

4.13 RECREATION

This section provides an overview of existing recreational resources within the study areas (Mount Signal Solar Farm (MSSF1), Calexico Solar Farm 1(CSF1), Calexico Solar Farm 2(CSF2), and off-site transmission facilities (OTF) within private and Bureau of Land (BLM) land) and identifies applicable Federal, State, and local policies related to the conservation of recreational uses. The impact assessment provides an evaluation of potential adverse effects to recreational resources based on criteria derived from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines in conjunction with actions proposed in Chapter 3, Project Description.

4.13.1 Environmental Setting

Regional Setting

Imperial County has a variety of recreational opportunities. Parks within the county are classified by a combination of factors including size, number of amenities, location, ease of access, and oversight (Federal, State, or County). County park classifications consist of Limited Facility Park, Neighborhood Park, Community Park, Regional Park, and State and Federal Park.

Limited facility parks have minimal amenities, with one primary function and possibly some accessory uses. This type of park may be of any size and is usually located in the open desert area of the county (County of Imperial 2008). The county has three Limited Facility Parks: Palo Verde Park, Osborne Park, and Niland Marina. Palo Verde Park is owned and operated by the County. Osborne Park is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and is an access point to the Imperial Sand Dunes area for off-highway vehicles, with a paved access road and an improved parking area. Niland Marina Park is a County-owned park on the Salton Sea near Bombay Beach, off Highway 111 (County of Imperial 2008).

Neighborhood parks are small (usually less than 3 acres) and are located within walking distance of a residential district (County of Imperial 2008). Three neighborhood parks are located within the unincorporated area of the county: two in Heber and one in Salton City.

Community parks are shared by the entire local community and range in size from three acres to 80 acres in size. This type of park is usually entirely within an unincorporated community and typically has a major active recreational use such as athletic fields or courts which the entire community uses (County of Imperial 2008). The county has four community parks: one each in Ocotillo, Heber, Salton City, and Desert Shores.

Regional parks are typically larger than community parks and serve the entire county. Regional parks must have easy access from a major road (County of Imperial 2008). Imperial County has five regional parks: Sunbeam Lake, Wiest Lake, Heber Dunes, Red Hill Marina, and Pioneer's County Park. Sunbeam Lake Park is a County-maintained park south of Seeley near Interstate 8 (I-8). Wiest Lake Park is a County-maintained park located northeast of Brawley off Highway 111. Heber Dunes Park is located off State Route (SR) 7, near the Calexico East Port of Entry. Heber Dunes Park is currently being leased by the County to the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Red Hill Marina Park is on an island on the southeastern shores of the Salton Sea, northeast of Calipatria. Pioneer's County Park is off SR 111 near Imperial Valley College (County of Imperial 2008).

State and Federal Parks

State and federal parks are maintained by the State or Federal government. The parks are usually large areas that may include hundreds of acres under wildlife preserve with designated areas for human use (County of Imperial 2008). The County has a significant amount of State and Federal parkland. The State maintains four major parks within the county, which include the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, the Picacho State Recreation Area, the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area, and a portion of the

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. The Federal parkland within the county, managed by the BLM, includes the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation and Wilderness Area.

4.13.1.1 Regulatory Setting

This section identifies and summarizes Federal, State, and local laws, policies, and regulations that are applicable to the projects.

Federal

California Desert Conservation Area Plan

The California Desert Conservation Area Plan (CDCA) (BLM 1980, as amended) recognizes that the California desert is "...a reservoir of open space and as a place for outdoor recreation" (CDCA Plan, BLM 1980, page 69). The CDCA Plan notes that the diverse landscape of the California desert provides for a variety of physical settings. Further, the CDCA Plan identifies the wide variety of desert recreation uses ranging from off-road vehicles to outdoor preservationists, and the increasing challenge to accommodate these varied and sometimes competing uses. The OTF located within BLM land is designated as Utility Corridor "N" and is not anticipated to be used by off-highway vehicle (OHV) enthusiasts. However, there is a potential that BLM land surrounding the project sites are used by OHVs.

