the handling of hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school. No development projects or changes to land use or zoning are contemplated as part of the Element. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. The Element does not have any components that would result in projects to be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects; therefore, the Element does not have any components that would result in a safety hazard in an airport land use area. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects and therefore would not result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the vicinity of a private airstrip. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Any impacts would be less than significant.
- g) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects and therefore would not impair the implementation of an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- h) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects; therefore, the Element would not expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires. Any future

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discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>9. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY.</b> Would the project:				
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Substantially deplete groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that there would be a net deficit in aquifer volume or a lowering of the local groundwater table level (e.g., the production rate of pre-existing nearby wells would drop to a level which would not support existing land uses or planned uses for which permits have been granted)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, in a manner which would result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, or substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner that would result in flooding on- or off-site?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Otherwise substantially degrade water quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Place housing within a 100-year flood hazard area as mapped on a Federal Flood Hazard Boundary or Flood Insurance Rate Map or other flood hazard delineation map?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Place within a 100-year flood hazard area structures that would impede or redirect flood flows?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving flooding, including flooding as a result of a failure of a levee or dam?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) Inundation by seiche, tsunami, or mudflow?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to promote land and water use decisions that protect hydrology and water quality in the County. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. The Element would not violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements. Any indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the Element would be beneficial, as the following goal and objectives would guide future land use decisions:

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- Goal 6: The County will conserve, protect, and enhance waster resources in the County.
- Objective 6.1: Ensure the use and protection of all the rivers, waterways, and groundwater sources in the County for the use by future generations.
- Objective 6.2: Ensure proper drainage and provide accommodation for storm runoff from urban and other developed areas in manners compatible with requirements to provide necessary agricultural drainage.
- Objective 6.3: Protect and improve water quality and quantity for all water bodies in Imperial County.
- Objective 6.4: Eliminate potential surface and groundwater pollution through regulations as well as educational programs.
- Objective 6.5: Reclaim polluted water bodies, such as the New and Alamo Rivers.
- Objective 6.6: Ensure protection of water bodies that are important for recreational fishing.
- Objective 6.7: Prohibit the inappropriate siting of solid or hazardous waste facilities next to water bodies or over sources of potable groundwater or recharge basins. In association with the cleanup of the New River, all existing landfills in or near the river should eventually be closed.
- Objective 6.8: Discourage the use of hazardous materials in areas of the County where significant water pollution could pose hazards to humans or biological resources.
- Objective 6.9: Identify and protect watersheds and key recharge areas for the protection of water quality and groundwater.
- Objective 6.10: Encourage water conservation and efficient water use among municipal and industrial water users, as well as reclamation and reuse of wastewater.
- Objective 6.11: Coordinate with the appropriate agencies for the availability of water to meet future domestic, industrial/commercial and agricultural needs.

No components of the Element would result in violation of any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements in the County. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. The Element has no components that would deplete groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that there would be net deficit in aquifer volume or a lowering of the local groundwater table level. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. The Element has no components that would alter existing drainage patterns in the County and thus would not result in substantial erosion or siltation. Rather, the Element has a specific objective to protect against such effects:

- Objective 6.2: Ensure proper drainage and provide accommodation for storm runoff from urban and other developed areas in manners compatible with requirements to provide necessary agricultural drainage.

Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See c) above. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. The Element does not have any components that would alter the existing drainage pattern in the County, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, in a manner that would result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See c) above. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. It does not have any components that would contribute to stormwater runoff or drainage systems in the County. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would not substantially degrade the water quality in Imperial County. Indirect impacts resulting from adoption of the Element would be beneficial, as the following objectives would guide land use decisions that could affect water quality:

- Objective 6.5: Reclaim polluted water bodies, such as the New and Alamo Rivers.
- Objective 6.7: Prohibit the inappropriate siting of solid or hazardous waste facilities next to water bodies or over sources of potable groundwater or recharge basins. In association with the cleanup of the New River, all existing landfills in or near the river should eventually be closed.
- Objective 6.8: Discourage the use of hazardous materials in areas of the County where significant water pollution could pose hazards to humans or biological resources.
- Objective 6.9: Identify and protect watersheds and key recharge areas for the protection of water quality and groundwater.

