

INITIAL STUDY AND MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Four New Coachella Valley Trails Project Riverside County, California

CEQA Lead Agency:



Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

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Palm Desert, CA 92260

Prepared by



May 2024

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARPA	Archaeological Resources Protection Act
CASP	California State Parks
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CDFW	California Department Fish and Wildlife
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CVAG	Coachella Valley Association of Governments
CVCC	Coachella Valley Conservation Commission
CVMC	Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy
CVMSHCP	Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan
CVWD	Coachella Valley Water District
FODM	Friends of the Desert Mountains
IS	Initial Study
IS/MND	Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration
JTNP	Joshua Tree National Monument
MDLT	Mojave Desert Land Trust
MND	Mitigated Negative Declaration
MWD	Metropolitan Water District
NAGPRA	Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
NAHC	Native American Heritage Commission

1. MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

1.1. Project Information

This Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) has been prepared on behalf of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC) to assess the environmental impacts associated with the Four New Coachella Valley Trails Project (proposed Project). The Project consists of designating four new recreational trails in Coachella Valley for pedestrian use, as well as other non-motorized uses such as equestrian, dog walking, or mountain biking where these other uses are allowed under local ordinance or landowner regulations. These proposed recreational trails are on lands owned by various public or nonprofit entities, Metropolitan Water District (MWD), California State Parks (CASP), Cathedral City, City of Rancho Mirage, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM), and private owners. This joint IS/MND is prepared for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) with the CVMC as the Project's CEQA Lead Agency.

1.2. Introduction

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Conservancy must prepare an Initial Study (IS) for the proposed Project to determine if any significant adverse effects on the environment would result from Project's implementation. The IS utilizes the significance criteria outlined in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. If the IS for the Project indicates that a significant adverse impact could occur that could not be mitigated below a level of significance, the Conservancy would be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Report.

According to Article 6 (Negative Declaration Process) and Section 15070 (Decision to Prepare a Negative Declaration or Mitigated Negative Declaration) of the CEQA Guidelines, a public agency shall prepare or have prepared a proposed negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration for a project subject to CEQA when:

- (a) The initial study shows that there is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the agency, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, or
- (b) The initial study identifies potentially significant effects, but:
 - (i) Revisions in the project plans or proposals made by, or agreed to by the applicant before a proposed mitigated negative declaration and initial study are released for public review would avoid the effects or mitigate the effects to a point where clearly no significant effects would occur, and
 - (ii) There is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the agency, that the project as revised may have a significant effect on the environment.

Based on the analysis in the Initial Study, it has been determined that all Project-related environmental impacts could be reduced to a less-than-significant level with the incorporation of feasible mitigation measures. Therefore, adoption of a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) will satisfy the requirements of CEQA. The mitigation measures included in this MND are designed to reduce or eliminate the potentially significant environmental impacts described in the Initial Study. Mitigation measures are structured in accordance with the criteria in Section 15370 of the CEQA Guidelines.

1.3. Project Summary

The proposed Project is described in detail in Section 2, Project Description. The following summarizes basic Project information.

Project Sponsor and CEQA Lead Agency:

Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy
 73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 112
 Palm Desert, CA 92260

Project Location: The Project locations are described in Section 2 (Project Description). The following identifies the USGS 7.5-minute quads for each Project component as well as the trailhead locations in latitude and longitude.

West Deception Canyon: East Deception Canyon
 Trailhead location: 33°54'13.98"N 116°21'13.32"W

Biskra Palms: Myoma and West Berdoo Canyon
 Trailhead Location: 33°46'22.16"N 116°15'04.90"W

Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector: Cathedral City
 Trailhead Location: 33°46'01.53"N 116°27'30.62"W

Cathedral City Cove Connector: Cathedral City
 Trailhead Location: 33°46'49.50"N 116°28'16.10"W

1.4. Environmental Determination

Based on the analysis in the CEQA Initial Study Checklist in Section 5, the Conservancy has determined that all Project-related environmental impacts could be reduced to a less-than-significant level under CEQA with the incorporation of mitigation measures included in this document. Therefore, adoption of a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) will satisfy the requirements of CEQA.

1.5. Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures are included as part of the Project to reduce or avoid potentially significant environmental effects (CEQA Guidelines Section 15071).

Table 1-1. Mitigation Measures

Issue Area	Mitigation Measure
Biological Resources	<p>BIO-1: CVMSHCP Compliance. All applicable avoidance and minimization measures as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP will be observed during construction activities, as well as payment of a fee to fund the CVMSHCP or other appropriate mechanism based on the type of proposed activity as described in Section 11.7.3 of the CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement.</p> <p>Bio-1A: Consistency Review for the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail. Prior to designation and initiation of any trail work on the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail and associated trailhead and parking area, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy will complete a consistency review with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission on topics including, but not</p>

Issue Area	Mitigation Measure
	<p>limited to, consistency with CVMSHCP general guidelines for development of perimeter trails, minimum requirements for trailhead facilities, and findings of a research program on the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep described in Element 2 of CVMSHCP Section 7.3.3.2.</p>
	<p>BIO-2B: Consistency Review for the West Deception Canyon and Biskra Palms Trails. Prior to designation and initiation of any trail work on the West Deception Canyon Trail and Biskra Palms Trail and associated trailheads and parking areas, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy will complete a CVMSHCP consistency review with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission on topics including, but not limited to, consistency with CVMSHCP Guidelines for Public Access and Recreation on Reserve Lands and compliance with applicable Required Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures and Land Use Adjacency Guidelines.</p>
	<p>BIO-2: Limit Disturbance Areas. At all work areas, mechanical disturbance of previously undisturbed habitats (including soils) will be limited to the minimum area necessary. Project disturbance areas will be sited on previously disturbed areas to the extent feasible.</p>
	<p>BIO-3: Assign Project Biologist. The CVMC will assign one or more acceptable biologists (according to CVMSHCP requirements) to conduct pre-construction surveys and construction monitoring as described in Mitigation Measures BIO-4 and BIO-5. An "acceptable biologist" means a biologist whose name is on a list, maintained by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), of biologists who are acceptable to CVCC, CDFW, and USFWS for purposes of conducting surveys for Covered Species.</p>
	<p>BIO-4: Preconstruction Surveys. An acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) will conduct pre-activity clearance surveys for desert tortoise and their burrows, Peninsular bighorn sheep, and other special-status species. Surveys for desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep will be conducted according to the avoidance and minimization measures in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP. Pre-activity surveys will be conducted no more than 7 days in advance of any ground- or vegetation-disturbing activities in any location. For potential development activities planned between February 15 and November 15 at the Biskra Palms Trail. Preconstruction surveys for nesting birds and burrowing owls will be in accordance with BIO-4A & B.</p>
	<p>Bio-4 A: Preconstruction Surveys for Nesting Birds. Regardless of the time of year, nesting bird surveys shall be performed by a qualified avian biologist no more than 3 days prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. Pre-construction surveys shall focus on both direct and indirect evidence of nesting, including nest locations and nesting behavior. The qualified avian biologist will make every effort to avoid potential nest predation as a result of survey and monitoring efforts. If active nests are found during the pre-construction nesting bird surveys, a qualified biologist shall establish an appropriate nest buffer to be marked on the ground. Nest buffers are species specific and shall be at least 300 feet for passerines and 500 feet for raptors. A smaller or larger buffer may be determined by the qualified biologist familiar with the nesting phenology of the nesting species and based on nest and buffer monitoring results. Construction activities may not occur inside the established buffers, which shall remain on site until a qualified biologist determines the young have</p>

Issue Area	Mitigation Measure
	<p>fledged or the nest is no longer active. Active nests and adequacy of the established buffer distance shall be monitored daily by the qualified biologist until the qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged or the Project has been completed. The qualified biologist has the authority to stop work if nesting pairs exhibit signs of disturbance.</p>
	<p>Bio-4B: Preconstruction Surveys for Burrowing Owls. No less than 60 days prior to the start of Project-related activities, a burrowing owl habitat assessment shall be conducted by a qualified biologist according to the specifications of the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012, or most recent version).</p> <p>If the habitat assessment demonstrates suitable burrowing owl habitat, then focused burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted by a qualified biologist according to the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. If burrowing owls are detected during the focused surveys, the qualified biologist and Project proponent shall prepare a Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall describe proposed avoidance, monitoring, relocation, minimization, and mitigation actions. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall include the number and location of occupied burrow sites, acres of burrowing owl habitat that will be impacted, details of site monitoring, and details on proposed buffers and other avoidance measures if avoidance is proposed. If impacts to occupied burrowing owl habitat or burrow cannot be avoided, the Burrowing Owl Plan shall also describe minimization and compensatory mitigation actions that will be implemented. Proposed implementation of burrow exclusion and closure should only be considered as a last resort, after all other options have been evaluated as exclusion is not in itself an avoidance, minimization, or mitigation method and has the possibility to result in take. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall identify compensatory mitigation for the temporary or permanent loss of occupied burrow(s) and habitat consistent with the "Mitigation Impacts" section of the 2012 Staff Report and shall implement CDFW-approved mitigation prior to initiation of Project activities. If impacts to occupied burrows cannot be avoided, information shall be provided regarding adjacent or nearby suitable habitat available to owls. If no suitable habitat is available nearby, details regarding the creation and funding of artificial burrows (numbers, location, and type of burrows) and management activities for relocated owls shall also be included in the Burrowing Owl Plan. The Project proponent shall implement the Burrowing Owl Plan following CDFW and USFWS review and approval.</p> <p>Preconstruction burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted no less than 14 days prior to the start of Project-related activities and within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance, in accordance with the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 or most recent version). Preconstruction surveys should be performed by a qualified biologist following the recommendations and guidelines provided in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. If the preconstruction surveys confirm occupied burrowing owl habitat, Project activities shall be immediately halted. The qualified biologist shall coordinate with CDFW and prepare a</p>

Issue Area	Mitigation Measure
	Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW and USFWS for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities.
	<p>BIO-5: Construction Monitoring. An acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) will monitor construction activities, provide worker education programs, and supervise or perform other related actions. The Biological Monitor will be authorized to temporarily halt construction activities if needed to prevent potential harm to these and any other special-status species. Project activities may not disturb an active bird nest. If an active bird nest is located on or adjacent to the work site, a Biological Monitor will designate and flag an appropriate buffer area around the nest where construction activities will not be permitted. The buffer area will be based on the bird species and nature of the construction activity. The work supervisor will coordinate with the Biological Monitor on planned or ongoing construction activities and any specific pre-activity surveys or monitoring requirements for each activity in those areas.</p>
	<p>BIO-6: Special-Status Species Avoidance and Minimization Measures. The acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) and all workers shall regularly observe the work areas for desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep, and burrowing owl. The Project will adhere to avoidance and minimization measures for sensitive species as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP. For desert tortoise, installing exclusionary fencing per CVMSHCP guidelines for trailhead or trail construction would be infeasible. Instead, if a desert tortoise or Peninsular bighorn sheep are observed, they will be left to move away from the work site on their own. Burrowing owl measures include establishing appropriate buffers, depending on the season, where no construction activities may occur; and coordinating with Wildlife Agencies on appropriate eviction/passive relocation procedures.</p>
	<p>BIO-7: Worker Training. Employees will be trained to ensure that all workers on site (including contractors) are aware of all applicable Mitigation Measures for biological resources. Specifically, workers will be required to (1) limit all activities to approved work areas; (2) report any desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep, burrowing owl, or other special-status species, or bird nest observation in the work areas and access routes to the supervisor or Biological Monitor; (3) avoid contact with any wildlife that may approach a work area, and be aware of potential venomous reptile bites from carelessness or unnecessary harassment; (4) pick up and properly dispose of any food, trash, or construction refuse; and (5) report any spilled materials (oil, fuel, solvent, engine coolant, raw concrete, or other material potentially hazardous to wildlife) to the supervisor or on-site Biological Monitor. During the training, the instructor will briefly discuss special-status species that may occur in the work areas, their habitats, and requirements to avoid or minimize impacts. In addition, all workers will be informed of civil and criminal penalties for violations of the federal ESA, CESA, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, relevant sections of the California Fish and Game Code, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.</p>
	<p>BIO-8: Wildlife Avoidance. Workers will not be permitted to feed, harm, approach, harass, or handle wildlife at any time, except to move animals out of harm's way, and only as directed by a supervisor. This condition will not exempt workers, including the Biological Monitor, from any safety policies with regard to venomous reptiles.</p>

