

3.1 AESTHETICS

3.1.1 Introduction

This section discusses the potential for the Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) Project to result in temporary and permanent changes in the visual environment near the New and Alamo rivers. The study area includes the locations from which views of the proposed SCH Project sites would be possible, including the southern portion of the Salton Sea and its shoreline, adjacent agricultural areas, the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (Sonny Bono NWR) and Imperial Wildlife Area, and public use areas at Red Hill. Although the Salton Sea can be viewed from hills and mountains farther away, the proposed Project sites would be viewed by most people from lands immediately adjacent to or within the study area boundary.

Table 3.1-1 summarizes the impacts of the six Project alternatives on aesthetic resources, compared to both the existing conditions and the No Action Alternative.

Table 3.1-1 Summary of Impacts on Aesthetics								
Impact	Basis of Comparison	Project Alternative						Mitigation Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Impact AES-1: Project construction could temporarily degrade the scenic quality, character, or scenic vistas of the site and surrounding areas.	Existing Condition	L	L	L	L	L	L	None required
	No Action	L	L	L	L	L	L	None required
Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and surrounding areas.	Existing Condition	B	B	B	B	B	B	None required
	No Action	B	B	B	B	B	B	None required
Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the surrounding area.	Existing Condition	L	L	L	L	L	L	None required
	No Action	L	L	L	L	L	L	None required
Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting.	Existing Condition	L	L	L	S	S	S	MM AES-1: Shield and direct construction lights away from Red Hill Park.
	No Action	L	L	S	S	S	S	Same as Existing Condition
Note: O = No Impact L = Less-than-Significant Impact S = Significant Impact, but Mitigable to Less than Significant U = Significant Unavoidable Impact B = Beneficial Impact								

3.1.2 Regulatory Requirements

No regulatory requirements pertain specifically to the aesthetic/visual environment of the Salton Sea. However, the Imperial County General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (1993) and

1 Circulation and Scenic Highways Element (2008) include a number of goals and objectives intended to
2 preserve visual resources and protect scenic highways in the county.

3 **3.1.3 Affected Environment**

4 Elements that influence the visual environment include topographic features such as landforms; the Salton
5 Sea itself; vegetation patterns; human-made alterations to the landscape such as roads, public works
6 projects, agricultural land uses, and structures; and wildlife. Photos showing the visual environment of the
7 study area are shown in Figures 3.1-1 and 3.1-2. Key observation points (KOPs), which provide
8 representative views of the visual environment, are described below. A photograph for each KOP, along
9 with the location of each, is shown in Figure 3.1-3.

10 **3.1.3.1 Project Vicinity**

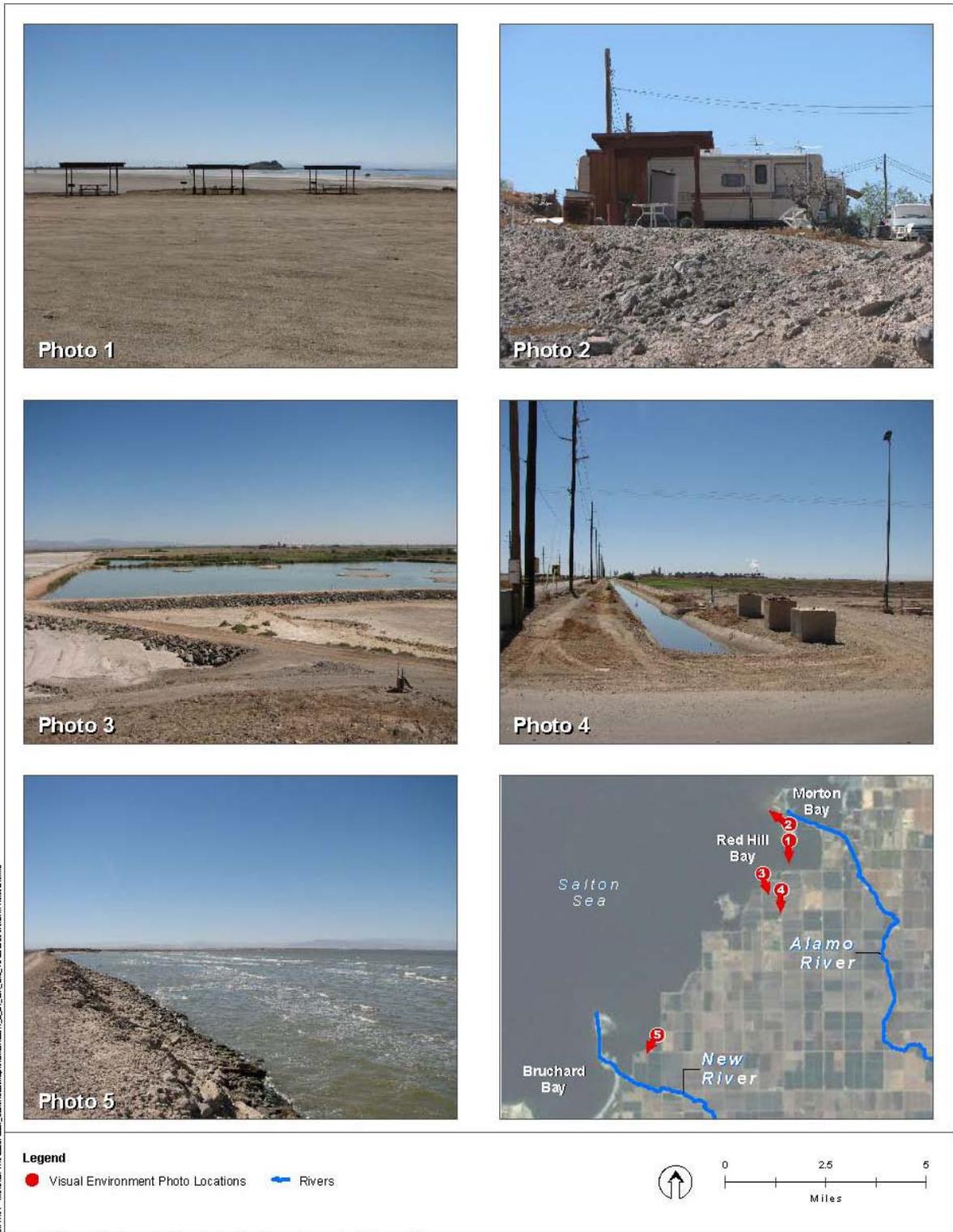
11 The New and Alamo rivers flow into the Salton Sea where the proposed SCH sites are located, forming
12 river deltas that are significant visual elements within the region. Riparian vegetation and exposed shore
13 (playa) dominate the delta areas. Vegetation is generally dense and distributed linearly along the rivers,
14 obscuring water views of the rivers.