Any impacts from adoption of the Element would therefore be less than significant.

i) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. It does not have any components that would result in placing housing within a 100-year flood hazard area as mapped on a Federal Flood

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Hazard Boundary or Flood Insurance Rate Map or other flood hazard delineation map. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- j) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not have any components that would result the placement of any structures within a 100-year flood hazard. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
  
- g) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Imperial Diversion Dam is located in the lower Colorado River Valley straddling the border between Imperial County and Yuma County, Arizona. The dam conveys waters of the Colorado River into the Imperial Reservoir and canal system. However, there are no land use changes or development projects contemplated in the Element, nor does the Element have any components which would expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving flooding as a result of a failed levee or dam. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
  
- h) **Less Than Significant Impact.** Imperial County is located approximately 144 miles east of the Pacific Ocean and is therefore not at risk of tsunami. The Salton Sea may be susceptible to seiche, but the Element does not propose any components that would result in increased inundation risks from the Salton Sea. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects so there would be no increased risk of mudflows. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Any impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>10. LAND USE AND PLANNING.</b> Would the project:				
a) Physically divide an existing community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project (including, but not limited to, the general plan, specific plan, local coastal program, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects or land use decisions that would physically divide a community. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** All General Plan elements are required to be both internally consistent and externally consistent with other elements. The purpose of the proposed project is to update the *Conservation and Open Space Element* to ensure consistency with other Imperial County General Plan elements and provide a guiding document for future land use decisions with regard to the resource areas addressed in the Element. The main goals of the Element are to promote the protection and maintenance of the environmental resources, particularly scarce resources or resources that require special control or management. The overarching goal of the *Conservation and Open Space Element* is to prevent wasteful exploitation of natural and cultural resources, so that they may be maintained for future generations. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan, as there are none in place that affect unincorporated County lands addressed by the Element. A conservation plan proposed within Imperial County is 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 plan identifies conservation areas, sensitive plant and wildlife species, and a strategy for their management into the future (CEC 2015). The County's *Conservation and Open Space Element* is independent of the DRECP work, but both the Element and the DRECP help Imperial County identify and manage conservation areas for sensitive plant and wildlife species. Thus, impacts would be less than significant.

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	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>11. MINERAL RESOURCES.</b> Would the project:				
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the State?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not result in the loss of mineral resources that will be of value to the region or residents of the State. Rather, the Element proposes objectives, a policy, and programs to identify and protect geologic, soil, aggregate, and mineral resources for extraction while minimizing any negative effects of mining on surrounding land uses and other environmental resources, as listed below.
- Objective 4.1: Require use of latest technologies for extraction of mineral and quarry/aggregate resources that protect the natural desert environment
  - Objective 4.2: Require that mineral extraction and reclamation operations be performed in a way that is compatible with surrounding land uses and minimize adverse effects on the environment.
  - Objective 4.3: Safeguard the use and full development of all mineral deposits.
  - Objective 4.4: Regulate the development adjacent to or near all mineral deposits and geothermal operations due to the potential for land subsidence.
  - Policy: Control the extraction of mineral resources in order to assure minimal disturbance to the environment, conservation of significant mineral deposits, and to protect mining operations from encroachment by incompatible land use.
  - Program: The County shall require all surface mine operators to submit surface mining and reclamation plans prior to beginning mining operations. Surface mining includes surface work incident to an underground mine. Such plans shall be processed by the Planning and Development Services Department and shall require the approval of the Planning Commission. Following the approval of those plans, the issuance of all other required regulatory permits, and the commencement of surface mining operations, the Planning and Development Services Department shall inspect each surface mining operation at least once a year, for the life of the operation to assure compliance with the mining plans. The County should coordinate with the Department of Conservation's Office of Mine Reclamation (OMR) and the State Mining and Geology Board (SMGB) to ensure proper administration of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA).

- Program: The County shall protect known mineral deposits and mining operations from the encroachment of incompatible urban land uses. All protected areas shall be reevaluated in light of future State reports identifying areas of regional and Statewide mineral significance.

As a result, the Element would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource. Impacts would be less than significant.

- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element would not result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource, but rather would seek to conserve and manage the mineral resources of Imperial County for future generations. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>12. NOISE.</b> Would the project result in:				
a) Exposure of persons to or generation of noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance or of applicable standards of other agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Exposure of persons to or generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) A substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) A substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan area or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or a public use airport, exposure of people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) For a project within the vicinity of a private airstrip, exposure of people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The *Noise Element* of the Imperial County General Plan includes a program for incorporating noise issues into the land use planning process with a goal of minimizing adverse noise impacts to noise-sensitive receptors. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* would not conflict with the *Noise Element* and would not alter its efficacy or result in any other changes to the County's noise regulations. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions, including evaluation for noise impacts. The proposed project does not include any development projects or changes to land use. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not contain any goals, objectives, policies, or programs that relate to noise regulation in the County. It does not have any components that would result in exposure of persons to excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not contain any goals, objectives, policies, or programs that relate to noise regulation in the County. It does not have any components that would result in an increase in ambient noise levels in the County, as the Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use

decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not include any goals, objectives, policies, or programs that relate to noise regulation. There are no components in the Element that would result in ambient noise. It does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** No components in the Element would result in the exposure of people to noise levels in an airport land use area. There are no development projects or land use changes proposed in the Element. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** While there are private airstrips in the County, the Element does not have any components that would expose people residing or working in the County to noise. The Element does not propose any projects or changes to land use or zoning. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Any impacts would be less than significant.