Issue Area	Mitigation Measure
	<p>BIO-9: Trash, Refuse, Concrete, and Other Construction Materials. All trash and food materials will be properly contained within vehicles or closed refuse bins while on any site and will be regularly removed from the site (at least on a weekly basis) for proper disposal. All refuse from construction activities will be removed from each work site upon completion of work. No raw cement, concrete or washings thereof, asphalt, paint, oil, solvents, or other petroleum products, or any other substances that could be hazardous to vegetation or wildlife resources, shall be disposed of on-site or allowed to spill onto soil. Cleanup of any spilled material shall begin immediately.</p> <p>BIO-10: Minimize Standing Water. Water applied to dirt roads and construction areas for dust abatement shall use the minimal amount needed to meet safety and air quality standards, to prevent the formation of puddles, which could attract wildlife to trailhead or development sites.</p> <p>BIO-11: Water Storage. All water containers (i.e., tanks or trailers) will be securely covered to prevent wildlife from entering the containers and becoming trapped.</p> <p>BIO-12: Speed Limit. To minimize potential impacts to special-status wildlife, no vehicles will be permitted to exceed 25 mph while traveling on dirt access roads.</p> <p>BIO-13: Streambed Avoidance. A qualified biologist or hydrologist will identify the jurisdictional boundaries of the washes, ephemeral drainages, and wetlands located at the site. If jurisdictional areas are found to be located within the impact area, permits will be obtained from CDFW, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Colorado River Regional Water Control Board.</p>
	<p>BIO-13A: CDFW Lake and Streambed Alteration Program. Prior to construction, the Project Sponsor shall obtain written correspondence from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) stating that notification under section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code is not required for the Project, or the Project Sponsor should obtain a CDFW-executed Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement, authorizing impacts to Fish and Game Code section 1602 resources associated with the Project.</p>
<p>Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources</p>	<p>CR-1: Cultural Resource Public Education. Trailhead signage and other public educational materials would be provided for all trails to inform the public about the need to respect and not disturb potential cultural resources found in the vicinity of these trails.</p> <p>CR-2: Inadvertent Discovery of Archaeological Resources. In the event of the unanticipated discovery of archaeological materials, the project contractor will immediately cease all work activities in the area (within approximately 50 feet) of the discovery until it can be evaluated by the qualified archaeologist. Construction will not resume until the qualified archaeologist has conferred with the landowner on the significance of the resource.</p> <p>If it is determined that the discovered archaeological resource constitutes a historic property under Section 106 of the NHPA, or a historical resource under CEQA, avoidance and preservation in place is the preferred manner of mitigation. If preservation in place is determined to be infeasible and data recovery through excavation is the only feasible mitigation available, a Cultural Resources Treatment Plan will be prepared and implemented by the qualified archaeologist in consultation with the landowner. The Cultural Resources Treatment Plan will provide for the adequate recovery of the</p>

Issue Area	Mitigation Measure
	<p data-bbox="609 216 1455 289">scientifically consequential information contained in the archaeological resource.</p> <p data-bbox="505 296 1455 653">CR-3: Assess and Treat Inadvertent Discovery of Human Remains. All human remains discovered are to be treated with respect and dignity including following the requirements of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979 (Public Law 96-95) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), enacted in 1990. In addition, additional requirements are to be followed provided by the State of California Native American Heritage Commission entitled Discovery of Human Remains That May Be Native American, and Information Bulletin No. CA-IB-2016-012, issued by the BLM’s California State Office, entitled Procedures and Requirements When Human Remains Are Discovered on Bureau of Land Management - California Lands, dated August 23,2016.</p>

A Mitigation Monitoring Plan has been prepared to ensure that the mitigation measures presented above are properly implemented (see Appendix A). The plan describes specific actions required to implement each measure, including information on timing of implementation, and monitoring requirements.

Based on the analysis and conclusions of the Initial Study, the impacts of the Project would be mitigated to less-than-significant levels with the implementation of the mitigation measures presented herein, which have been incorporated into the proposed Project.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

2.1. Environmental Factors Potentially Affected

The environmental factors checked below would be potentially affected by this project, requiring implementation of mitigation as indicated by the checklist on the following pages that is “Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated.”

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetics | <input type="checkbox"/> Hazards & Hazardous Materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture & Forestry Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrology/Water Quality | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Quality | <input type="checkbox"/> Land Use/Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Tribal Cultural Resources |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Biological Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Utilities/Service Systems |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cultural Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Noise | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildfire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Population/Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory Findings of Significance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geology/Soils | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Services | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greenhouse Gas Emissions | | |

2.2. Determination

On the basis of this initial evaluation,

- I find that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the project have been made or agreed to by the project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a “potentially significant” or “potentially significant unless mitigated” impact on the environment, but at least one effect (1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards and (2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis, as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (1) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards and (2) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

 Jim Karpiak, Executive Director
 Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

 Date

3. INTRODUCTION TO THE INITIAL STUDY

3.1. Proposed Project Overview

Coachella Valley has long been known for its many trail opportunities beginning back in the 1930s with the formation of the Desert Riders and their creation of numerous equestrian trails in the local mountains, publishing trail maps and encouraging trail use. As the valley grew in population, so did the popularity of nonmotorized trail use throughout the surrounding mountains and valley floor. Planning for trail use became an integral part of the management of the designated Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument as well as the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP). Intensive trail use is evidenced by the number of users observed on any day that is suitable for hiking in the valley and clearly demonstrates the need for additional trail designations.

The Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC) is a state agency established in 1991 to pursue this mission of protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley including the high value scenic, wildlife, cultural, geologic, and recreational resources found within. Pursuant to these goals, the CVMC is preparing environmental review documents necessary for the designation of four recreational trails within the Coachella Valley, including documents required under the state California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Titled the *Four New Coachella Valley Trails Project*, this effort would create four newly designated recreational trails named West Deception Canyon, Biskra Palms, Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector and Cathedral Cove Connector Trails (the “Project”).

3.2. Environmental Analysis

3.2.1. CEQA Process

This IS has been prepared pursuant to CEQA and the amended State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.). The purpose of the IS is to inform the decision-makers, responsible agencies, and the public of the proposed Project, the existing environment that would be affected by the Project, the environmental effects that would occur if the Project were implemented, and proposed mitigation measures that would avoid or reduce environmental effects.

An MND has been prepared based on the assessment of potential environmental impacts identified in the IS. All potentially significant impacts associated with the Project can be mitigated to a level below significance; therefore, an MND can be adopted by the Conservancy in accordance with Section 21080 of the CEQA Public Resources Code.

3.2.2. CEQA Lead Agency

The CVMC is the lead agency for review of the Project under CEQA because it must issue a decision whether to adopt the MND and to approve or deny the Project.

3.2.3. Initial Study

The IS presents an analysis of potential effects of the proposed Project on the environment. The IS is based on information from site visits, data requests, and additional research. Development activities and Project operation could have direct and indirect impacts on the environment. The following environmental

parameters are addressed based on the potential effects of the proposed Project and potential growth-inducing or cumulative effects of the Project in combination with other projects:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural & Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology/Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population/Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utility/Service Systems
- Wildfire
- Mandatory Findings of Significance

The IS has been organized into the following sections:

- Section 3: Introduction. Provides an introduction and overview describing the proposed Project and the CEQA process and identifies key areas of environmental concern.
- Section 4: Project Description. Presents the Project objectives and provides an in-depth description of the proposed Project, including construction details and methods.
- Section 5: Environmental Analysis and Mitigation. Includes a description of the existing conditions and analysis of the proposed Project's potential environmental impacts and identifies mitigation measures to reduce potentially significant impacts to less-than-significant levels.
- Section 6: List of Preparers. Lists the preparers and reviewers of the IS.
- Section 7: References. Lists the sources of information used to prepare the IS.
- Appendix A: Mitigation Monitoring Plan. Includes mitigation measures that must be implemented as part of the Project, actions required to implement these measures, monitoring requirements, and timing of implementation for each measure.
- Appendix B: Biological Resources. Includes supporting information for the analysis of impacts to biological resources.
- Appendix C: Significant Aggregate Resource Areas

4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

These four proposed recreational trails, located within the Coachella Valley in Riverside County, California, (Map 4-1. Project Location) are on land owned by various public or nonprofit entities, including Metropolitan Water District (MWD), California State Parks (CASP), Cities of Cathedral City and Rancho Mirage, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, the Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM), and private owners. Land ownership for each trail is summarized in Table 4-1.