15 Intensive irrigated row crops and wildlife management areas are the primary land uses in the study area.
16 Agricultural lands consist of expansive areas of uniform rows and plots, separated by berms and cement-
17 lined canals. The vivid green crops contrast significantly with the earthen tones of the berms and other
18 surrounding land features of the arid desert. The berms and canals create a uniform grid pattern over a
19 majority of the land area.

20 Due to the large numbers and variety, birds are an important aesthetic/visual element at the Salton Sea.
21 Many of the birds congregate at or near the Sonny Bono NWR and the Imperial Wildlife Area. The Sonny
22 Bono NWR, shown on Figure 2-2, contains areas of salt and freshwater marsh, open water, exposed
23 playa, pasture, and managed agricultural fields. Public access to the shoreline is provided at observation
24 towers, viewing blinds, observation trails, and an interpretive center. Two separate units comprise the
25 Sonny Bono NWR: Unit 1 encompasses the New River mouth and the shoreline to the south and west of
26 the outlet; Unit 2 encompasses the Alamo River mouth and the shoreline to the south and west of the
27 Alamo outlet. Rock Hill, a main topographic feature within the refuge, is located at the end of a 1-mile
28 trail from the Sonny Bono NWR headquarters.

29 Red Hill Park is located immediately north of the second unit of the Sonny Bono NWR adjacent to the
30 Alamo River mouth. Red Hill was originally an island connected to land by a causeway extending out
31 from Garst Road; however, due to declining water levels, the areas between the island and mainland are
32 exposed playa and salt flats that are no longer submerged beneath the Sea. The marina is located on the
33 western side of the island and is no longer operational because of declining water levels. Fishermen
34 launch their boats by trailering them to the water's edge. Remnants of two docks remain at the marina
35 site. The site continues to support picnic facilities; however, they are no longer located along the shoreline
36 of the Salton Sea. A campground, including recreational vehicle (RV) hookups and additional picnic
37 facilities, is located on the northern and eastern sides of Red Hill Island (County of Imperial 2010). Two
38 of the trailers/RVs parked in the campground currently are occupied by long-term residents rather than
39 short-term visitors (personal communication, K. Mercurio 2011).

40 Rock Hill and Red Hill are both considered scenic "mountain peaks" because they are the only
41 topographic features for miles around the Project vicinity. Previous studies in the area have considered the
42 incorporation of one or both of these features in the design of restored habitat to significantly enhance the
43 scenic quality of the area (Salton Sea Authority Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee 2004).