The OTF would be installed adjacent to the existing lines to the extent possible, and the lines and towers would be similar to the existing transmission lines in the area. The purpose of the Utility "N" Corridor is to allow a designated area within the BLM lands for utility structures such as transmission lines and to group them together in one area rather than allow them to be scattered throughout BLM lands. The BLM lands adjacent to the Utility Corridor "N" can be used for OHV recreation.

State

The California Parklands Act of 1980

The California Parklands Act of 1980 (Public Resources Code Section 5096.141-5096.143) identifies "the public interest for the state to acquire, develop, and restore areas for recreation...and to aid local governments of the state in acquiring, developing and restoring such areas..." The California Parklands Act also identifies the necessity of local agencies to exercise vigilance to see that the parks, recreation areas, and recreational facilities they now have are not lost to other uses.

Quimby Act

The goal of the 1975 Quimby Act (California Government Code Section 66477) was to require developers to help mitigate the impacts of property improvements by requiring them to set aside land, donate conservation easements, or pay fees for park improvements. The Quimby Act gave authority for passage of land dedication ordinances only to cities and counties, thus requiring special districts to work with cities and/or counties to receive parkland dedication and/or in-lieu fees. The fees must be paid and land conveyed directly to the local public agencies that provide park and recreation services community-wide. Revenues generated through the Quimby Act cannot be used for the operation and maintenance of park facilities.

Originally, the Quimby Act was designed to ensure "adequate" open space acreage in jurisdictions adopting Quimby Act standards (e.g., 3-5 acres per 1,000 residents). In 1982, the Quimby Act was amended via Assembly Bill (AB) 1600. The amendments further defined acceptable uses of or restrictions on Quimby funds, provided acreage/population standards and formulas for determining the exaction, and indicated that the exactions must be closely tied (nexus) to a project's impacts as identified through traffic studies required by CEQA.

Imperial County General Plan

The Imperial County General Plan serves as the overall guiding policy for the County. The Parks and Recreation Element contains numerous policies that are set forth to help the County achieve and maintain the goal of requiring five acres of park land per 1,000 residents. The policies are directed mainly toward residential development within the county. Also, the County's General Plan Land Use Element recognizes that the permitted uses and standards on agricultural lands include open space/recreation. "Open space and recreation land uses within this category consists of environmentally sensitive areas, parks, fault zones, floodways and floodplains, agricultural lands, and areas designated for the managed production of mineral resources." There are no specific General Plan policies that are applicable to the proposed project as the project sites are not planned for recreational uses, and no uses are proposed that would place a demand on recreational activities.

4.13.1.2 Existing Conditions

Federal Parks (BLM Management Areas)

The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area is located approximately 30 miles east of the study area. The area extends about 40 miles in the eastern part of the county. The recreation area contains sand dunes that rise up to 300 feet. This area is primarily used as an off-highway area for dune buggies, dirt bikes, quads, and other OHVs. The park also includes wilderness areas that are closed to the public to preserve wildlife habitats.

The route of the proposed OTF will traverse lands under BLM jurisdiction, specifically within the CDCA Plan, which encompasses about 25 million acres of land in Southern California, 10 million of which is managed by the BLM. CDCA recognizes that the California desert is "...a reservoir of open space and as a place for outdoor recreation" (CDCA Plan, BLM 1980, page 69). The CDCA Plan notes that the diverse landscape of the California desert provides for a variety of physical settings. Further, the CDCA Plan identifies the wide variety of desert recreation uses ranging from off-road vehicles to outdoor preservationists, and the increasing challenge to accommodate these varied and sometimes competing uses. BLM land would be located within an area currently designated by the BLM's CDCA as Utility Corridor "N." The purpose of the Utility "N" Corridor is to provide a designated area within the BLM lands for utility structures such as transmission lines and to group these utilities together in one area rather than allow utilities to be scattered throughout BLM lands. Assessment of environmental impacts associated with the route of the proposed OTF will be presented in a separate Environmental Assessment (EA) and is also addressed in the Imperial Solar Energy Center South Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (FEIR/EA).

California State Parks

California State Parks has several recreation areas in the general vicinity of the study area: Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area, and Heber Dunes State Recreation Area. The Salton Sea State Recreation Area is located on the northeastern shore of the Salton Sea, north of Bombay beach, off SR 111.