Map 4-1. Project Location

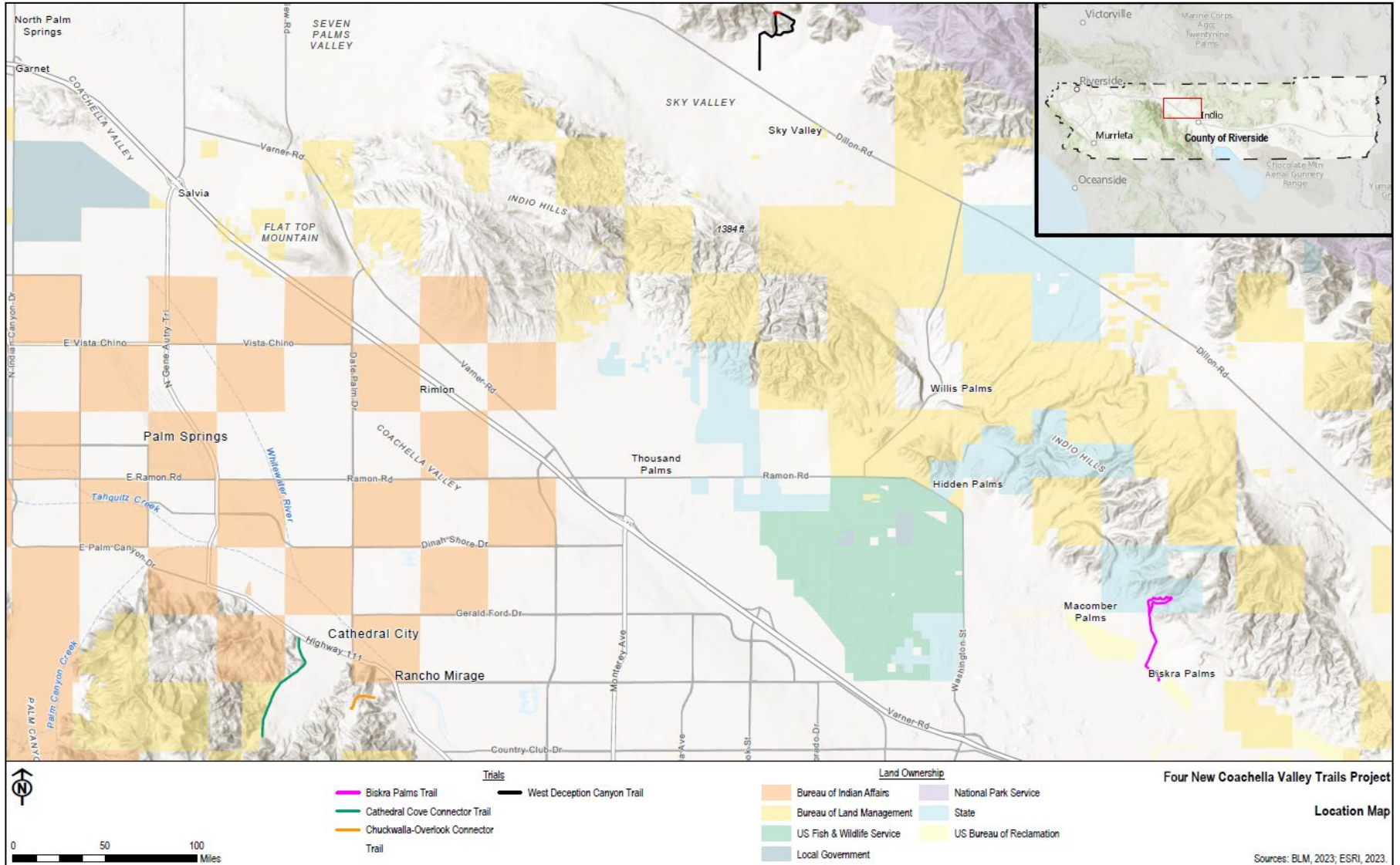


Table 4-1. Land Ownership

Trail	Landowner	Miles
West Deception Canyon Trail	Friends of the Desert Mountains	1.36
	Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC)	0.5
Biskra Palms Trail	Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD)	0.43
	California State Park	1.0
	Private	0.71
Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector	City of Rancho Mirage, Ritz Carlton, & Mirada HOA	0.46
Cathedral City Cove Connector	Riverside County Flood Control District	1.64

The West Deception Canyon Trail is located on the northern edge of the unincorporated community of Sky Valley, north of I-10, and in the vicinity of the boundary of the Joshua Tree National Monument (JTNP). The Biskra Palms Trail, located near the middle of Coachella Valley, is north of the Indio City limits and on the southern slopes of the Indio Hills. The Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail is located on the eastern boundary of the City of Rancho Mirage and on the lower slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains. The Cathedral Cove Connector Trail is located on the western boundary of the Cathedral Cove within the City of Cathedral Cove. Jurisdictions and existing land use for each trail are described in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2. Jurisdictions and Land Uses

Trail	Jurisdiction(s)	Applicable Plan	Adjacent Land uses
West Deception Canyon	Unincorporated-Riverside County	Riverside County General Plan	Rural residential; Open space
Biskra Palms	City of Indio	Indio General Plan	Residential; aggregate mining
	Unincorporated-Riverside County	Riverside County General Plan	Recreation; Open space; Mining
Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector	City of Rancho Mirage	City Rancho Mirage General Plan	Resort hotel; Residential; Open space
Cathedral City Cove Connector	Cathedral City	Cathedral City General Plan	Residential; Open space
	City of Palm Springs (short trail segment)	Palm Springs General Plan	Open space

These trails are within lands managed under the CVMSHCP, a conservation plan designed to ultimately conserve over 240,000 acres of open space, protect 27 species, and safeguard the desert's natural heritage for future generations. Under the direction of the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG), the CVMSHCP provides for balanced growth to meet the requirements of federal and state endangered species laws and helps to expedite transportation improvement projects, while promoting enhanced opportunities for recreation, tourism, and job growth.

This MSHCP identifies 21 Conservation Areas designed to achieve identified conservation goals including maximizing connectivity among populations and avoid habitat fragmentation within Conservation Areas to conserve biological diversity, ecological balance, and connected populations of Covered Species as well as minimize adverse impacts from off road vehicle use, illegal dumping, edge effects, exotic species, and other disturbances. Management and Monitoring Programs for each conservation area direct allowable uses. Table 4-3 identifies the Conservation Areas associated with all or parts of these trails.

Table 4-3. MSHCP Conservation Management

Trail	Conservation Management Area(s)
West Deception Canyon Trail	Indio Hills/Joshua Tree National Park Linkage, West Deception Canyon
Biskra Palms Trail	East Indio Hills, Indio Hills Palms
Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail	None
Cathedral Cove Connector Trail	Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains

4.1. Project Objectives

The purpose of the Four New Coachella Valley Trails Project is to create newly designated recreational trails in Coachella Valley for pedestrian use, as well as other non-motorized uses such as equestrian, dog walking, or mountain biking where these other uses are allowed under local ordinance or landowner regulations. The project is designed to minimize additional environmental disturbance associated with designating these trails by using existing old roads or social trails to form the basis of these trail alignments, in lieu of creating new trails in areas where none exist.

These new trails will contribute to meeting some of the existing demand for outdoor recreational trail experiences in Coachella Valley as well as improve visitor experiences in these areas that are known as quality hiking locations. The proximity of these trails to underserved communities will also facilitate their access to quality hiking and outdoor experiences. In addition, designating and maintaining these trails will reduce resource impacts resulting from potential overuse and trail proliferation.

4.2. Proposed Project

These trails will be designated for pedestrian use, with other non-motorized uses such as equestrian, walking dogs or mountain biking if allowed under the local ordinances or regulations of the underlying agencies or landowners. No paved parking areas or trails are proposed. Proposed trail construction is very minimal involving adding 100 feet of switchbacks along a ridge on the West Deception Canyon Trail to avoid soil erosion. The addition of trail markers and informational signage to facilitate trail users will be used throughout the project area. Developing a trailhead for the Biskra Palms Trail would require removing 50 feet of curbing and installing an apron in its place to allow for vehicle access into an existing level area for parking. Each trailhead would have a visitor information sign on the edge of the parking area that would provide a map of the designated trail, applicable regulations, contact information, and information about sensitive resources in the area. No fencing would be installed around parking or trailhead areas.

Proposed trail improvements associated with the West Deception Canyon Trail would be completed by a trail crew utilizing hand tools and low-impact trail construction and maintenance methods/equipment. All trail work, completed by volunteers or Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) crews, would transport tools and materials by hand or by wheelbarrow from the trailhead to the work areas. A person with trail building expertise would be retained to design and supervise trail improvement activities. Trail markers and related signs would be installed, as necessary, to facilitate public use of the area and reduce resource impacts.

Project development is anticipated to be initiated within six months of a finalized environmental review process. Project implementation would conform to any easements, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), or other applicable land use agreements. Project construction would be subject to the avoidance and minimization measures requiring surveys for species for which there is modeled habitat in the Project area, as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP. For additional information about biological surveys, see Appendix B. The project would adhere to the requirements of AB 52 that establishes a formal role for California Native American tribes in the CEQA process, and applicable regulations associated with protecting cultural resources.

4.2.1. West Deception Canyon Trail

The proposed West Deception Canyon Trail involves hiking across open desert into a canyon with gentle elevation changes and excellent views of the southern flanks of JTNP as well as Coachella Valley (Map 4-2). The route, on FODM and CVCC lands, involves a 4.3-mile loop trail that is easily accessed using 2WD roads. The proposed parking area and trailhead is located on the road shoulder at the intersection of 20th Avenue and Hot Springs Road, located just north of Dillon Road. The parking area is along Hot Springs Road where there is sufficient room for parallel parking off the roadway. The trail, currently identified by rock cairns, follows an existing road and a natural canyon wash for approximately 1.25 miles before traversing over a small ridge. Approximately 200 feet of trail switchbacks will be needed at this ridge to enhance hiker safety and avoid erosion. The trail then loops back to the trailhead. Trail signage and markers would be the only other proposed improvements. No other trail construction or related surface disturbance is part of this trail designation proposal. Trail maintenance would involve stabilizing and smoothing of the trail bed with no alternation of ephemeral streams or channels. Development of the switchbacks would be accomplished by an experienced trails crew, using hand tools, and outside of any potential ephemeral streams or channels.

West Deception Canyon Trail



West Deception Canyon Trail: Location of Proposed Trail Switchbacks (Green Line):



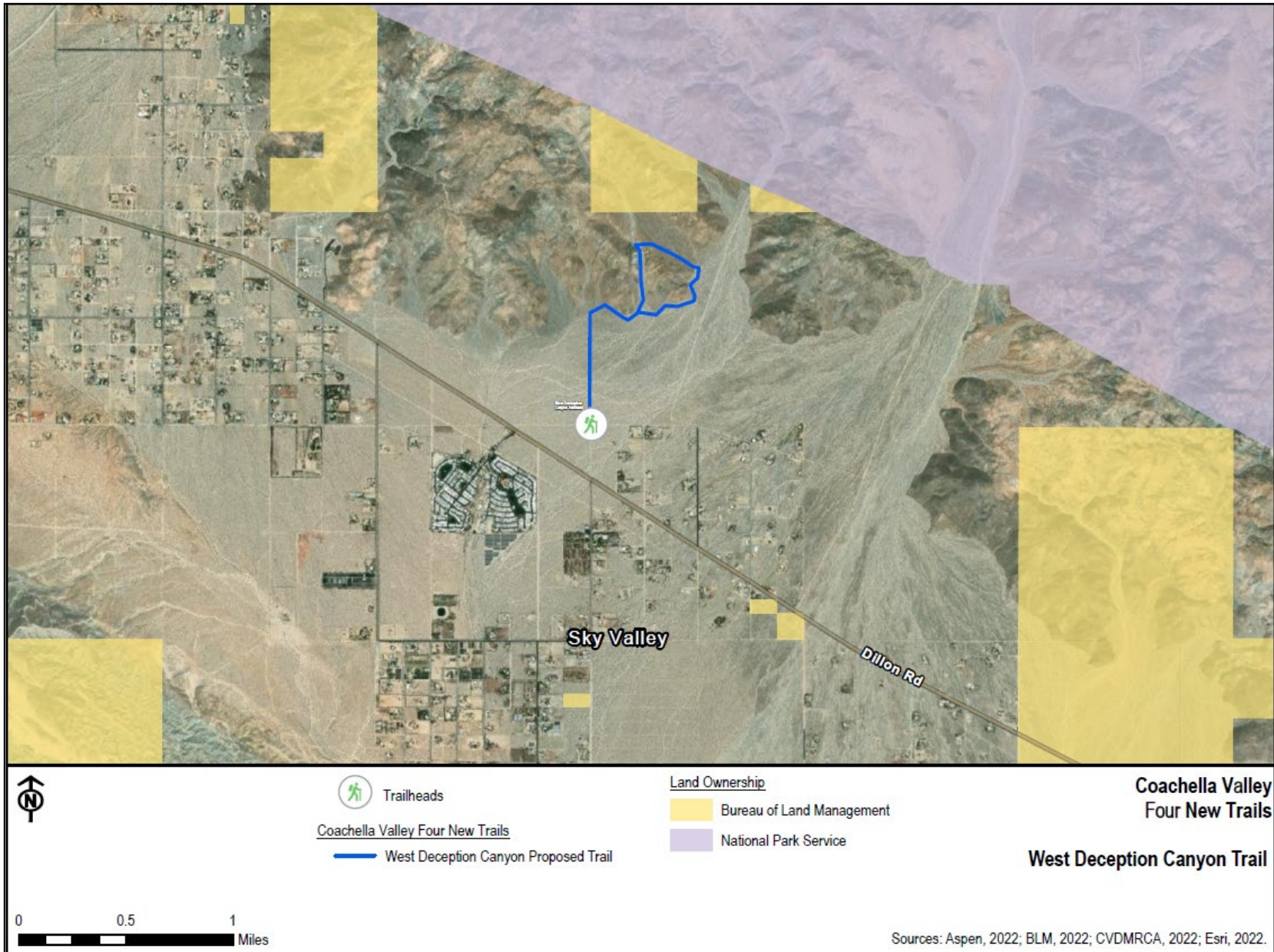
West Deception Canyon Trail Switchback Location



