

1 **3.18 RECREATION**

2 This section focuses on potential changes to recreational uses at the Salton Sea, which are closely related
 3 to the state of fish and wildlife habitat. The study area includes the sites where the Species Conservation
 4 Habitat (SCH) Project would be implemented and nearby recreational areas.

5 Table 3.18-1 summarizes the impacts of the six Project alternatives on recreational resources, compared
 6 to both the existing conditions and the No Action Alternative.

Table 3.18-1 Summary of Impacts on Recreation								
Impact	Basis of Comparison	Project Alternative						Mitigation Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Impact REC-1: The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites.	Existing Condition	B	B	B	B	B	B	None required
	No Action	B	B	B	B	B	B	None required
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								

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 8 **3.18.1 Regulatory Requirements**

9 Recreational resources in the study area are subject to the regulations of Federal, state, or local agencies,
 10 depending on jurisdiction. For example, the State of California regulates State Recreation Areas (SRAs),
 11 and the Federal government regulates National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs).

12 **3.18.2 Affected Environment**

13 The predominant recreational activities at the Salton Sea include bird-watching, wildlife observation,
 14 camping, hiking, picnicking, and hunting. Historically, the Salton Sea provided a variety of recreational
 15 opportunities, including swimming, water skiing, sport fishing, and boating. In recent years, however,
 16 recreational use at the Salton Sea has decreased noticeably, most likely due to a perception of
 17 deteriorating water quality and odors, the decline of the sport fishery, and the declining surface water
 18 elevation. Starting in 2000, all sport fish populations underwent a dramatic reduction. Marine sport fish
 19 species have been undetectable in California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) gill net sampling since
 20 mid-May 2003. In addition, none have been detected in fish kills or presented by anglers since mid-May
 21 2003. In response to the loss of the marine sport fish, angling and recreational boating has virtually ceased
 22 at the Salton Sea (California Department of Water Resources [DWR] and DFG 2007). Of eight boat-
 23 launching facilities that were active in the 1980s, today only two are active (Varner Harbor at the Salton
 24 Sea SRA Headquarters and the Obsidian Butte boat launch). On most days, no boats or other watercraft
 25 are present on the Salton Sea. The few boats that are observed on the Salton Sea are primarily research
 26 vessels (personal communication, J. Crayon 2011).

