

C. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

C.1 Introduction

Section C includes analyses of the 12 technical issue areas listed below:

- Air Quality and Climate Change
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Public Safety
- Hydrology
- Noise
- Recreation and Land Use
- Transportation and Traffic
- Visual Resources
- Water Quality and Resources
- Wildfire Prevention and Suppression

Within each of the technical issue areas listed above, discussion of Project impacts is organized according to the following major subheadings:

- Affected Environment
- Regulatory Framework
- Issues Identified During Scoping
- Environmental Consequences, including direct and indirect impact analyses, CEQA Conclusions, and mitigation for the proposed Project and alternatives, including the No Action Alternative.
- Impact Summary

C.1.1 Affected Environment

The affected environment has been described in each issue area to encompass the proposed action and alternatives, including site preparation; construction activities; sediment removal, transport, and disposal; and operation and maintenance. The extent of the affected environment evaluated, or study area, can differ between issue areas. Study areas were determined by geographic extent of anticipated project-related impacts.

NEPA requires that the EIS shall succinctly describe the environment of the area(s) to be affected or created by the alternatives under consideration (40 CFR 1502.15). However, NEPA has no direct guidance regarding when the establishment of a baseline for determining the significance of an impact when preparing an EIS should occur. For the purpose of this EIS/EIR document, and pursuant to CEQA Guidelines (Section 15125[a]), the environmental setting, or affected environment, used to determine the impacts associated with the proposed action and alternatives is based on the environmental conditions that existed in the project area in March 2014, at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) was distributed and the Notice of Intent (NOI) was published (see Section A.4).

As part of Section C (Affected Environment), the regulatory framework applicable to the proposed action is presented within each issue area section. Project activities predominantly would occur on National Forest System lands, with sediment transport routes traversing public rights-of-way in unincorporated Los Angeles County and the City of Palmdale. Consideration to the zoning ordinances of the County of Los Angeles and the City of Palmdale is given in the impact analyses provided in Section C. However, the Forest Service and PWD have pre-emptive jurisdiction over the proposed action and no local discretionary permits or local plan consistency evaluations are required for the proposed action or alternatives. As the action involves construction related to a water storage facility, under California

Government Code Section 53091(e), “Zoning ordinances of a county or city shall not apply to the location or construction of facilities for the production, generation, storage, treatment, or transmission of water...” However, the sites identified to receive the sediment removed from the Reservoir would be required to obtain any necessary permits from local jurisdictions (refer to Standard Project Commitments in Appendix A). Additionally, the Forest Service and PWD, in accordance with NEPA and CEQA (respectively), have included evaluation of local land use plans in this document in cases where these local plans and policies would help reduce or eliminate an environmental impact. The issue area discussions in Section C (Regulatory Framework) present applicable federal, State, and local plans and policies, as well as a discussion of the proposed action’s consistency with each applicable plan or policy described.

C.1.2 Environmental Consequences

Section C examines the environmental consequences associated with the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action, including the No Project/No Action alternative. Analysis within each issue area includes consideration of the proposed action and alternatives, which are described fully in Section B of this EIS/EIR.

The purpose of identifying the potential environmental impacts and the associated mitigation is to provide information about the proposed action’s environmental effects to decision makers and the public that can be used in deliberations about whether or not to approve the proposed action or one of the alternatives. The information contained in this EIS/EIR will also be used by regulatory agencies that would need to issue permits for the construction of the proposed action if approved by the Lead Agencies.

Pursuant to NEPA, the intent of the environmental impact analysis is to provide a scientific and analytic basis for comparing the alternatives. The analysis also identifies any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the Project be implemented and presents mitigation measures to minimize adverse environmental impacts (40 CFR 1502.16). Environmental effects will include direct, indirect, as well as residual or unavoidable impacts that would remain after mitigation measures have been applied.

A significant impact is defined by CEQA as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project” (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15382). In comparison, NEPA states that “‘Significantly’ as used in NEPA requires considerations of both context and intensity...” (40 CFR 1508.27). Significance criteria, or thresholds, serve as a benchmark for determining if a project action will result in a significant adverse environmental impact when evaluated against the baseline.

For the CEQA analysis, impact significance is discussed for each issue area under the subheading “CEQA Significance Conclusion,” and is identified according to the following classification:

- **Class I:** Significant impact that cannot be mitigated to a level that is not significant. Class I impacts are significant adverse effects that cannot be mitigated below a level of significance through the application of feasible mitigation measures. Class I impacts are significant and unavoidable.
- **Class II:** Significant impact that can be mitigated to a level that is not significant. A Class II impact is a significant adverse effect that can be reduced to a less-than-significant level through the application of feasible mitigation measures.
- **Class III:** Adverse, but not significant. A Class III impact is a minor change or effect on the environment that does not meet or exceed the criteria established to gauge significance.
- **Class IV:** Beneficial impact. Class IV impacts represent beneficial effects that would result from project implementation.

Although guidance provided by CEQA and NEPA are used to help determine the level of severity of impacts, the determination of impact significance is based on the independent judgment of the Lead Agencies. The establishment of any criteria used to evaluate the level of severity of impacts is also the responsibility of the Lead Agencies. Some impact categories in this document lend themselves to scientific or mathematical analysis and, therefore, to quantification, while others are more qualitative, and issue areas such as Air Quality have significance criteria that are established by regulatory agencies.

Each environmental impact identified is associated with a specific threshold, which is used to evaluate the level of severity of the impact. Potential mitigation measures are proposed for adverse impacts, where feasible. The PWD has incorporated mechanisms into the description of its proposed project to avoid or reduce impacts from project construction and operation. These mechanisms are referred to as standard project commitments (SPCs) in this EIS/EIR, and are considered in the analysis of impacts and the determinations of impacts. In the assessment of identified impacts, SPCs have been assumed to be part of the proposed project and, therefore, are not included as mitigation measures. The SPCs are considered a commitment by the PWD and implementation of each SPC will be monitored by the PWD if the proposed project or an alternative is approved. The SPCs that are considered necessary to reduce potential impacts are listed in Appendix A (Standard Project Commitments).