West Deception Canyon Trail: Rock Cairn as One of the Currently Existing Trail Markers:



Map 4-2. West Deception Trail



4.2.2. Biskra Palms Trail

The proposed Biskra Palms Trail (Map 4-3), located north of Indio, California and on California State Park, CVWD, and private lands, provides excellent views of Eastern Coachella Valley as well as an opportunity to visit one of the unique palm oases in the valley. The trail, a 3.6-mile loop, begins from the intersection of 38th Avenue & Madison Street in Indio, traverses gently sloping desert terrain for approximately 1 mile before entering the Biskra Palms Oasis. The trail loops through the oasis before tying back to the main trail for the return trip. The trailhead is a level 60 X 100-foot area located directly adjacent to Madison Street. Minor trailhead development would be required involving removing 50 feet of curbing and installing an apron in its place to allow vehicle access into a parking area. The parking area would accommodate 10 to 12 vehicles. A trailhead sign would be installed to provide trail information and trail markers would be used along the route to reduce trail proliferation. No trail construction or related surface disturbance is part of this trail designation proposal. Trail maintenance would involve stabilizing and smoothing of the trail bed with no alternation of ephemeral streams.

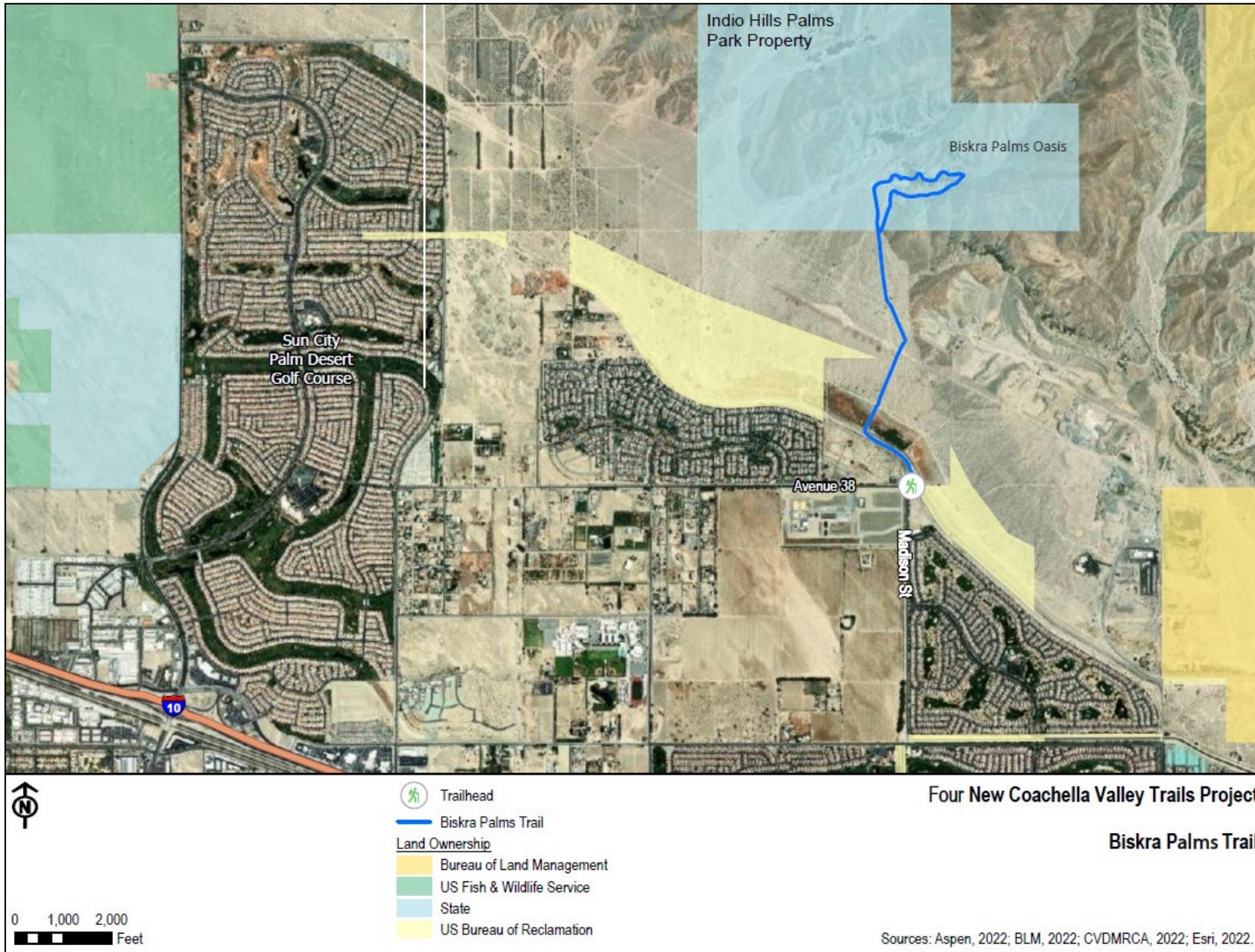
Biskra Palms Oasis



Biskra Palms Trailhead



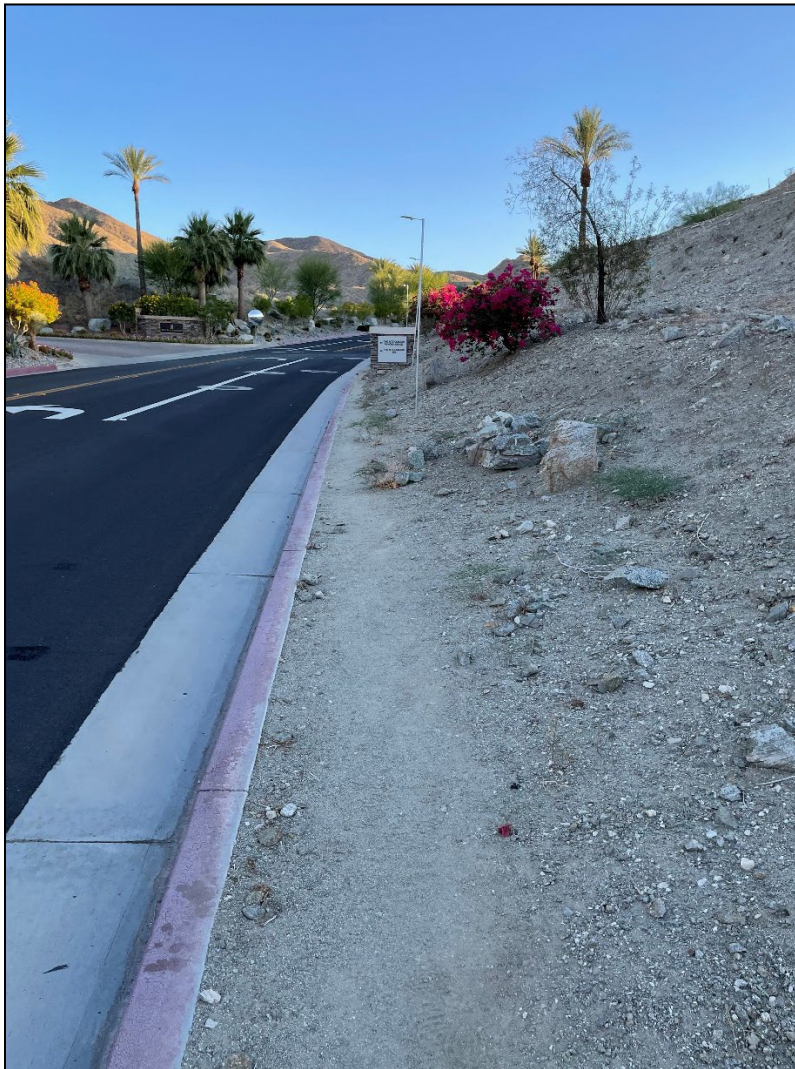
Map 4-3. Biskra Palms Trail



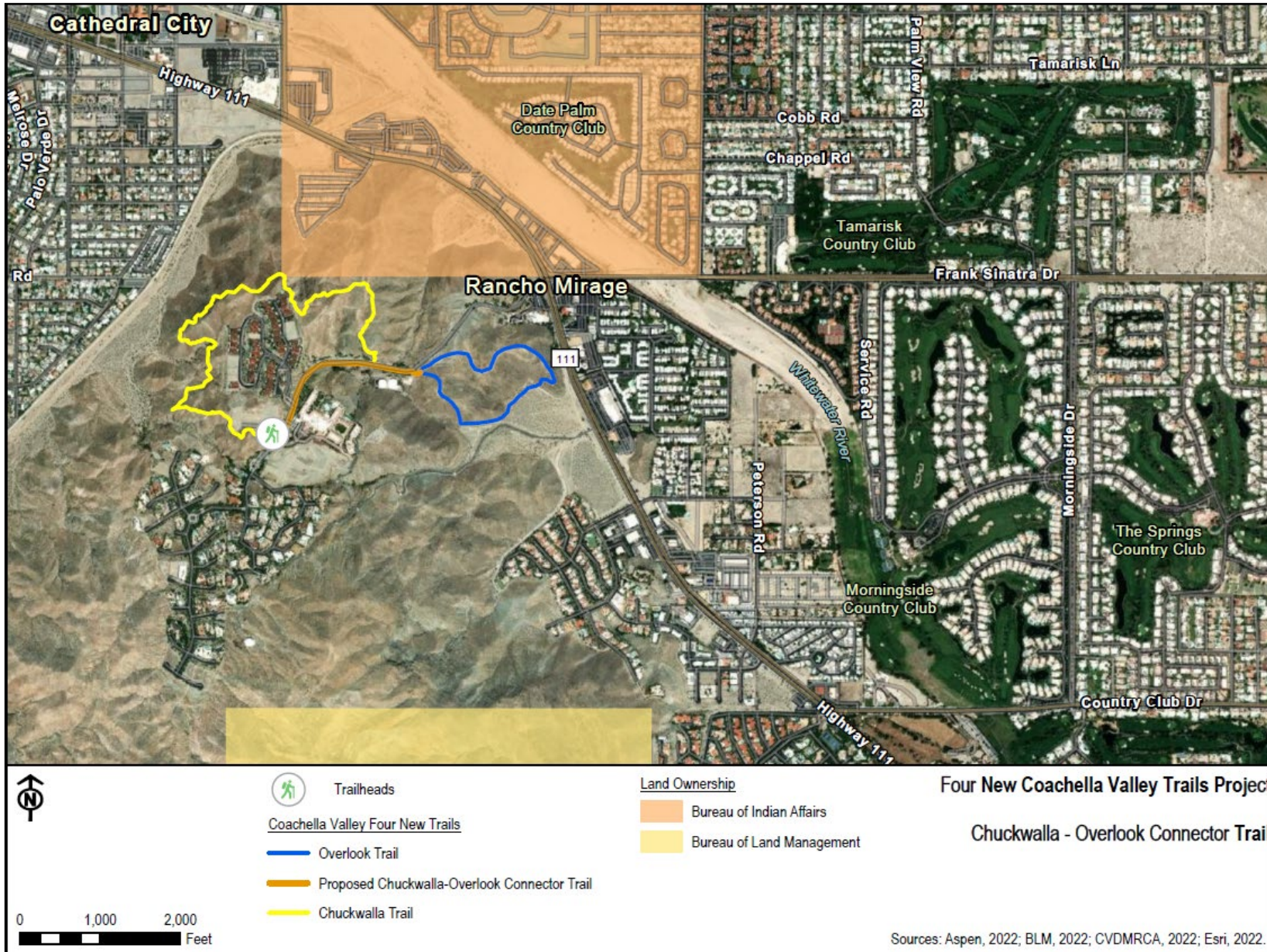
4.2.3. Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector

The proposed Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail, located in the vicinity of the Ritz Carlton-Rancho Mirage Hotel, in Rancho Mirage, California, is an extension of the existing Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail that will allow for a connection with the existing Overlook Trail, located above Hwy 111 (Map 4-4). This proposed trail extension adds 0.46 miles to the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail with an existing trailhead in a Ritz Carlton-Rancho Mirage Hotel trailhead parking area located on the west side of Frank Sinatra Drive. The proposed trail traverses a Rancho Mirage City right of way on the western portion, crosses the Mirada Homeowners Association (HOA) area and street, and then winds through a natural area on the Ritz Carlton property until it connects with the Overlook Trail at the eastern end. This proposed trail extension will eliminate the need for trail users to walk along Frank Sinatra Drive and potentially impede traffic. Trail marking and new crosswalk on Frank Sinatra would be required. Overall, the proposed trail connector will create a 3.75-mile loop trail.

Chuckwalla – Overlook Connector Trail



Map 4-4. Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail



4.2.4. Cathedral Cove Connector Trail