1

2 **Figure 3.1-1 Representative Photos of the Study Area (Photos 1-5)**

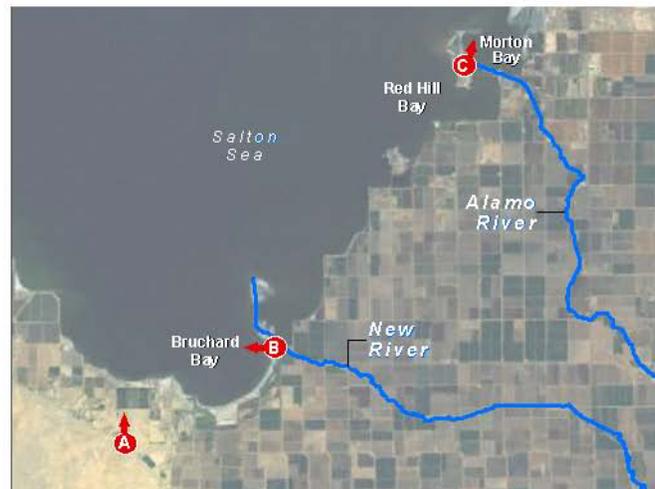
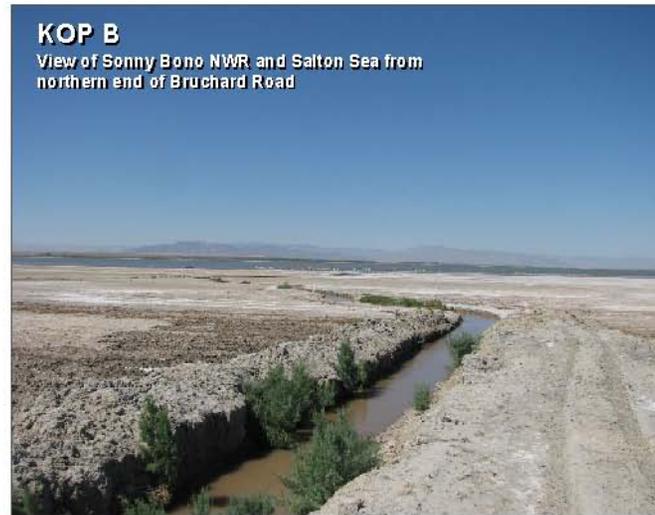
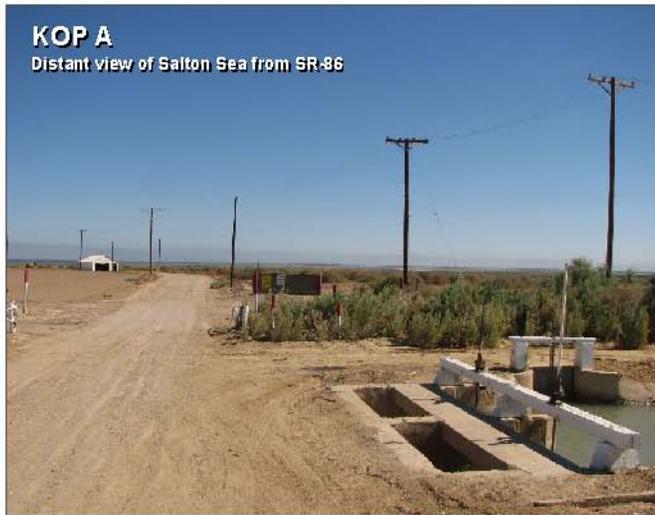
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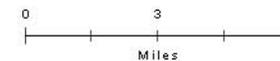
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2 **Figure 3.1-2 Representative Photos of the Study Area (Photos 6-9)**

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Legend
 ● Key Observation Points Rivers



1

2 **Figure 3.1-3 Key Observation Points**

1 Geothermal plants are visible in the southern parts of the study area and are dominant visual features due
2 to their height and bulk. Steam plumes from the plants may be visible depending on atmospheric
3 conditions, especially during cooler weather.

4 **3.1.3.2 Visibility**

5 Despite the Project area's general flat topography, visual access to the southern portion of the Salton Sea
6 is limited due to the Salton Sea's distance from major highways (SR-86 and SR-111) and other urban
7 centers. Within the study area, visual access is further limited by areas of dense riparian vegetation
8 associated with the rivers and canals, as well as by the berms separating agricultural fields. In addition to
9 limited visual access, physical access to the shoreline of the Salton Sea is generally restricted throughout
10 most of the study area because of private land ownership and trespassing restrictions in protected areas.
11 Visual access to the potential SCH Project sites at the Alamo River is provided Red Hill Park. Red Hill
12 provides excellent views of the Salton Sea and surrounding areas.