Anza-Borrego Desert State park and Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area are two adjoining parkland areas in the western open desert area of the County. Anza-Borrego Park features nature trails, campsites, picnic areas, restrooms, RV hookups, and parking areas, however, the part of the park which lies in the county is not open to the public. Ocotillo Wells primarily serves as an off-highway vehicle recreation area.

Heber Dunes Park is located off SR 7, near the Calexico East Port of Entry. The 323-acre park is currently being leased by the County to the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The most

prominent feature of the park is its sand dunes, which are used for off-highway recreation. Heber Dunes Park is the closest park to the project study areas, within 10 miles.

Imperial County

Parks within the county are discussed under “Regional Setting.” There are no parks located within, or in proximity to the project sites.

4.13.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section presents the significance criteria used for considering project-related land used compatibility impacts and consistency with applicable planning documents, the methodology employed for the evaluation, and mitigation requirements, if necessary.

4.13.2.1 Thresholds of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and the professional judgment of County staff and consultants, the County concludes that the projects would result in a significant impact on the environment if it would result in:

- An increase in 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.
- Recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment.

4.13.2.2 Methodology

The projects were evaluated for its impacts on parks and recreational services based on a review of the Imperial County General Plan, and a review of proposed and existing parkland in the County.

4.13.2.3 Impact Analysis

IMPACT 4.13-1	Increase the Use of Existing Parks or Other Recreational Facilities. The project would not result in an increased use of parks or recreational facilities within the County.
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MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), CSF2(B), OTF-Private Land

The projects include the construction and operation of solar energy facilities and do not contain residential uses. Because the projects do not contain a residential development, it would not increase the use of an existing neighborhood, regional park, or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated. Therefore, **no significant impact** to recreational facilities is identified.

The projects would convert the sites from agricultural land to solar energy facilities. As such, although no formerly-designated recreational uses would be removed, there may be some limited recreational utility lost associated with the agriculture fields as a result of the projects because such activity would be restricted to those with legal access. However, this impact is considered **less than significant** as the projects would not generate a demand for recreational uses.

OTF-BLM Land

The route of the proposed OTF-BLM Land, traverses through BLM managed lands, specifically within the CDCA Plan which encompasses about 25 million acres of land in Southern California, 10 million of which is managed by the BLM. The BLM land is located within an area currently designated by the BLM's CDCA as Utility Corridor "N." The purpose of the Utility "N" Corridor is to provide a designated area within the BLM lands for utility structures such as transmission lines and to group these utilities together in one area rather than allow utilities to be scattered throughout BLM lands. Because the proposed OTF would be installed adjacent to the existing lines located in Utility "N" Corridor, a less than significant impact is identified (see Imperial Solar Energy Center South FEIR/EA, Section 4.15, pages 4.15-2 and 4.15-3.). Therefore, impacts to this issue area are considered **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measure(s)

No mitigation is required.

IMPACT 4.13-2	Require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities. The projects would not result in an increased use of parks or recreational facilities within the county.
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MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), CSF2(B), OTF-Private Land, OTF-BLM Land

The County identifies agricultural land as a passive recreational use that could include hunting or walking activities. Development of the projects would remove the project study areas from availability for this type of use. The County contains over one million acres of agricultural land (Section 4.2 of this EIR). Removal of the approximate 4,228 acres of agricultural land would result in a less than one percent decrease in the passive recreational areas. As mentioned previously, Imperial County contains numerous local, regional, state and federal recreational areas that allow for various recreational activities. Therefore, the projects would not require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, which might have an adverse impact on the environment. A **less than significant** impact is identified.

Mitigation Measure(s)

No mitigation is required.

4.13.3 Decommissioning/ Restoration and Residual Impacts

Decommissioning/Restoration

Decommissioning and restoration of the sites would not create a demand for recreational uses or impact existing recreational uses. The proposed project sites are not formally-designated for recreational uses and decommissioning and restoration activities would not create a demand for recreational use. The proposed project sites would be restored to agricultural uses, which would not result in the demand for recreational uses. Therefore, **no impact** is identified and no mitigation is required.

Residual

The projects do not result in significant impacts to parks or other recreational facilities. Additionally, the projects would not require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that could have an adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, mitigation is not required. The projects would not result in residual impacts to the environment with regards to parks and recreation.

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