The proposed Cathedral Cove Connector Trail (Map 4-5), located on the west side of Cathedral Cove and within Cathedral City, California, would establish a 2-mile extension of existing trails from the top, or southern extension of Cathedral Cove to the intersection of Hwy 111 and Bankside Drive. This trail extension would enhance access, including for local residents, to the trails leading into the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and showcases the ascent into the mountains along a major wash. This 2-mile connector trail, located on Riverside County Flood Control lands, would utilize an existing road and trails. Vacant and disturbed land on Bankside Drive, identified as APNS: 687-085-006 and 687-085-006 (see map), would need to be acquired for parking and trailhead access (presently in negotiations with landowner). This area is over 21,000-square feet in size, providing sufficient room for parking and trailhead signage.

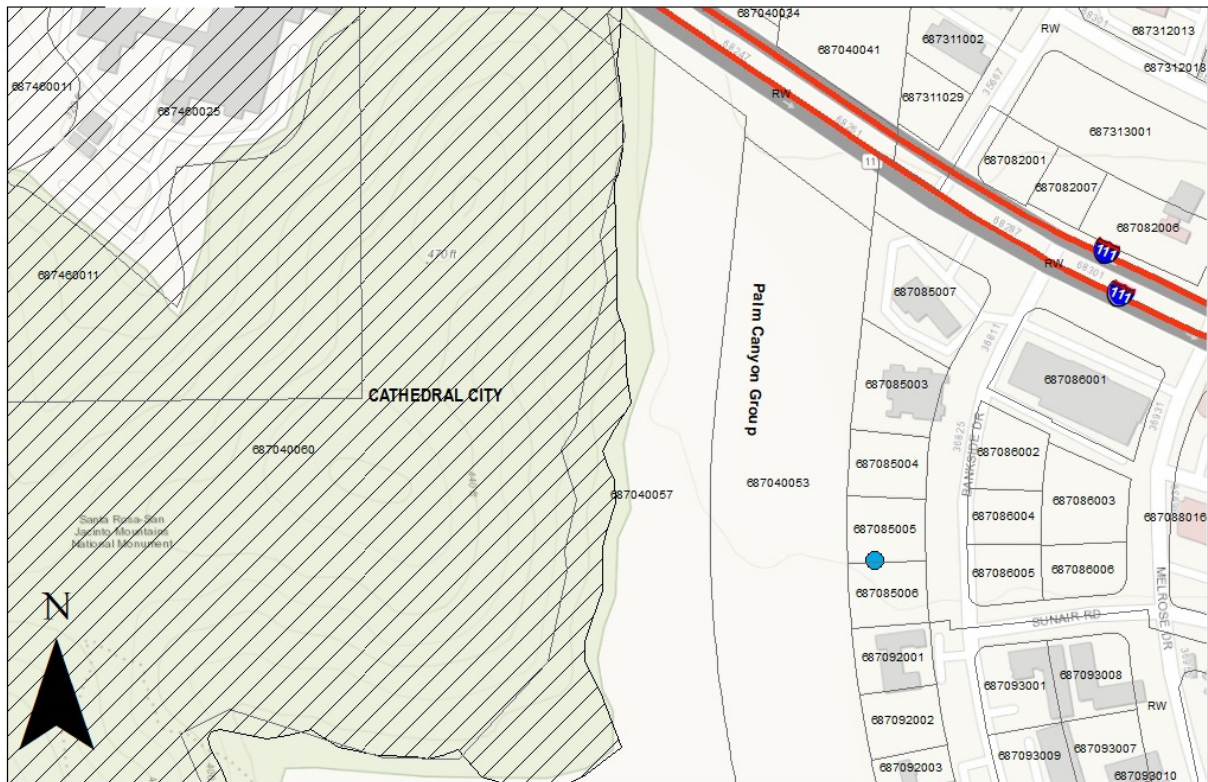
This proposed trail is located within and adjacent to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area and is identified as a Perimeter Trail along its southwestern extent and a Perimeter Trail Corridor along its northeast extent as identified in the CVMSHCP Figure 7-11 and in Section 7.3.3.2 (page 7-71). The CVMSHCP Section 7.3.3.2 (page 7-70) indicates that for new perimeter trails proposed, “[a]ppropriateness of perimeter trails will be determined upon completion of the research program described in Element 2. If research results show that recreational trail use would not adversely impact bighorn sheep health, behavior, demography, and population sustainability and connectivity, construction of these perimeter trails could be initiated as soon as feasible, depending on funding availability and acquisition of easements or other authorizations, and completion of applicable NEPA and CEQA requirements.”

Since the research program exploring the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*; CVMSHCP Covered Species; Fully Protected Species) has been initiated, but not finalized, this trail would not be designated until the research program has been finalized, the CVMC has completed a consistency review with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), and the trail meets the guidelines for development of perimeter trails, minimum requirements for trailhead facilities, and findings of the research program on the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep described in Element 2 of CVMSHCP Section 7.3.3.2.

Cathedral Cove Connector Trail



Cathedral Cove Connector Trail Trailhead and Parking (to be acquired)



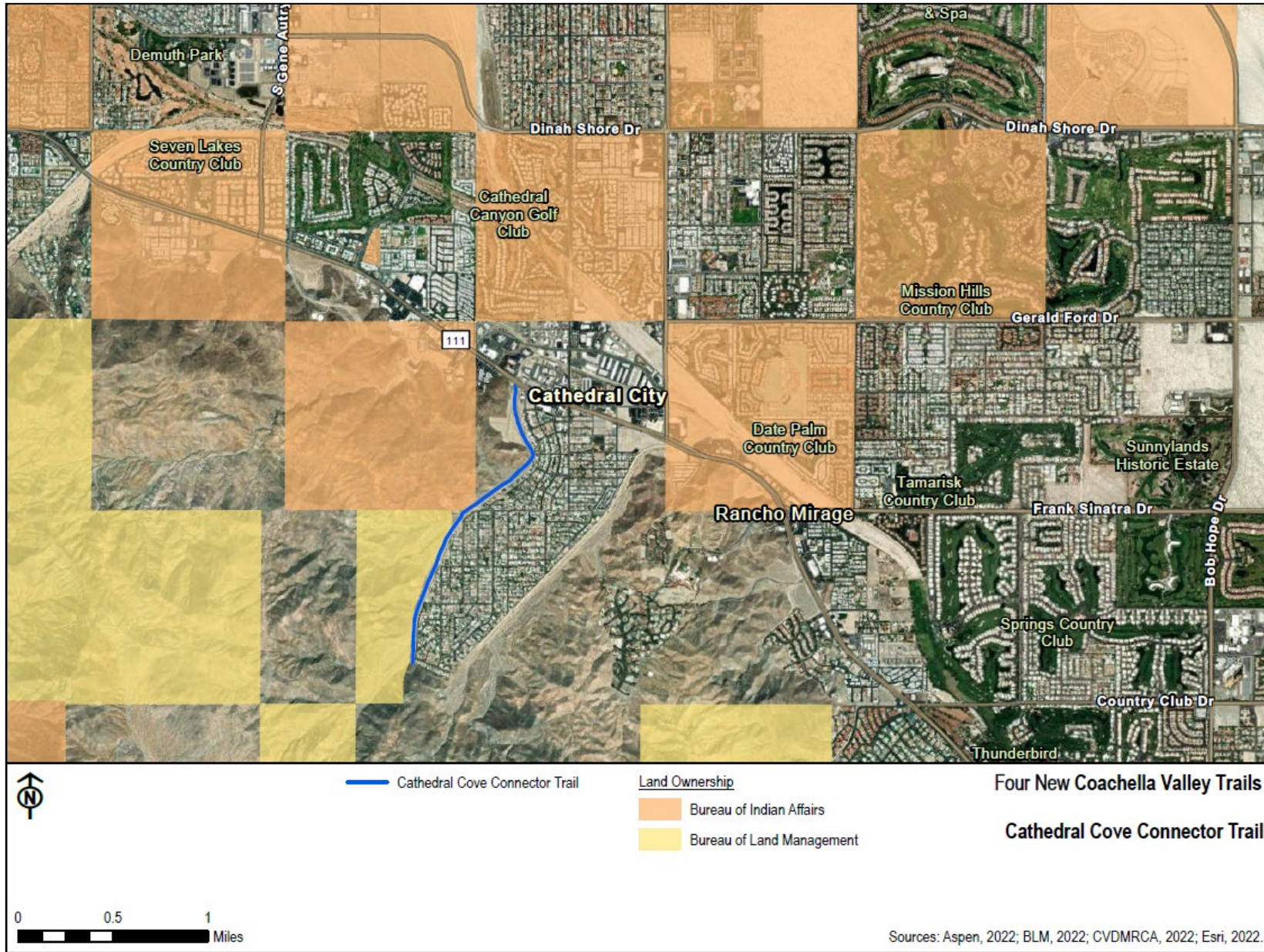
● Proposed Trailhead: Cathedral Cove Connector Trail



Trailhead (to be acquired): Cathedral Cove Connector Trail



Map 4-5. Cathedral Cove Connector Trail



4.2.5. Disturbance Acreage

Table 4-4 summarizes the estimated disturbance associated with each Project component, reflecting the existing trails and routes that would be designated. Most of the trails are existing footpaths that would need minimal work, primarily installation of trail markers to avoid trail proliferation.