13 **3.1.3.3 Viewer Sensitivity**

14 Viewer sensitivity is a measure of public concern for scenic quality and is analyzed by considering the
15 type of users, amount of use, public interest, and adjacent land uses. Users within the study area include
16 recreational users, such as hunters, anglers, and birdwatchers; farmworkers, and residents at nearby farms;
17 employees at the geothermal plants; and commuters/travelers on SR-86 between the intersection of SR-78
18 and Vendel Road. Workers and commuters in the area would view the Salton Sea in the vicinity of the
19 New River as a backdrop to their daily activities or as a brief view as they pass through the area. Worker
20 and commuter views of the SCH ponds at both the New and Alamo river sites would generally be
21 obstructed by industrial and farming uses, including geothermal plants; farm equipment; agricultural
22 fields; and the expansive grid network of canals that covers most of the area. These users would likely be
23 insensitive to changes in visual character because the Project area would not be the focus of their
24 activities and because views of farming and industrial uses would dominate the foreground of their views.

25 Recreational users, such as hunters, photographers, and birdwatchers, participate in these activities at the
26 Sonny Bono NWR, Imperial Wildlife Area, and other sites in the study area. Because the value of such
27 recreational activities is enhanced by the scenic quality of the surrounding areas, these users would have a
28 greater interest in the preservation or enhancement of the visual character of the proposed Project sites.
29 Additionally, because many of these users partake in recreational activities within or directly adjacent to
30 the Project sites, views are more focused on the natural environment and less obstructed by man-made
31 modifications that would lessen their sensitivity to change.

32 **3.1.3.4 Key Observation Points**

33 KOPs are viewing locations chosen to be representative of the most visually sensitive areas that would
34 view the Project sites. The inventory of KOPs includes three components: (1) identification and photo-
35 documentation of viewing areas and potential KOPs, (2) classification of the visual sensitivity of the
36 KOPs, and (3) description of the Project's visibility from the KOPs. KOPs were identified based on
37 review of available land use data and field inspection.

38 Three sensitive viewing locations were identified as representative of viewers who would be most
39 susceptible to visual impact within their viewshed as a result of the SCH Project. The selected KOPs are
40 representative of the range of potential viewer experience from the immediate surrounding areas. KOPs
41 are static depictions of the visual environment that is in reality experienced and perceived through
42 dynamic interaction of the viewer and his/her environment. Therefore, the analysis of KOPs considers
43 visual features in the context of the viewer's experience that may not be visible within the KOP image.
44 These features contribute to the overall perception of landscape associated with the viewer's experience.

1 In addition, KOPs are analyzed as being representative of a larger area than the specific KOP location
2 when that image is considered to be representative of the visual experience of viewers within a larger, but
3 related, geographic area.

4 KOP locations are included for both the New and Alamo river sites. KOP locations and photographs are
5 presented in Figure 3.1-3. A brief characterization of these areas is provided below.

6 ***KOP A***

7 Travelers along SR-86 would have varying views of the Project due to distance from the site, topography,
8 and built structures. KOP A is taken from SR-86 near the intersection with Poe Road, looking northeast
9 towards the Salton Sea. SR-86 is one of the primary north-south routes through the Imperial Valley and is
10 the only state highway that passes within viewing distance of the Project. For travelers along SR-86, the
11 Salton Sea is visible in the distance, with foreground views being primarily of agricultural fields, canals
12 and scattered farmhouses. SR-86 is primarily a four-lane, separated highway traveled by either local
13 farmers or trucks traveling between the border crossing at Calexico and Interstate 10. Northbound and
14 southbound annual average daily traffic in the portion of the highway that passes closest to the Project
15 area is 10,800 trips per day and 8,700 trips per day, respectively.

16 ***KOP B***

17 KOP B views the existing southern shoreline of the Salton Sea from the northern end of Bruchard Road.
18 This viewpoint is located within the Sonny Bono NWR near the confluence of the New River and the
19 Salton Sea. The view is of exposed playa, an agricultural drain, and riparian habitat bordering the New
20 River in the foreground, and the Salton Sea and distant mountains in the background. The visual
21 environment is generally composed of natural elements, except for a single road extending onto the
22 exposed playa, which is minimally obtrusive and contrasts only slightly with the exposed playa. This
23 view is representative of recreational users visiting Unit 1 of the NWR, including photographers and
24 birders. Dense vegetation in the area associated with the New River and canals obstructs views from
25 surrounding agricultural properties and local roads.

26 ***KOP C***

27 The location of KOP C is representative of the viewer experience from the campground located at Red
28 Hill Park. This viewpoint is located on the north shore of the island, looking north towards the Alamo
29 River mouth. The view is dominated by exposed playa with a thin border of riparian vegetation lining the
30 horizon. The dense vegetation and the angle of view obstruct any potential views of the Alamo River,
31 which flows across the exposed playa to its outlet at the Salton Sea. Only two of the campers at the Red
32 Hill campground are long-term seasonal residents. Overnight campers, while infrequent, would be
33 expected to be sensitive to the visual environment as the focus of their visit would likely be to view the
34 natural surroundings.