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	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>13. POPULATION AND HOUSING.</b> Would the project:				
a) Induce substantial population growth in an area, either directly (e.g., by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (e.g., through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Displace substantial numbers of people, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** Imperial County is the least populated county in the region, with approximately 177,000 residents. The two largest cities in the County are El Centro and Calexico, each with approximately 35,000 residents. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects, including road extension or other infrastructure that may indirectly induce growth. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. No components of the Element would result in the displacement of housing necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere. The Element does not include goals, objectives, policies, or programs relating to population and housing. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See b) above. No components of the Element would result in the displacement of people. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>14. PUBLIC SERVICES.</b> Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, the need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times, or other performance objectives for any of the following public services:				
a) Fire protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Police protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Schools?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Parks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Other public facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for increased fire protection services. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for increased police protection services. No components of the Element would result in new facilities being constructed or being altered. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for new or expanded school facilities. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element is intended to promote land use decisions that preserve open space and recreation, including parks. The Element includes a goal and objectives and programs that would help parks and recreational uses to be maintained and expanded:
  - Goal 8: Open space shall be maintained to protect the aesthetic character of the region, protect natural resources, provide recreational opportunities, and minimize hazards to human activity.
  - Objective 8.5: Encourage the acquisition and development of additional County recreational facilities.

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- Objective 8.7: Encourage the development and improvement of recreational facilities in Imperial County.
- Objective 8.8: Coordinate Federal, State, and local agencies for trail-oriented recreational uses.
- Objective 8.9: Conserve desert lands, within the County's jurisdiction for wildlife protection, recreation, and aesthetic purposes.
- Program: Ensure consistency with the *Parks and Recreation Element* and pertinent factors such as existing park conditions, funding sources, and anticipated recreational needs.
- Program: Ensure consistency and compliance with the Quimby Act which allows the County to impose fees in order to ensure provision of 3 acres of park area per 1,000 residents. Assembly Bill 1359 allows fees collected from new housing development to be used on parks outside of the housing development's neighborhood.
- Program: Ensure compliance with Imperial County Land Use Ordinance (Title 9) Division 29: Parks and Recreation Regulations to ensure the provision of specific rules and regulations for County parks and recreational areas in order to promote public health, safety, and general public welfare.

The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Any impacts that would occur would be less than significant.

- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** As discussed above, the Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore has little relation to demand for increased public services. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>15. RECREATION.</b>				
a) Would the project 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?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Does the project include recreational facilities, or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS**

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See d) in subsection 14, Public Services. The *Conservation and Open Space Element* is intended to promote land use decisions that conserve and expand open space and recreational opportunities. The Element includes a policy and programs that would help parks and recreational uses to be maintained and expanded:

- Policy: The County shall take a pro-active role in working with local, State, and Federal agencies to maintain and develop lands for outdoor recreation.
- Program: Encourage State and Federal Agencies to develop and operate recreational facilities which are determined by the County to possess more than local significance.
- Program: Provide County input into State and Federal recreation and wilderness areas so that the natural values of the area are conserved.
- Program: Support controlled development of recreation facilities in primitive or wilderness areas so that the natural values of the area are conserved.

Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** See a) above. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. No components of the Element would result in the construction or expansion of recreational facilities. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