Table 4-4. Ground Disturbance (Acres)

Activity	Acres
Trailhead Improvements	0.01
Trail Improvements ¹	0.02
Existing trail disturbance	4.43
Total Estimated Disturbance	4.46

1 The acreage of disturbance for trail improvements was conservatively estimated as a 6-foot-wide buffer (3 feet either side of the proposed trail centerline), as this is the area that could be subject to disturbance. The majority of trail work would be limited to placement of trail markers, and soil and rock movement to improve existing trail treads where needed or to clearly delineate the route in areas where the trail is not obvious. Therefore, the acreage of disturbance reported overestimates the actual ground disturbance that would be required.

4.3. Operation & Maintenance

Operation and maintenance (O&M) activities would include routine trail inspections and patrols to identify any maintenance needs and unauthorized uses. Inspections would also be conducted following major storms, to assess any damage and to temporarily close trails and trailheads, if needed, until repair activities are complete. Routine trail maintenance and emergency repairs would be conducted with hand tools, similar to the initial trail improvement phase. No ephemeral streams or channels would be altered during maintenance activities. Signs and trail markers would be repaired or replaced as needed. O&M activities would include weed management, conducted periodically as a component of routine trail and trailhead maintenance; all weed eradication would be done by hand and no herbicides would be used.

4.4. Other Permits and Approvals

Table 4-5 identifies anticipated approvals and permits that may be required for implementation of the Project. Additional authorizations may be required.

Table 4-5. Anticipated Permits, Approvals, and Authorizations

Agency	Permit/Approval	Description
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC)	Project Approval	CEQA Lead Agency and Project proponent.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	California Endangered Species Act Streambed Alteration Agreement	Participation in the CVMSHCP will satisfy the requirements of the California Endangered Species Act Requires California Department of Fish and Wildlife to review project impacts to “waters of the state” (bed, banks, channel, or associated riparian areas of a river, stream, or lake), including impacts to wildlife and vegetation from sediments, diversions, and other disturbances.
California State Parks Division	Agreement	For designation of the Biskra Palms Trail on State Park lands.

Agency	Permit/Approval	Description
Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC)	Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Compliance	CVMC is a participant under the CVMSHCP and is required to follow a standardized set of minimizations and avoidance measures in addition to the payment of mitigation and administrative fees. Certain projects are required to implement additional measures, as determined by USFWS and CDFW due to the projects' location and anticipated level of impact.
	Permit	Per CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement
City of Indio	Permit	Removal of curb and installation of an apron for the Biskra Palms Trailhead.
Coachella Valley Conservation Commission	Real Estate Authorization	Required for West Deception Canyon Trail access.
Friends of the Desert Mountains	Real Estate Authorization	Required for West Deception Canyon Trail access.
Coachella Valley Water District	Real Estate Authorization	Required for Biskra Palms Trail access.
Riverside County Flood Control District	Real Estate Authorization	Required for Cathedral Cove Connector Trail access.
Private Landowners	Real Estate Authorization	Required for Biskra Palms Trail access.
California Native American Tribes	The CVMC consults with California Native American Tribes about potential tribal cultural resources in the project area, the potential significance of project impacts, the development of project alternatives and the type of environmental document that should be prepared.	The CVMC consults with California Native American Tribes in compliance with AB 52.

4.5. Conformance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulations, and Policies

4.5.1. Tribal Consultation

AB 52 establishes a formal role for California Native American Tribes in the CEQA process. CEQA lead agencies are required to consult with tribes about potential tribal cultural resources in the project area, the potential significance of project impacts, the development of project alternatives, and the type of environmental document that should be prepared.

- A "Native American tribe located in California that is on the contact list maintained Native American Heritage Commission" (NAHC). This definition does not distinguish between federally recognized and non-federally recognized tribal groups and is therefore more inclusive than the federal definition of "Indian tribe" (PRC § 21073).
- To qualify as a tribal cultural resource, it must either be 1) listed on or eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources or a local historic register or, 2) or is a resource that the lead agency, at its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, determines should be treated as a Tribal Cultural

Resource (PRC § 21074). Tribal Cultural Resources include “non-unique archaeological resources” that, instead of being important for “scientific” value as a resource, can also be significant because of the sacred and/or cultural tribal value of the resource. Tribal representatives are considered experts appropriate for providing substantial evidence regarding the locations, types, and significance of tribal cultural resources within their traditionally and cultural affiliated geographic area (PRC § 21080.3.1(a)).

- Consultation in the context of AB 52 is the meaningful and timely process of seeking, discussing, and carefully considering the views of others. Meaningful consultation usually consists of face-to-face meetings conducted in such a way that recognizes the cultural values of all parties involved and makes a concerted effort to reach an agreement. Consultation should recognize the tribe’s potential need for confidentiality regarding places that hold traditional tribal significance. Consultation with tribes is considered the best way for lead agencies to determine if a project could result in significant environmental impacts to tribal cultural resources (PRC § 21080.3.1(a); GC § 65352.4).

A project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment (PRC § 21084.2).

4.5.2. Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

Designation of trails, including ancillary facilities is a covered activity and conditionally compatible public access use under the CVMSHCP provided they are consistent with the species conservation goals and objectives for the designated conservation areas and consistent with the guidelines for trails and public access. The proposed Project has been designed to comply with applicable requirements in the CVMSHCP.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

5.1. Aesthetic

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

NO IMPACT: The project would have no impacts on a scenic vista.

The West Deception Canyon Trail begins approximately .25 miles north of Dillon Road, determined to be eligible by Riverside County as a Scenic Highway due to its scenic characteristics. The Circulation Element of the Riverside County General Plan identifies careful application of scenic highway standards along designated and eligible scenic highways. As the proposed trail designation would involve minimal disturbance (i.e., trailhead signage, trail markers, no parking lot grading, and minimal trail development), none of these activities would adversely affect a scenic vista from Dillon Road. The proposed 200 feet of switchbacks on this trail would be approximately one mile distant from Dillon Road and would be obscured by terrain. In addition, the Project would minimize trail proliferation and potential unauthorized activities that could impact the scenic nature of the surrounding open space.

The Biskra Palms Trail is between 2 to 3 miles north of I-10, determined to be eligible by Riverside County as a Scenic Highway due to its scenic characteristics. The distance from I-10 and the minimal disturbance associated with this trail all reduce the visibility of the trailheads and trail from this eligible scenic highway.

There are no designated scenic vistas associated with the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector or the Cathedral City Cove Connector Trails. Both trails would result in minimal disturbance and are directly associated with substantial improvements including Frank Sinatra Drive and a Riverside County flood control drainage structure, respectively.

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?

NO IMPACT: The project would have no impacts to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

The proposed project would involve minimal disturbance (i.e., trailhead signage, trail markers, no parking lot development, and minimal trail development); none of these activities are determined to result in substantial damage to scenic resources under this criterion.

c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

NO IMPACT: The project would not adversely affect the existing visual character or quality of public views of the respective sites and trail surroundings. The project is designed to minimize additional environmental disturbance associated with designating these trails by using existing old roads or social trails to form the basis of these trail alignments, in lieu of creating new trails in areas where none exist. No trail or parking lot layout or design work will be required, and no paved parking is proposed. Proposed trail construction is very minimal and associated with avoiding erosion, trail proliferation and facilitating trail use. Minor development of parking areas and trailheads is identified for several trails as well as use of trail markers and signage to facilitate trail hikers throughout the project area. Trail designation would also provide for on-going trail maintenance and control of potential unauthorized activities that degrade scenic values.

The Project would not conflict with applicable zoning or other regulations governing scenic quality in the two urban area trails, the Chuckwalla-Overlook, and the Cathedral City Cove Connector Trails. The Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail is designed to connect two exist trails listed in the City's Parks and Trails list, the Chuckwalla and Overlook Trails. This trail designation will supplement these two approved trails and is consistent with applicable zoning and regulations governing scenic quality in the area, including those identified in Chapter 5 of the City's 2017 General Plan, Conservation and Open Space. The low-impact nature of this trail is consistent with maintaining the surrounding scenic values.

The Cathedral City Cove Connector Trail is within lands designated in the Cathedral City General Plan as Open Space-Water (OS-W). This designation is used to delineate floodways, including natural and constructed floodway and drainage channels. Open space land use designations, in general, include lands that are preserved for outdoor recreation and outstanding scenic values. Under the General Plan, it is policy to preserve all substantial watercourses and washes necessary for regional community flood control and drainage for open space and/or multi-purpose recreational purposes. As the proposed trail designation would involve minimal disturbance (i.e., informational trailhead signage, no parking lot grading, and minimal trail development), none of these activities would conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

NO IMPACT: The project would not create new light sources or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. Site development activities associated with the Biskra Palms Trail would require minimal equipment over a 1-to-2-day period with activities occurring during daylight hours. All the trailhead parking areas are small, and any associated vehicle-related glare would not be substantial. None of the permanent structures, including informational signs, would utilize outdoor lighting that would affect nighttime views or additional sources of glare.

5.2. Agricultural Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state’s inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code §12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code §4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code §51104(g))?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use? Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?

NO IMPACT. A review of the California Department of Conservation 2018 data for Riverside County Important Farmland shows that the proposed project is within the “Other Lands” category which accounts for land that does not meet the criteria for lands covered under this criterion. Designated Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, or Grazing Land would, therefore, not be affected by this project. As this Project would not convert lands under any of these categories, there would be no impact under this criterion.

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?

NO IMPACT. Based on a review of the land designations for the Riverside County and Cities of Cathedral City, Indio, and Rancho Mirage, the Project routes and trailheads would not traverse land within an

agricultural zoning designation or under a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, there would be no impact under this criterion.

c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code §12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code §4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code §51104(g))?

NO IMPACT. Based on a review of the land designations for Riverside County, and Cities of Cathedral City, Indio, and Rancho Mirage, the Project routes and trailheads would not traverse land within a zoning designation for forest land or timberland designation. Therefore, there would be no impact under this criterion.

d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

NO IMPACT. The Project would not traverse land designated as forest land. Therefore, there would be no conversion of forest land and there would be no impact under this criterion.

e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

NO IMPACT. The Project is not in proximity to designated farmland or forest lands such that effects from the trail designations and use would convert lands away from agricultural or forest land uses. Therefore, there would be no impact under this criterion.