35 **3.1.4 Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

36 **3.1.4.1 Impact Analysis Methodology**

37 Effects on visual resource are created when the physical characteristics of facilities or alterations to the
38 natural environment associated with a project contrast with natural and existing characteristics of the
39 landscape setting. Factors that affect the degree to which a project affects visual resources include (1)
40 scenic quality, (2) visibility, and (3) sensitivity of the viewers. Natural landscapes are traditionally
41 considered to be more aesthetically pleasing and of greater scenic quality than man-made landscapes and
42 are measured based on landforms, vegetation, water, color, influence of adjacent scenery, scarcity, and
43 cultural modifications. Resources that are located closer to the viewer, or where there is no interruption of
44 the view, are generally considered more valuable. Resources that are viewed by those who use an area

1 frequently, are subject to high levels of public interest, are adjacent to complementary land uses, or are
2 considered special areas are also viewed as more important aesthetically.

3 Impacts of the Project alternatives are presented through a discussion of changes in views from the KOPs.
4 Because the Project alternatives would involve construction at different locations, the KOPs that could be
5 affected would vary depending on the location of the ponds and associated facilities. Alternatives 1, 2,
6 and 3 would construct ponds near the New River, while Alternatives 4, 5, and 6 would construct ponds
7 near the Alamo River. Due to this variation, the Project sites (and associated construction activities) for
8 Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 could be visible from KOPs A and B, but would not be visible from KOP C. The
9 Project sites for Alternatives 4, 5, and 6 (and associated construction activities) could be visible from
10 KOP C, but would not be visible from either KOPs A or B.

11 3.1.4.2 Thresholds of Significance

12 *Significance Criteria*

13 Impacts on aesthetic resources would be significant if the Project alternatives would:

- 14 • Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- 15 • Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in
16 the area;
- 17 • Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees; rock outcroppings, and
18 historic buildings within a state scenic highway; or
- 19 • Have a substantial adverse impact on a scenic vista.

20 *Application of Significance Criteria*

21 A summary of the overall methodology used in applying the significance criteria to the Project
22 alternatives follows:

- 23 • **Substantially degrade visual character or quality** – The analysis is based upon changes to the
24 scenic quality, visibility and sensitivity of viewers. It is assumed that the Project would generally
25 produce beneficial changes to the visual environment of the Project area; however, during
26 construction there is the potential for degradation of the visual character.
- 27 • **Substantially damage scenic resources including those within a state scenic highway** – The
28 Project would be constructed as the Salton Sea recedes and would restore habitat that would be lost. It
29 would not substantially damage scenic resources. No officially designated state scenic highways are
30 present in Imperial County, nor are there any eligible state scenic highways within viewing distance
31 of the Project area. Therefore, this criterion is not addressed in the following impact assessment¹.
- 32 • **Create a new source of light or glare** – Night lighting could be required during construction, so this
33 impact is addressed below. Lighting at the trailer serving as an office for permanent employees would
34 be minimal and would not cause an adverse change in the environment, and this impact is not
35 discussed further. No substantial sources of glare would be introduced as part of the SCH Project, so
36 this issue is not addressed further.

¹¹ Highways within Imperial County that are eligible for designation as a state scenic highway include Interstate 8 (I-8), State Route 78 (SR-78), and State Route 111 (SR-111). I-8 from the border with San Diego County to SR-98 near Coyote Wells; SR-78 west of the intersection with SR-86; and SR-111 from Bombay Beach north to the Riverside County line are eligible for scenic highway designation. However, Imperial County has not applied for scenic highway designation for these routes. Moreover, none of the routes listed as eligible is within viewing distance of the Project sites (California Department of Transportation 2009).

- 1 • **Have a substantial adverse impact on a scenic vista** – No scenic vistas are identified in the
2 Imperial County General Plan or other applicable land use plans. Red Hill provides expansive views
3 of the proposed Alamo River sites and surrounding areas. Therefore, vistas from this viewpoint may
4 be considered scenic and are discussed in combination with impacts to visual character and quality.

5 3.1.4.3 No Action Alternative

6 The description of the impacts of the No Action Alternative that is included in the *Salton Sea Ecosystem*
7 *Restoration Program Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Report* (California Department of
8 Water Resources [DWR] and California Department of Fish and Game [DFG] 2007) is applicable to the
9 SCH Project and summarized below. This alternative would involve construction and operations and
10 maintenance activities associated with pupfish channels and relocating recreational facilities as the Salton
11 Sea recedes.

12 Under the No Action Alternative, views would be affected primarily by the pupfish channels and the
13 receding Salton Sea. Pupfish channels would be unlined excavated channels along the southern shoreline
14 and have the general appearance of a drainage canal. The pupfish channels would also be constructed by
15 2020. The Salton Sea would continue to appear as a large body of water. However, the Salton Sea would
16 not be located adjacent to the shoreline. This high salinity water body probably would be reddish brown
17 to dark brown based on water quality and weather conditions.