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	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>16. TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC.</b> Would the project:				
a) Conflict with an applicable plan, ordinance, or policy establishing measures of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system, taking into account all modes of transportation including mass transit and non-motorized travel and relevant components of the circulation system, including but not limited to intersections, streets, highways and freeways, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and mass transit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Conflict with an applicable congestion management program, including, but not limited to, level of service standards and travel demand measures, or other standards established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways, either individually or cumulatively, a level of service standard established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Result in a change in air traffic patterns, including either an increase in traffic levels or a change in location that results in substantial safety risks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Substantially increase hazards due to a design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Result in inadequate emergency access?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Conflict with adopted policies, plans, or programs regarding public transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities, or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of such facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not conflict with an applicable plan, ordinance, or policy establishing measures of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system, taking into account all modes of transportation including mass transit and non-motorized travel and relevant components of the circulation system, including but not limited to intersections, streets, highways and freeways, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and mass transit. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. No components of the Element would conflict with an applicable congestion management program. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** No components of the Element would result in a change in air traffic patterns, either in air traffic levels or changes in location. The Element does not propose any land use changes or development projects, and any future discretionary development would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not propose any land use changes or include development projects and no components would increase any hazards due to a design feature. Any future discretionary development would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** No components of the Element would result in a conflict with emergency access. There are no proposed land use changes or development projects within the Element. Any future discretionary development would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element does not have any components that would conflict with any adopted policies, plans, or programs regarding public transit. There are no proposed land use changes or development projects within the Element. Any future discretionary development projects would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>17. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS.</b> Would the project:				
a) Exceed wastewater treatment requirements of the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Require or result in the construction of new water or wastewater treatment facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Require or result in the construction of new stormwater drainage facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project from existing entitlements and resources, or are new or expanded entitlements needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider that serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand, in addition to the provider's existing commitments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Be served by a landfill with sufficient permitted capacity to accommodate the project's solid waste disposal needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Comply with Federal, State, and local statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** There are no proposed land use changes or development projects within the Element, and it does not have any components that would result in exceeding wastewater treatment requirements of the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for increased water or wastewater treatment facilities. The Element does not propose any land use changes or development projects. No components of the Element would result in the construction of new water or wastewater treatment facilities or the expansion of existing facilities. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for expansion of stormwater infrastructure. Any future discretionary development projects or land use

decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

- d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for increased water supply or infrastructure. The Element would not result in any changes to the County's utilities. Rather, the Element seeks to ensure responsible management of all water resources in the County [see a) in subsection 9, Hydrology and Water Quality]. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- e) **Less Than Significant Impact.** No components of the Element would affect any wastewater treatment provider in the County. The Element does not propose any land use changes or development projects and would not conflict with the County's utilities. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as they are under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- f) **Less Than Significant Impact.** No components of the Element would necessitate solid waste disposal or affect existing solid waste regulations. The Element would not directly or indirectly result in population or housing growth and therefore bears little relation to the need for increased solid waste disposal services. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.
- g) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Element would not conflict with any Federal, State, or County statutes and regulations related to solid waste. The Element does not propose any land use changes or development projects. Any future discretionary development projects or land use decisions would be required to comply with environmental review under CEQA, as under existing conditions. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<b>18. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE.</b>				
a) Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of rare or endangered plants or animals, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? "Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Does the project have environmental effects that will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS

- a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** This Initial Study found that the *Conservation and Open Space Element* would not directly or indirectly impact sensitive species, but rather would help ensure their habitat is responsibly managed and protected through goals, objectives, programs, and policies that guide future land use decisions in the County. Accordingly, effects to the natural environment, including habitat of fish and wildlife species, would be beneficial. Additionally, the Element is intended to guide land use decisions that preserve historical, archaeological, and tribal cultural resources. As such, adoption of the Element would not eliminate important examples of major periods of history. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant as demonstrated by the responses. Please refer to subsection 4, Biological Resources, and subsection 5, Cultural Resources.
- b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** As demonstrated in this Initial Study, the Element would not result in any direct or indirect significant impacts. Rather, the goals, objectives, policies, and programs in the Element seek to improve environmental conditions cumulatively in the County. The Element does not include any specific development projects, land use or zoning changes, or other changes to the way the County processes development projects. While future discretionary development projects will be evaluated for consistency with the goals, objectives, policies, and programs contained in the Element, they will also be subject to CEQA review, as they currently are. Therefore, adoption of the Element would not result in a considerable contribution to a cumulative impact.
- c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** As demonstrated in this Initial Study, the *Conservation and Open Space Element* would not result in environmental impacts that could cause either

direct or indirect substantial adverse effects to humans. The Element does not propose any land use changes or include any development projects. Rather, it would institute beneficial goals, objectives, programs, and policies to help protect, preserve, maintain, and enhance Imperial County and its natural resources, thereby resulting in beneficial indirect impacts to humans. The Element specifically aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the adverse effects of climate change; reduce health impacts from impaired air quality and dust; preserve cultural heritage; provide ample recreational opportunities; conserve, protect, and enhance water resources; preserve critical habitats to manage their integrity, function, productivity, and long-term viability; protect and responsibly manage geologic, soil, and mineral resources; and protect the aesthetic character of the County.

### 3.0 INITIAL STUDY

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#### REFERENCES

CEC (California Energy Commission). 2015. *Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan*.  
<http://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp>.