5.3. Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable Federal or State ambient air quality standard?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The Project would include minor short-term and localized effects associated with activities involving the removal of 50 feet of curbing and installing an apron at the Biskra Palms Trailhead. The Biskra Palms Trailhead would involve cutting and excavating an existing curb, loading, and hauling the excavated materials using a loader and dump truck, constructing forms, pouring concrete from a concrete pumper truck, and site cleanup, all within a one to two-day period. In addition, minor trail improvements and installation of trail signage would be completed by trail crews using hand tools including adding 200 feet of switchbacks along a ridge on the West Deception Canyon Trail to avoid soil erosion.

The applicable air quality management plan is the 2022 South Coast AQMD Air Quality Management Plan (adopted December 2, 2022). Air Quality in the Coachella Valley does not attain the applicable ambient air quality standards for ozone and PM10, although the region attains the Federal and State standards for PM2.5, carbon monoxide (CO), and nitrogen dioxide (NO2). Strategies and control measures identified within the Air Quality Management Plan apply to project activities as promulgated through SCAQMD’s rules and regulations.

Project activities, including activity that would cause fugitive dust from unpaved surfaces and the use of vehicles and equipment that produce short-term and localized air emissions, would occur in compliance with all air quality management rules, regulations, and programs adopted by SCAQMD to control emissions of ozone precursors, PM10, and PM2.5. Emissions would not occur at levels that could approach or exceed the applicable General Conformity de minimis thresholds (40 CFR Part 93, Subpart B, et seq.) for the Coachella Valley. Therefore, the Project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable Federal or State ambient air quality standard?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Project activities, utilizing vehicles and equipment that produce short-term and localized air emissions, would not result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any

criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable Federal or State ambient air quality standard. The Biskra Palms Trailhead would involve cutting and excavating an existing curb, loading, and hauling the excavated materials using a loader and dump truck, constructing forms, pouring concrete from a concrete truck, and site cleanup, all within a one to two-day period. In addition, minor trail improvements and installation of trail signage would be completed by trail crews using hand tools including adding 200 feet of trail switchbacks for the West Deception Canyon Trail. Emissions related to these minor construction activities would not be likely to exceed any of the quantitative thresholds of significance established by SCAQMD guidelines. Accordingly, the Project would not cause a cumulatively considerable net increase of any pollutant.

c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The Biskra Palms Trailhead work, involving removal of 50 feet of curbing and installing an apron in its place, is within 300 feet of a residence on Avenue 38, as well as 850 feet from the Sun City Shadow Hills Dog Park and several nearby residences. The minor and short-term activities associated with this trailhead development would not expose any sensitive receptors to known substantial pollutant concentrations.

d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?

NO IMPACT. Activities associated with the proposed trailhead development, as well as the trail improvements completed by hand-crews, would not involve any sources of odorous substances that could result in odors or other emissions that would adversely affect a substantial number of people. Most of this work is in essentially undeveloped areas, except for the Biskra Palms Trailhead that is within an open area, adjacent to traveled roadways and 300 feet from the closest residence.

5.4. Biological Resources

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in the City or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.4.1. Methods

Available literature was reviewed to identify special-status plants, wildlife, and vegetation communities known from the vicinity of each proposed trail and trailhead. Data reviewed during the literature review includes information provided by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). These materials included searches of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB; CDFW, 2023) for the following USGS 7½-minute topographic quads (Appendix B-1):

USGS 7½-minute Topographic Quad Maps		
Cathedral City	Joshua Tree South	Rancho Mirage
Cottonwood Basin	Keys View	Rockhouse Canyon
Desert Hot Springs	La Quinta	Seven Palms Valley
East Deception Canyon	Malapai Hill	Thermal Canyon
Fried Liver Wash	Morongo Valley	Washington Wash
Indian Cove	Myoma	West Berdoo Canyon
Indio	Palm Springs	Yucca Valley South

The California Native Plant Society (CNPS) On-line Electronic Inventory (CNPS, 2023) was also reviewed for the same quads. Additional data sources included the Consortium of California Herbaria data (CCH, 2023) and the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP; CVAG, 2007).

Rainfall during 2022, when the surveys were completed was below average in the Coachella Valley. The average annual rain fall for the Coachella Valley is approximately 6 inches per year (Dawson and Belitz, 2012). Precipitation recorded at the Palm Desert weather station (Station No. CA-RV-72) from July 22, 2021, through July 22, 2022, at the station was 1.37 inches (CoCoRaHS, 2022). This lower-than-average rainfall may have resulted in annual plants not being present, as discussed below.

Several special-status species identified from the region during the literature review occur only in specialized native habitats that are absent from the proposed trails or occur at higher elevations than the Project sites. These plants and animals are listed in Appendix B-3 but are not addressed further in this report because they do not have the potential to occur in the Project area. Appendix B-2 lists all special-status plant and wildlife species known from habitats within the region comparable to those at each proposed trail and trailhead. Appendix B-2 also summarizes the habitat, distribution, conservation status, and probability of occurrence on the sites for these species.

On March 30, April 5, 12, 13, 18 and 26, 2022 an Aspen Environmental Group (Aspen) Biologist surveyed the trails and trailheads. The route for the Biskra Palms Trail was modified slightly after the completion of initial surveys, and the Aspen Biologist conducted a reconnaissance survey of the new route segment on July 21, 2022. During the surveys, the biologist mapped all special-status plant and wildlife locations observed with a GPS unit and maintained lists of all species observed. Plants, wildlife, and wildlife sign (e.g., scat, tracks, and burrows) were identified in the field using binoculars and field guides. All plant species observed were identified in the field or collected for later identification. Plants were identified using keys, descriptions, and illustrations from sources such as Baldwin et al. (2012) and other regional references. All species detected on or around the sites are listed in Appendix B-4. Representative photos of the six proposed trail alignments are provided in Appendix B-5.

The field surveys were conducted in accordance with CDFW rare plant survey guidelines (CDFG, 2018). The field surveys were “floristic in nature” (i.e., designed to find and identify all plants on the site, regardless of conservation status). The field surveys were “full coverage” and were completed within the documented flowering season for most special-status plants of the area (Appendix B-2). However, due to poor rainfall, some plants may have been undetectable during spring 2022, as noted in Appendix B-2 and the Results section below.

During the survey, a burrowing owl habitat assessment was conducted in accordance with CDFW’s Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFG, 2012). All suitable owl burrows, owl sign (tracks, molted feathers, pellets, whitewash, and possible owl perches), and live owls were mapped. A focused burrowing owl survey was not completed (CDFG, 2012).

The CVMSHCP (CVAG, 2007) names and describes natural communities that are present throughout the plan area. Vegetation mapping for this Project was based on the CVMSHCP natural communities.

5.4.2. Results

Vegetation and Habitat

Six vegetation types and one land cover type are mapped within the Project areas (Appendix B-6) and are described in the following paragraphs. Representative photos of the six proposed trail alignments are provided in Appendix B-5. The vegetation maps provided with this report conform to the maps provided by the CVMSHCP for all trails.

Desert Dry Wash Woodland. This natural community dominates the larger washes within the Project areas. It is characterized by the presence of smoke tree (*Psorothamnus spinosus*), catclaw acacia (*Sene-galia greggii*), cheesebush (*Ambrosia salsola*), and a seasonal array of wildflowers. Desert dry wash woodland is present at the proposed Biskra Palms and Cathedral Cove Connector trail alignments.

Desert Fan Palm Oasis Woodland. This natural community is characterized by the presence of California fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera*), and wetland species such as Olney's three-square bulrush (*Schoenoplectus americanus*), Southwestern spiny rush (*Juncus acutus* ssp. *leopoldii*), and arrow-weed (*Pluchea sericea*). Honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa* var. *torreyana*) is also present around the margins of the desert fan palm oasis woodland. Desert fan palm oasis woodland is present at the proposed Biskra Palms trail alignment.

Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub. This natural community is the most widespread in the Colorado Desert and is present at the proposed Biskra Palms and West Deception Canyon trail alignments. Sonoran creosote bush scrub is characterized by its dominant species creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) and typically develops in well-drained soils. Additional plant such as white bur-sage (*Ambrosia dumosa*), brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*), white rhatany (*Krameria bicolor*), and numerous annuals are also present. In washes this vegetation also co-occurs within species such as smoke tree, indigo bush (*Psorothamnus schottii*), and cheesebush.

Sonoran Mixed Woody and Succulent Scrub. Sonoran mixed woody and succulent scrub is located on the proposed Biskra Palms and Cathedral Cove Connector trail alignments. This natural community is similar in composition to Sonoran creosote bush scrub but is more varied, with a substantial proportion of cacti and other stem succulents which included silver cholla (*Cylindropuntia echinocarpa*).

Stabilized Shielded Desert Sand Fields. This natural community is characterized by sand fields that lack dune development. The vegetation is dominated by creosote bush and other shrubs listed in Sonoran creosote bush scrub above. Stabilized shielded desert sand fields are present at the proposed Biskra Palms trail alignment but are poorly developed and not expected to support any aeolian sand species.

Mojave Mixed Woody Scrub. This natural community is characterized by very shallow, overly drained, and often rolling to steep soils, usually derived from granitic parent materials (CVAG, 2007). This natural community is present at the proposed West Deception Canyon trail alignment. Within this natural community are areas of broad alluvial fans that may be better classified as desert dry wash woodland. These areas are dominated by cheesebush, smoke tree, and catclaw acacia.

Other Land Cover Types

Developed or Disturbed

This land cover type was used to map portions of the proposed trail alignments that have been developed, lack vegetation, or have otherwise been impacted to a point that they provide minimal plant and wildlife habitat. This land cover type was mapped at the proposed Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector and Biskra Palms trail alignments. Developed or disturbed is not recognized as a sensitive natural community (CDFW, 2022).

Streambeds

The proposed West Deception Canyon Trail is located on sandy bajadas and foothills of the Little San Bernardino Mountains. The Biskra Palms trail passes through an emergent wetland and bajada located at the base of the Indio hills. Cathedral Cove and Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector trails are in the foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains and Cathedral Cove does cross over a large bajada. The proposed Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector trail crosses several small ephemeral drainages. The jurisdictional limits of the washes and wetlands that may be subject to state or federal regulation under California Fish and Game Code Section 1600 or the federal Clean Water Act Sections 401 and 404 have not been delineated.

Wildlife

Wildlife and wildlife sign observed during the field surveys included species common in the open, xeric desert environment, such as common raven (*Corvus corax*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), and coyote (*Canis latrans*). During each trail visit several special-status species were observed and are addressed below. Other wildlife species common in desert shrublands throughout the region are also likely to occur at each proposed trail but were not observed during field work reported here. These include secretive reptiles, burrowing mammals, and uncommon wide-ranging species such as badger and golden eagle. Appendix B-4 lists all species observed or detected at each proposed trail and trailhead.