18 Additionally, the No Action Alternative would result in reduced habitat at the Salton Sea. Higher salinity
19 levels would reduce survival rates of aquatic species, and in particular, fish that provide an important food
20 source for birds. Fewer birds would reduce photography and birding opportunities and would reduce the
21 aesthetic value of the area for recreational users. Therefore, impacts on wildlife would degrade the visual
22 quality, character, and scenic vistas of the Project area.

23 3.1.4.4 Alternative 1 – New River, Gravity Diversion + Cascading Ponds

24 Alternative 1 would restore approximately 3,130 acres of habitat near the confluence of the New River
25 and the Salton Sea. Restored habitat would include ponds surrounded by berms that would extend along
26 the shoreline from Young Road in the northeast to the southwestern extent of the Sonny Bono NWR. The
27 ponds would include nesting islands. An approximately 60-acre sedimentation basin would be constructed
28 several miles upriver near the point of diversion from the New River. A brackish water supply pipeline
29 would be constructed as well, and could follow existing roads or the river corridor or could cross
30 agricultural fields. A seawater pump and associated pipeline would be required, as well.

31 **Impact AES-1: Construction would temporarily degrade the scenic quality and character of the site**
32 **and surrounding areas (less-than-significant impact).** Construction of the SCH ponds and associated
33 components would involve extensive excavation; the formation of berms and islands; and trenching for
34 the brackish water supply pipeline. The brackish water pipeline corridor would be restored to its previous
35 condition once construction was completed. Trucks and light vehicles would traverse nearby roads each
36 day in order to transport workers and haul construction materials, but these would not cause a substantial
37 visual change since trucks and heavy equipment are typically used in agricultural settings.

38 Representative views of the Project site during construction would include views from KOP A and KOP
39 B. The Project site would not be visible from KOP C. Therefore, no impacts would occur at these
40 locations.

41 KOP A would be representative of views from SR-86 and from agricultural fields to the south and west of
42 the site. The Project site would be viewed from a distance (at least 2 miles from the nearest pond site) and
43 views would be obscured or interrupted by other agricultural and industrial uses in the area. Heavy

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1 machinery associated with construction activity would not be visible, although dust associated with trucks
2 traveling to and from the site on dirt roads could be visible from these locations. Viewers from areas
3 representative of KOP A would likely not be visiting the area for the aesthetic values it provides for
4 activities such as photography and birding, but would rather be passing through or involved in
5 agricultural or industrial activities. Any impacts would be temporary and less than significant when
6 compared to both the existing environmental setting and the No Action Alternative.

7 KOP B is located within the Project site and is representative of views by visitors to the Sonny Bono
8 NWR. During Project construction, views from this point would be dominated by heavy machinery
9 engaged in ground disturbing construction activities and dust emissions. Individuals viewing the Project
10 from this area would likely be sensitive to changes in the visual environment; however, access is limited
11 in this area and construction would only occur temporarily. Therefore, impacts would be less than
12 significant when compared to both the existing environmental setting and the No Action Alternative.

13 Construction would likely disrupt normal wildlife patterns in the immediate vicinity, but this change
14 would be temporary, and wildlife viewing opportunities would be available at the nearby Sonny Bono
15 NWR and Imperial Wildlife Area. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant when compared to
16 both the existing environmental setting and the No Action Alternative.

17 **Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and**
18 **surrounding areas (beneficial impact).** Once operational, views from KOP A of the Project site would
19 likely be of the berms and dikes that contain the SCH ponds due to the angle of view from which travelers
20 along SR-86 and nearby agricultural areas view the site. Because of the distance (over 2 miles from the
21 nearest pond site), the Project site would likely be undistinguishable from the surrounding area. There
22 would be little contrast between the Project and the adjacent agricultural areas and remaining open water
23 of the Salton Sea. No impacts on the visual environment would occur when the Project was viewed from
24 this distance.

25 The SCH ponds would be constructed in areas that are currently or were recently submerged. Upon
26 completion of construction, the area viewed from KOP B would consist primarily of SCH ponds
27 surrounded by berms. The ponds and nesting islands are considered a more aesthetically pleasing setting
28 than the exposed playa that would be present when construction began. The SCH ponds are intended to
29 provide habitat for birds, which also would contribute to the area's scenic qualities. The scenic quality
30 and character of the site would be improved compared to both the existing conditions and the No Action
31 Alternative, with greater benefit realized in comparison to No Action, because the amount of exposed
32 playa would increase over time. Overall, impacts would be beneficial when compared to both the existing
33 environmental setting and the No Action Alternative.