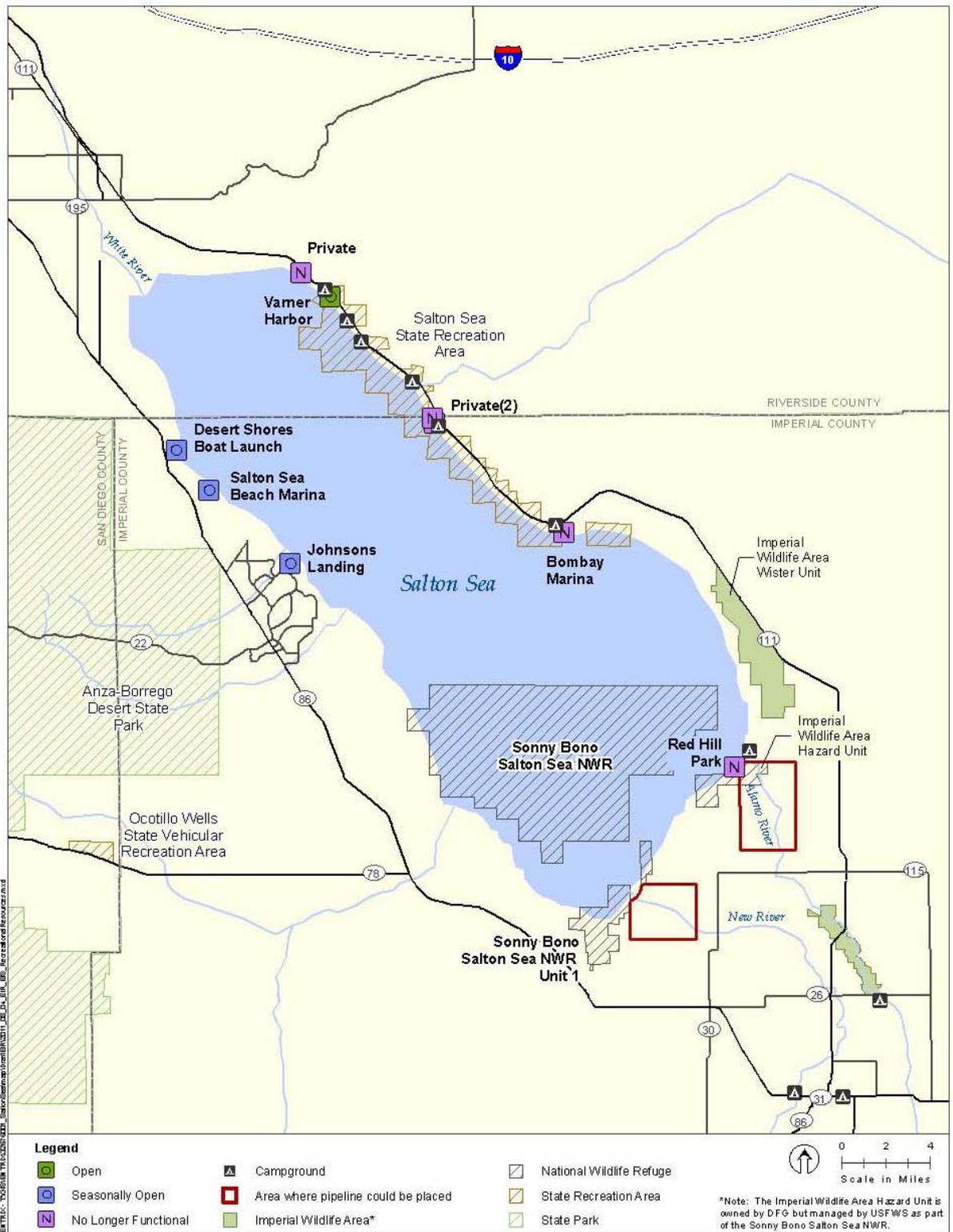
SECTION 3.0
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

1 Figure 3.18-1 shows the major recreational facilities around the entire Salton Sea. The Red Hill Park,
2 which includes an inactive marina, is located immediately north of the second unit of the Sonny Bono
3 Salton Sea NWR adjacent to the Alamo River mouth. Red Hill was originally an island connected to land
4 by a causeway extending out from Garst Road; however, due to declining water levels, the areas between
5 the island and mainland are exposed playa and salt flats that are no longer submerged beneath the Sea.
6 The marina is located on the western side of the island and is no longer operational because of declining
7 water levels. Anglers launch their boats by trailering them to the water's edge. Remnants of two docks
8 remain at the marina site. The site continues to support picnic facilities; however, they are no longer
9 located along the shoreline of the Salton Sea. A campground, including recreational vehicle hookups and
10 additional picnic facilities, is located on the northern and eastern sides of Red Hill Island.

11 Figure 2-2 shows the relationship of the proposed SCH pond sites to the nearby NWR and Imperial
12 Wildlife Area. The Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR was established in 1930 as a refuge and breeding
13 habitat for wildlife and is operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Most of the refuge is inundated
14 by the Salton Sea. Along the shoreline, the refuge includes upland forage and freshwater marsh areas.
15 This portion of land adjacent to the Salton Sea is an important part of the Pacific Flyway and is
16 considered one of the premier bird-watching locations in the nation. The refuge, which receives
17 approximately 20,000 visitors a year, (personal communication, C. Schoneman 2011) also includes nature
18 trails and provides opportunities for photography, picnicking, and waterfowl hunting. Public access to the
19 shoreline is provided at observation towers, viewing blinds, observation trails, and an interpretive center;
20 the only other areas open to the public are portions of Union Tract and Hazard Unit, which are available
21 for hunting from November to January.

