



Chapter Four Resource Management Plan

4.1 Overview of Resource Management Plan

Sensitive resources identified within the Plan area include biological, agricultural, and cultural resources. This section of the Plan describes these resources and identifies potential options for their preservation. This section also identifies conservation measures to protect the region's shared resources, including energy and water.

4.2 On Site Resources

4.2.1 Biological Resources

Vegetation/Habitats

Agriculture: Agricultural land may be defined broadly as land used primarily for production of food and fiber. Approximately 1,000 acres of the project site is active agricultural land and approximately 62 acres of the site is agricultural industrial land. Crops grown on the project site include Bermuda grass, vegetables, alfalfa and hay. Additionally, several patches of isolated stands of Mexican fan palm and Palo Verde exist on dirt roads along the drainage ditches within the project site. Most of the plant species observed on the site were crops and non-native weeds growing within the designated agriculture fields.

Irrigation Canals and Drains: Large irrigation canals and drains that are part of the Imperial Irrigation District system exist in easements on the project site. The agricultural fields are irrigated by releasing water from a system of canals and flooding the fields. The excess water is collected in a series of drains. The Central Main Canal, Rockwood Canal, Pearsol Drain, and Pearsol Drain Number One are the four main irrigation conveyers located on the project site. All four of these are soft-bottomed and contain small isolated patches of non-native wetland indicator species. Several smaller concrete-lined private irrigation ditches extend across the property, running along some fields. No vegetation was present in these concrete-lined private irrigation ditches. In total, approximately 17 acres of canals and drains occur within the project area. In addition, several soft-bottomed agricultural irrigation holding ponds exist on the site.

Wildlife Observed in the Planning Area

The Specific Plan area supports numerous reptile, bird, and mammal species. The only two reptiles observed in the Plan area include the Baja California collared lizard and gopher snake. Approximately 39 bird species were observed in the Plan area. Common species of birds observed include cattle egret, snowy egret, western burrowing owl, black-necked stilt, mourning dove, greater roadrunner, red-winged blackbird, great-tailed grackle, and western meadowlark. A total of three mammal species were observed in the Plan area. Mammal species observed included common muskrat, desert cottontail, and round-tailed ground squirrel.

Sensitive Habitats

Wetland habitats and their associated riparian habitats are considered to be sensitive by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG, 2003b) primarily for their ecological values to surrounding sensitive wildlife species. Riparian habitat serves many functions including providing habitat for rare and common species, corridors for wildlife movement, and control of water quality and erosion.

Freshwater marsh habitat (4.5 acres) exists on the project site within the irrigation holding ponds. This freshwater marsh habitat is classified as riparian habitat with the potential to support sensitive wildlife species. Potential impacts to these riparian habitats and necessary mitigation are discussed in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP).

Sensitive Plant Species

No sensitive species were observed in the study area, and no endemic species or critical populations of listed species were either observed or known to be present in the study area. Due to the agricultural use of the site and the resulting predominance of non-native plant species, native sensitive plant species are not anticipated to occur.

Sensitive Wildlife Species

Burrowing Owls: The burrowing owl is federally listed as a Species of Management Concern. The burrowing owl is also a second priority Species of Special Concern (SSC) in California. Burrowing owl surveys conducted on the project site June 28, June 29, July 14, and July 21 of 2008 found 4 active burrows and observed 5 owls. Along the IID canals/drains and along roads adjacent to the site, the surveys found 5 active burrows and observed 8 owls. Potential impacts to burrowing owls and necessary mitigation are discussed in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan EIR and MMRP.

Special Status Species: Special status species include those designated by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), CDFG, and/or other local agencies and those species whose status warrants legal protection for the survival of the species. “Threatened and Endangered Species” applies to flora and fauna listed under the federal Endangered Species Act and/or the California Endangered Species Act due to their rapid decline from urban development and other environmental constraints. The Plan area includes suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species such as the Yuma clapper rail, the mountain plover, and the desert pupfish.

“Species of Special Concern” (SSC) status applies to animals not listed under the federal Endangered Species Act or the California Endangered Species Act, but which nonetheless are declining at a rate that could result in listing, or historically occurred in low numbers and known threats to their persistence currently exist (CDFG 2003c). Six S were observed on the site during biological surveys. These species were the western burrowing owl, great egret, white-faced ibis, horned lark, long-billed curlew, and loggerhead shrike.

The literature review conducted for the project site indicated the potential for several sensitive species to occur within or adjacent to the Plan area. Short-eared owls and prairie falcons, both of which are California SSC, may potentially utilize the site for foraging habitat. Additionally, short-eared owls may nest on the project site. Several sensitive bat species have the potential to forage over the site and the adjacent canals and drains. The Yuma hispid cotton rat, a California SSC, may also utilize the canals and drains and forage in the agricultural fields. The Sonoran desert toad, a California SSC, has a moderate potential to occur and potentially breed in the adjacent canals and drains. Potential impacts to special status species and necessary mitigation are discussed in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan EIR and MMRP.