34 **Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the**
35 **surrounding area (less-than-significant impact).** Views from KOP B may include a trailer that would
36 be present at the site for use by permanent employees. The trailer would be compatible with existing
37 agricultural uses that predominate. The sedimentation basin that would be located near the New River
38 would also be compatible with agricultural uses, and the brackish water pipeline corridor would be
39 restored to its previous condition. The diversion structure would require the removal of a small amount of
40 vegetation around the New River, but the disturbed area would be minor and would not be visible from
41 sensitive viewpoints at the Sonny Bono NWR. The seawater pump station would be located on a platform
42 in the Sea and may have to be relocated as the Sea recedes. A pipeline would be required to bring
43 seawater to the ponds. Such small-scale facilities would be visually compatible with surrounding
44 agricultural uses. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant when compared to both the existing
45 environmental setting and the No Action Alternative.

1 **Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting (less-than-**
2 **significant impact).** It is possible that some activities, such as dredging, may occur 24 hours a day and
3 require night lighting. This impact would be temporary, and the site is located in a remote rural area, well-
4 removed from populations who would be affected by the increased night lighting. Thus, this impact
5 would be less than significant when compared to both the existing environmental setting and the No
6 Action Alternative.

7 3.1.4.5 Alternative 2 – New River, Pumped Diversion

8 The key differences between Alternative 2 and Alternative 1 are that less habitat would be restored (2,670
9 acres as opposed to 3,130 acres), no brackish water pipeline would be required to convey river water to
10 the ponds, pumps would be used, the sedimentation basin would be located in the pond area, and the
11 diversion would be close to the ponds. Additionally, the configuration of the pond sites would be
12 different, with the ponds extending further west.

13 **Impact AES-1: Construction would temporarily degrade the scenic quality and character of the site**
14 **and surrounding areas (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
15 applicable to this alternative, although KOP A would be closer to the nearest pond (approximately 1 mile
16 away), and no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction would occur. The impact conclusion is
17 unchanged.

18 **Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and**
19 **surrounding areas (beneficial impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally applicable to
20 this alternative, although KOP A would be closer to the nearest pond (approximately 1 mile away). The
21 impact conclusion is unchanged.

22 **Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the**
23 **surrounding area (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
24 applicable to this alternative, although no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction would occur.
25 The sedimentation basin would be within the pond sites and would be visually compatible with the
26 surrounding area. The minor amount of vegetation removal required for the diversion structure would be
27 closer to the viewers from the Sonny Bono NWR, but it would be small and would not cause a substantial
28 change in the visual environment. Pump facilities are typical of agricultural areas and would be
29 compatible with surrounding uses.

30 **Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting (less-than-**
31 **significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is applicable to this alternative.

32 3.1.4.6 Alternative 3 – New River, Pumped Diversion + Cascading Ponds

33 The key differences between Alternative 3 and Alternative 1 are that more habitat would be restored
34 (3,770 acres as opposed to 3,130 acres), no brackish water pipeline would be required to convey river
35 water to the ponds, pumps would be used, the sedimentation basin would be located in the pond area, and
36 the diversion would be close to the ponds. Additionally, the configuration of the pond sites would be
37 different, with the ponds extending further west.

38 **Impact AES-1: Construction would temporarily degrade the scenic quality and character of the site**
39 **and surrounding areas (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
40 applicable to this alternative, although KOP A would be closer to the nearest pond (approximately 1 mile
41 away), and no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction would occur. The impact conclusion is
42 unchanged.

1 **Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and**
2 **surrounding areas (beneficial impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally applicable to
3 this alternative, although KOP A would be closer to the nearest pond (approximately 1 mile away). The
4 impact conclusion is unchanged.

5 **Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the**
6 **surrounding area (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
7 applicable to this alternative, although no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction would occur.
8 The sedimentation basin would be within the pond sites and would be visually compatible with the
9 surrounding area. The minor amount of vegetation removal required for the diversion structure would be
10 closer to the viewers from the Sonny Bono NWR, but it would be small and would not cause a substantial
11 change in the visual environment. Pump facilities are typical of agricultural areas and would be
12 compatible with surrounding uses.

13 **Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting (less-than-**
14 **significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is applicable to this alternative.

15 3.1.4.7 Alternative 4 – Alamo River, Gravity Diversion + Cascading Pond

16 Alternative 4 would involve the restoration of less habitat than Alternative 1 (2,290 acres as opposed to
17 3,130 acres. Other Project elements would be similar. Viewers in areas represented by KOPs A and B
18 would not have views of the Project sites or associated construction activities. Therefore, viewers near the
19 New River mouth or Unit 1 of the Sonny Bono NWR would not experience any impacts related to
20 construction of Alternative 4.