22 Imperial Wildlife Area consists of three units that are owned by DFG; these include the Wister Unit,
23 Finney-Ramer Unit, and Hazard Unit, although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has maintained
24 management and administrative authority of the Hazard Unit for decades by agreement with DFG. The
25 units are primarily composed of low-lying land that provide habitat for migratory waterfowl. Finney-
26 Ramer Unit is located south of the Salton Sea and the City of Calipatria, near the Alamo River. Originally
27 established as a waterfowl refuge by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, this unit consists of 2,047 acres,
28 including four lakes. Wister (5,243 acres) and Hazard (535 acres) units consist of upland habitat and
29 managed wetlands, primarily to provide waterfowl forage.

30 Recreational opportunities near the proposed SCH sites at the New and Alamo rivers include a popular
31 hunting spot containing duck blinds at Morton Bay, which is north of the Alamo River. New duck blinds
32 are being placed in Morton Bay as the Sea recedes. Hunting also occurs on lands owned by the Imperial
33 Irrigation District (IID). Although it is not IID's policy to allow hunting on their lands, it does occur
34 during the waterfowl hunting season, particularly at IID's Managed Marsh Complex. If waterfowl hunting
35 does occur on IID-owned lands, the hunters must follow the State of California hunting regulations (e.g.,
36 cannot shoot guns containing lead shot over surface water bodies) and hunt during state-mandated hunting
37 seasons applicable to Southern California (personal communication, B. Wilcox 2011).



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2 **Figure 3.18-1 Recreational Resources at the Salton Sea**

1 **3.18.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

2 **3.18.3.1 Impact Analysis Methodology**

3 Impacts on existing recreational resources are evaluated based on the changes to the size, function, or
4 access to existing recreational resources under each of the alternatives.

5 **3.18.3.2 Thresholds of Significance**

6 *Significance Criteria*

7 Impacts on recreational resources would be significant if the SCH Project would:

- 8 • Result in increased use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities
9 such that substantial deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated;
- 10 • Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that
11 might have an adverse physical effect on the environment; or
- 12 • Result in a substantial adverse change in recreational opportunities.

13 *Application of Significance Criteria*

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

- 16 • **Increase use of existing recreational facilities** –The SCH Project would not result in population
17 increases that would result in increased use of neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational
18 facilities (refer to Section 3.16, Population and Housing). Thus, this criterion is not considered
19 further.
- 20 • **Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities
21 that might have an adverse physical environmental effect** – The Project would be designed to
22 allow some recreational opportunities, and the impacts from such activities are addressed in this
23 Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report. The Project would not require the
24 construction or expansion of other recreational facilities, and this impact is not discussed further.
- 25 • **Substantially and adversely change recreational opportunities** – This impact is considered below
26 because the Project would create recreational opportunities in areas where some opportunities
27 currently exist.

28 **3.18.3.3 No Action Alternative**

29 As discussed in the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Programmatic Environmental Impact
30 Report (DWR and DFG 2007), recreational opportunities under the No Action Alternative will change as
31 the salinity of the Salton Sea increases and the fish population declines. The potential exists that some
32 fish, such as tilapia, could occur at the estuaries of the New, Alamo, and Whitewater rivers where salinity
33 will be lower.

34 Many of the recreational facilities are currently located adjacent to the shoreline. As the water elevation
35 declines, the distance between the existing facilities and the open water will increase. Under the No
36 Action Alternative, IID, as mitigation for the IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project, is required to
37 relocate campgrounds, roads, and trails that are currently located adjacent to the Salton Sea at the Salton
38 Sea SRA, as well boat launches along the shoreline. The facilities must be relocated as the water recedes
39 until the water surface elevation is at -248 feet mean sea level, or the elevation directly attributable to the

1 IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project. Therefore, by 2078, under the No Action Alternative, these
2 modified facilities would be separated from the Salton Sea by about 2 feet.

3 Waterfowl hunting activities at the Salton Sea are concentrated on Federal- and State-managed wetlands
4 (Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR and Imperial Wildlife Area) and private duck clubs in the Coachella and
5 Imperial valleys. They are freshwater environments managed primarily for attracting and supporting
6 waterfowl. While the waterfowl species sought by hunters (primarily dabbling ducks and snow geese) use
7 the Sea's shoreline, the Federal and State wetlands and duck clubs have areas that are managed for
8 specifically for waterfowl. As the Salton Sea recedes and becomes more saline under the No Action
9 Alternative, use of the Sea by waterfowl could decline. In addition, many duck-hunting blinds would
10 become stranded and hunting opportunities in the Salton Sea would be reduced. Bird-watching
11 opportunities also could be reduced as compared to existing conditions.