4.2.2 Agricultural Resources

The Imperial Valley contains some of the most productive agricultural soils in Southern California. As stated previously, crops grown on the project site include Bermuda grass, vegetables, alfalfa and hay. Also, several isolated stands of Mexican fan palm and Palo Verde exist along the IID canals/drains and dirt roads adjacent to the project site. More than 99 percent of the Plan area is located on land classified as agricultural land by the Department of Conservation. Approximately 90 percent of the Plan area is classified as

Farmland of Statewide Importance, while approximately 9 percent of the Plan area is classified as Prime Farmland. No Williamson Act Contracts exist or have existed within the Plan area.

The Imperial County General Plan encourages the preservation of All Important Farmlands. However, the General Plan allows the conversion of agricultural land to other uses where such uses have been identified in a city general plan or County General Plan. The Land Use Element of the Imperial County General Plan designates the Plan area as an Urban Area. Urban Areas are characterized by a full level of urban services, in particular public water and sewer systems, and contain or propose a broad range of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Therefore, development of the Plan area would convert agricultural resources to urban development.

The Plan area is to be developed in separate components, each containing phases, which will allow current agricultural activities to continue on those portions of the Plan area that are expected to develop at a later time as market conditions allow. If the conventional residential components phases I and/or II are developed first, the proposed alignment of the Specific Plan's roads and development over existing fields demonstrates that the southern half of the Plan area could continue under active cultivation. Because smaller private irrigation ditches may still be able to bring water to the southern fields, this area could fully operate as agricultural land until the proposed active adult, golf course, or additional conventional residential components begin development.

4.2.3 Cultural Resources

A Phase I archaeological investigation was conducted in order to assess the presence of any prehistoric or historic cultural resources within the Rancho Los Lagos Plan area. The survey identified the previously recorded Southern Pacific Railroad and the canals and drains that are a part of the Imperial Irrigation District system as being the only two known cultural resources present in the plan area. However, because these systems are still in use and they will not be diverted or otherwise substantially altered by the proposed plan development, the impacts on these resources are negligible.

Searches for archaeological records, including records documenting Native American artifacts, did not identify any historic artifacts within the plan area. Caution was given to the potential presence of prehistoric artifacts which may have been deposited from populations in the area; this will be remedied by the presence of an archaeological monitor during construction.

4.3 Shared Resources

The County of Imperial encourages energy conservation in order to reduce demand for electricity, gas, and water. The Specific Plan recognizes the importance of conserving the region's shared resources, including energy and water.

4.3.1 Energy

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan has been designed to encourage the conservation of energy resources. The design of the Circulation Plan encourages pedestrian and other non-vehicular modes of transportation. Additionally, multiple land uses (commercial, educational, and parks) have been located in proximity to one another in order to encourage residents to walk or bicycle to these use areas. Furthermore, if residents use vehicles, the trips will be shorter; this will reduce the consumption of fossil fuels.

Design standards incorporated into the Land Use Plan, such as street sections that require less pavement area and include more green space, along with other incorporated pedestrian friendly development techniques will foster conservation of energy resources. Additionally, future residential builders within the Plan area are encouraged to use energy efficient appliances and lighting in their homes, and develop homes with efficient solar orientation. Future builders are also encouraged to make solar power options available to future buyers, if market conditions make this option economically feasible.

4.3.2 Water

The County of Imperial is committed to maintaining water supply by requiring new development projects to incorporate water-conserving fixtures and low-flow toilets. Similarly, the Specific Plan is committed to water conservation, and is designed to minimize water use.

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan will use reclaimed or raw water for irrigation of the golf course and public open spaces and for providing water for the lake features. This use of reclaimed or raw water for these uses reduces demand for potable treated water. Irrigation systems in public rights-of-way are also to be modeled on a low precipitation regime, and will be time-controlled. Furthermore, this use of desert landscaping with low water use plants to complement “oasis landscaping” (focused areas of higher water use plants such as turf grass and palms) areas will reduce the amount of raw or reclaimed water used to irrigate public spaces.

Future residential builders within the Plan area are encouraged to use low-flow household appliances, such as toilets and shower heads. Water conservation devices that are to be used in the Plan area are described in **Table 4-1**. Residential water usage will be monitored on a per-unit basis, such that multi-family residential buildings, or mixed-use buildings, will have water use meters installed for each individual residence.

Table 4-1
Mandated Water Conservation Devices

Device	Maximum Water Usage
Showerheads	2.5 gpm
Lavatory Faucets	2.2 gpm
Sink Faucets	2.2 gpm
Metering Faucets in Public Restrooms	0.25 – 0.75 gal/cycle
Tub Spout Diverter	0.1 gpm
Residential Water Closets	1.6 gpf
Flushometer Valves	1.6 gpf
Commercial Water Closets	1.6 gpf
Urinals	1.0 gpf

gpm = gallons per minute
gpf = gallons per flush.