21 **Impact AES-1: Construction would temporarily degrade the scenic quality and character of the site**
22 **and surrounding areas (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
23 applicable to this alternative. Those at the nearby Red Hill Park (represented by KOP C) would be able to
24 view construction, particularly at the higher elevations. However, visual impacts would be temporary and
25 limited to those who are immediately adjacent to or within the Project site. Impacts would remain less
26 than significant.

27 **Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and**
28 **surrounding areas (beneficial impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally applicable to
29 this alternative. Views would be enhanced for those visiting Red Hill Park, as well as for the few long-
30 term residents at the park.

31 **Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the**
32 **surrounding area (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is applicable to
33 this alternative.

34 **Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting (significant**
35 **impact).** As noted under Alternative 1, some construction may require the temporary use of night
36 lighting. When construction occurred in the vicinity of Red Hill, this would result in a substantial change
37 over the current conditions in this undeveloped rural area, and could pose an annoyance to those residing
38 or camping there. This would be a significant impact when compared to both the existing environmental
39 setting and the No Action Alternative.

40 *Mitigation Measures*

41 **MM AES-1: Shield and direct construction lights away from Red Hill Park.** To the extent feasible,
42 when campers or other residents are present, nighttime construction should occur as far from the park as

1 possible. Additionally, lights should be shielded and directed away from the park and should be turned
2 out when no longer needed.

3 *Residual Impact*

4 Implementation of MM AES-1 would reduce this impact to less than significant because lighting impacts
5 on those staying at Red Hill Park would be minimized.

6 **3.1.4.8 Alternative 5 – Alamo River, Pumped Diversion**

7 Key differences between Alternatives 1 and 5 are that Alternative 5 would involve the restoration of less
8 habitat (2,080 acres as opposed to 3,130 acres), no brackish water pipeline would be required to convey
9 river water to the ponds, the sedimentation basin would be located in the pond area, and the diversion
10 would be close to the ponds.

11 **Impact AES-1: Construction would temporarily degrade the scenic quality and character of the site**
12 **and surrounding areas (less-than-significant impact).** The discussions under Alternatives 1 and 4 are
13 generally applicable to this alternative, although no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction
14 would occur.

15 **Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and**
16 **surrounding areas (beneficial impact).** The discussion under Alternatives 1 and 4 is generally
17 applicable to this alternative. Views would be enhanced for those visiting Red Hill Park, as well as for the
18 few long-term residents.

19 **Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the**
20 **surrounding area (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
21 applicable to this alternative, although no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction would occur.
22 The sedimentation basin would be within the pond sites and visually compatible with the surrounding
23 area. The minor amount of vegetation removal required for the diversion structure would be closer to the
24 viewers from the Sonny Bono NWR, but it would be small and would not cause a substantial change in
25 the visual environment. Pump facilities are typical of agricultural areas and would be compatible with
26 surrounding uses.

27 **Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting (significant**
28 **impact).** The discussion under Alternative 2 is applicable to this alternative. MM AES-1 also is
29 applicable to this alternative and would reduce this impact to less than significant.

30 **3.1.4.9 Alternative 6 – Alamo River, Pumped Diversion + Cascading Ponds**

31 Key differences between Alternatives 1 and 6 are that Alternative 6 would involve the restoration of less
32 habitat (2,940 acres as opposed to 3,130 acres), no brackish water pipeline would be required to convey
33 river water to the ponds, the sedimentation basin would be located in the pond area, and the diversion
34 would be close to the ponds.

35 **Impact AES-1: Construction would temporarily degrade the scenic quality and character of the site**
36 **and surrounding areas (less-than-significant impact).** The discussions under Alternatives 1 and 4 are
37 generally applicable to this alternative, although no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction
38 would occur.

39 **Impact AES-2: The SCH ponds would enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and**
40 **surrounding areas (beneficial impact).** The discussion under Alternatives 1 and 4 is generally

1 applicable to this alternative. Views would be enhanced for those visiting Red Hill Park, as well as for the
2 few long-term residents.

3 **Impact AES-3: Other SCH facilities would be compatible with the existing character of the**
4 **surrounding area (less-than-significant impact).** The discussion under Alternative 1 is generally
5 applicable to this alternative, although no impacts from brackish water pipeline construction would occur.
6 The sedimentation basin would be within the pond sites and visually compatible with the surrounding
7 area. The minor amount of vegetation removal required for the diversion structure would be closer to the
8 viewers from the Sonny Bono NWR, but it would be small and would not cause a substantial change in
9 the visual environment. Pump facilities are typical of agricultural areas and would be compatible with
10 surrounding uses.

11 **Impact AES-4: Some construction activities may occur at night, requiring lighting (significant**
12 **impact).** The discussion under Alternative 2 is applicable to this alternative. MM AES-1 also is
13 applicable to this alternative and would reduce this impact to less than significant.

14 3.1.5 References

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28 Mercurio, Kira. 2011. Accountant, Imperial County Planning & Development Services. Personal
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