12 3.18.3.4 Alternative 1 – New River, Gravity Diversion + Cascading Ponds

13 Impact REC-1: The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites (beneficial
14 impact). The SCH Project is not specifically designed to accommodate recreation because the provision
15 of recreational opportunities is not a Project goal. Nevertheless, some recreational activities would be
16 available to the extent that they are compatible with the management of the SCH ponds as habitat for
17 piscivorous (fish-eating) birds dependent on the Salton Sea.

18 Public access would be allowed to facilitate day use, hiking, bird-watching, and nonmotorized watercraft
19 use. However, management plans may require that certain areas be seasonally closed to human activities
20 to avoid disturbance of sensitive birds. When bird nesting was observed by SCH managers, human
21 approach would be limited by posted signs. Hours of public access could be restricted to early morning
22 during hot weather when nesting birds are present.

23 Fish would not be intentionally stocked for the purpose of providing angling opportunities. Nevertheless,
24 such opportunities may be provided at the SCH ponds, in particular for tilapia. Fish populations would be
25 monitored as a metric of the SCH Project's success. If populations became well established and appeared
26 to provide fish in excess of what birds were consuming, angling would be allowed.

27 Waterfowl hunting would be allowed consistent with the protection of other avian resources. This would
28 not be substantially different than the conditions that currently exist, and would be better than what would
29 occur in the future under the No Action Alternative.

30 The water diversion and pipeline and sedimentation basin would be located in an agricultural area and
31 would not affect recreational opportunities.

32 Overall, impacts on recreational resources would be beneficial compared to the existing environmental
33 setting, and benefits would be even greater in comparison to the No Action Alternative.

34 3.18.3.5 Alternative 2 – New River, Pumped Diversion

35 **Impact REC-1:** The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites (beneficial
36 impact). The discussion under Alternative 1 is applicable to this alternative.

37 3.18.3.6 Alternative 3 – New River, Pumped Diversion + Cascading Ponds

38 **Impact REC-1:** The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites (beneficial
39 impact). The discussion under Alternative 1 is applicable to this alternative.

1 **3.18.3.7 Alternative 4 – Alamo River, Gravity Diversion + Cascading Pond**

2 **Impact REC-1:** The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites (beneficial
3 impact). The discussion under Alternatives 1 is applicable to this alternative. Waterfowl blinds currently
4 at Morton Bay would be included in area where the ponds would be located; however, they would no
5 longer be functional by the time construction occurred because the Salton Sea would have receded to an
6 extent that waterfowl hunting would no longer be viable at this location.

7 **3.18.3.8 Alternative 5 – Alamo River, Pumped Diversion**

8 **Impact REC-1:** The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites (beneficial
9 impact). The discussions under Alternatives 1 and 4 are applicable to this alternative.

10 **3.18.3.9 Alternative 6 – Alamo River, Pumped Diversion + Cascading Ponds**

11 **Impact REC-1:** The SCH Project would create recreational opportunities at the pond sites (beneficial
12 impact). The discussions under Alternatives 1 and 4 are applicable to this alternative.

13 **3.18.4 References**

14 California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and California Department of Fish and Game (DFG).
15 2007. Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Final Programmatic Environmental Impact
16 Report.

17 **3.18.5 Personal Communications**

18 Crayon, J. 2011. California Department of Fish and Game. Personal communication with Sarah Bumby,
19 Cardno ENTRIX, January 5, 2011.

20 Schoneman, Christian. 2011. Project Leader, Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex.
21 Email to Lorraine Woodman, Cardno ENTRIX, January 4, 2011.

22 Wilcox, B. 2011. Imperial Irrigation District. Personal communication with Sarah Bumby, Cardno
23 ENTRIX, February 28, 2011.

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