Special-Status Species

Plants or wildlife may be ranked as special-status species due to declining populations, vulnerability to habitat change, or restricted distributions. Certain species have been listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) or California Endangered Species Act (CESA). Others have not been listed, but declining populations or habitat availability cause concern for their long-term viability. These species appear on lists compiled by resource agencies or private conservation organizations. In this report, “special-status species” is used to include all plants and wildlife listed as threatened or endangered or included in other compilations. All special-status plants and wildlife occurring in the region in habitats similar to those found at the proposed trails are addressed in Appendix B-2, with brief descriptions of habitat and distribution, conservation status, and probability of occurrence at each proposed trail.

No other state or federally listed plants were observed or are likely to occur on any proposed trail. This conclusion is based on habitat, geographic and elevation range, and surveys. Several BLM sensitive or other special-status plants have a low to high potential for occurrence at the proposed trails and are listed in Appendix B-2. Two listed threatened or endangered animals may occur on the proposed trails: Peninsular bighorn sheep DPS (*Ovis canadensis nelson* pop. 2) and desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). Peninsular bighorn sheep DPS and desert tortoise are covered species under the CVMSHCP.

BLM Sensitive Plants. The BLM (2023) maintains a list of sensitive plant species, including species that are rare, declining, or dependent on specialized habitats. The list includes all plants ranked by CNPS and CDFW as CRPR 1B. The BLM manages sensitive species to provide protection comparable to that afforded species that may become listed as threatened or endangered (i.e., candidate species for federal listing). No BLM sensitive plants have been documented on the proposed trails, but one has at least a moderate potential to occur on the proposed trails or trailheads (Appendix B-2).

Little San Bernardino Mountains linanthus (*Linanthus maculatus* ssp. *maculatus*). Little San Bernardino Mountains has a CRPR of 1B.2 and is a BLM sensitive species. It occurs at a few scattered sites in and around the southeastern San Bernardino Mountains (Whitewater River Canyon), Joshua Tree National Park and southward in the Coachella Valley margins and the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains foothills, perhaps south to Anza Borrego Desert State Park. The CNPS reports its habitat as desert dunes and sandy soils in desert shrublands or Joshua tree woodlands and flowers between March and May. Most known occurrences are on sandy alluvial flats river canyons and alluvial fans. Plants from Imperial and San Diego counties lack red spots at the base of their petals and have been proposed to be described as a new taxon, *L. maculatus* ssp. *emaculatus* (CNPS, 2023). It was not found during the field surveys, but the sandy soils of the proposed West Deception Canyon trail provide suitable habitat. In years with average or above average rainfall, there is a moderate potential for this species to be present. No suitable habitat is present at the remaining proposed trails.

Other Special-Status Plants. In addition to the statutes and policies described above, several public agencies and private entities maintain lists of plant species of conservation concern. The CDFW includes these in its compendium of “Special Plants.” These species with at least a moderate potential to be present area treated here as special-status species.

Glandular ditaxis (*Ditaxis claryana*). Glandular ditaxis has a CRPR of 2B.2. It occurs in sandy desert shrublands, including low elevation sand flats and flowers between October and March. In California, the only known occurrences are in extreme eastern Imperial and San Bernardino Counties, and a few locations in the Coachella Valley (near Indio and to the west) and Chuckwalla Valley (north and east of Desert Center). It is either closely related to *Ditaxis adenophora* or is synonymous with that plant (Munz, 1974; and Shreve & Wiggins, 1964; both used this name). *D. adenophora* occurs in western Arizona and Sonora, Mexico, on gravelly slopes and rocky hillsides (Shreve and Wiggins, 1964), but all California reports describe sandy low elevation habitats. Thus, it is difficult to identify appropriate habitat for this species. It was not found during the field surveys, but the sandy soils of the proposed Cathedral Cove and Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector trails provides suitable habitat. The remaining proposed trails appear to be outside of the species geographic range.

Narrow-leaf sandpaper-plant (*Petalonyx linearis*). Narrow-leaf sandpaper-plant has a CRPR of 2B.3. It is a shrub and blooms from March to May (CNPS, 2023). It is found on sandy and rocky canyons in Sonoran and Mojavean Desert scrubs; below about 4,000 feet elevation (it occurs within California and is endemic to Riverside, San Diego, Imperial Counties and occurs in Arizona, Baja, Sonora, Mexico). It was not found during the field surveys, but the desert washes and rocky hillsides provide suitable habitat. There is a moderate to high potential for this species to be present at the proposed West Deception Canyon trail. It is not expected at any of the remaining proposed trails.

Desert spike-moss (*Selaginella eremophila*). Desert spike-moss is a perennial herb that grows on mountainous or hillside rock outcrops and crevices, from about 600 to 3,000 feet in elevation in lower desert-facing slopes of the San Jacinto Mountain and adjacent deserts. This species was not found during the field surveys, but there is suitable habitat on the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail. In years with average or above average rainfall, there is a moderate potential for this species to be present at any of the proposed trails.

Mecca aster (*Xylorhiza cognata*). Mecca aster is a perennial herb that grows on slopes and bottoms of deep ravines in clay, rocky sand, and gravel. This species was not found during the field surveys, but there is suitable habitat at the proposed Biskra Palms. It has also been previously recorded from the Biskra Palms and has a high potential to be present. It is not expected to occur at any of the other proposed trails.

Special-Status Wildlife

Peninsular Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni* DPS). The Peninsular bighorn sheep is federally listed as endangered, State-listed as threatened and designated as a "fully protected animal" by the California Fish and Game Code. Under the federal Endangered Species Act listing (USFWS, 2009) "Peninsular bighorn sheep" refers to the regional Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of desert bighorn sheep (or Nelson's bighorn sheep). Under the 1971 California Endangered Species Act listing, Peninsular bighorn sheep refers to the subspecies *Ovis canadensis cremnobates*, although that subspecies is no longer recognized in more recent literature. Regardless of nomenclature, both listing designations refer to the same animals: the bighorn sheep population found in the Peninsular Ranges of southern California and southward into Baja California. This population is recognized as genetically isolated from other populations located farther to the north and east. Peninsular bighorn sheep inhabit the desert slopes of the Peninsular Ranges from Riverside County south to Baja California, Mexico, including the San Jacinto Mountains. Peninsular bighorn sheep biology, life history, and conservation status are described by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS, 2011) in its 5-year review. A few key aspects of its life history are seasonal movements and habitat use, reliance on surface water availability, and metapopulation geography.

The decline of Peninsular bighorn sheep is attributed to combined effects of disease and parasitism; low lamb recruitment; habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation; non-adaptive behavioral responses associated with residential and commercial development; and high predation rates.

The USFWS (2000) has prepared a Recovery Plan for Peninsular bighorn sheep, identifying 9 Recovery Regions, extending from the northernmost Recovery Region 1 on the desert-facing slopes of the San Jacinto Mountains, to the southernmost Recovery Region 9 extending from the Coyote Mountains south to the international border. The USFWS designated critical habitat for Peninsular bighorn sheep in 2009. All proposed trails are outside of designated critical habitat with the exception of the upper Cathedral Cove Connector trail which crosses into designated critical habitat. In its critical habitat designation (2009), the USFWS described “primary constituent elements” (PCEs) essential to the conservation of Peninsular bighorn sheep. The 5 PCEs are paraphrased below:

- Moderate to steep, open slopes and canyons, providing space for sheltering, predator detection, rearing of young, foraging and watering, mating, and movement within and between ewe groups.
- Presence of a variety of forage plants, including shrubs that provide a primary food source year-round, grasses, and cacti that provide a source of forage in the fall, and forbs that provide a source of forage in the spring.
- Steep, rugged, slopes (60 percent slope or greater) that provide secluded space for lambing and terrain for predator evasion.
- Alluvial fans, washes, and valley bottoms that provide important foraging areas where nutritious and digestible plants can be more readily found during times of drought and lactation, and that provide and maintain habitat connectivity by serving as travel routes between and within ewe groups, adjacent mountain ranges, and important resource areas (e.g., foraging areas and escape terrain); and
- Intermittent and permanent water sources that are available during extended dry periods and provide relatively nutritious plants and drinking water.

All five of the PCEs appear to be met where the proposed Cathedral Cove Connector trail meeting designated critical habitat.

Mojave Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). The Mojave Desert tortoise (i.e., west of the Colorado River) is state and federally listed as threatened. Tortoises east of the Colorado River have been considered a separate population of the same species but work by Murphy et al. (2011) suggests that they should be recognized as a distinct species, Morafka’s desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*). All wild desert tortoises in California are part of the state and federally listed Mojave population. The proposed trails are not within critical habitat for the desert tortoise as designated by the USFWS (1994).

Desert tortoises are uncommon in the Coachella Valley and have been extirpated from much of their historic range there. The West Deception Canyon Trail have moderately suitable habitat. The soils on these proposed trails are suitable for burrowing. The Biskra Palms trail is relatively poor habitat because the surrounding land uses and linear barriers (including roadways, railroad lines, surface water management, and other development) tend to isolate the site from tortoise populations, although tortoises may traverse the site while moving between suitable habitats. There is minimal potential for desert tortoise to occur along the Cathedral Cove and Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector trails as these areas are outside of the geographical range of the species.

Aspen’s field surveys were not USFWS protocol desert tortoise surveys (USFWS, 2010); however, the Aspen Biologist is familiar with desert tortoise sign and survey methods. The surveys were completed during the desert tortoise spring activity period, and our field methods covered all habitats throughout each proposed trail. No tortoise or tortoise sign (shells, bones, scutes, limbs, scats, pellets, tracks, egg fragments, courtship rings, drinking sites, mineral licks, etc.) of the desert tortoise were found on any proposed trail. While no desert tortoises were found, tortoises may occur at very low density in the general area or captive tortoises may be released illegally in the vicinity. We conclude there is a moderate potential for desert tortoise to be present on the proposed Biskra Palms and West Deception Canyon trails and minimal potential for desert tortoise to be present at the two remaining proposed trails.

Crotch bumblebee (*Bombus crotchii*). Crotch bumblebee is a candidate for listing under the State endangered species act. It currently has no federal protection. This species occurs primarily in California, mostly concentrated in the Central Valley, but found along the Pacific Coast and adjacent ranges and into the deserts. Crotch bumblebee is associated with grass and shrublands that are hotter and dryer than habitats typically occupied by other bumblebee species. Crotch bumble bee is known to be a short-tongued species and prefers plants including milkweeds, lupines, phacelias, sages, poppies, and buckwheats. This species frequently nests underground in abandoned rodent nests but can also be found above ground utilizing tufts of grass, old bird nests, rock piles, and cavities in dead trees. Threats to this species include habitat loss and degradation, climate change, pesticide use, and competition from non-native bees. Suitable habitat is present along all proposed trails but has a moderate potential to be present along the proposed Biskra Palms trail and was recently observed within about three miles of the trail. It has a low potential to be present along the remaining trails.

Species Protected under the Federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 668-668d; BGEPA) prohibits take of bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*). The BGEPA defines *take* to include “pursuing, shooting, shooting at, poisoning, wounding, killing, capturing, trapping, collecting, molesting, and disturbing.” The USFWS (2007) further defines *disturb* as “to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the best scientific information available, (1) injury to an eagle, (2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or (3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior.”

Golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*). Golden eagle are year-round residents throughout most of their range in the western United States. In the southwest, they are more common during winter when eagles that nest in Canada migrate south into the region. They breed from late January through August, mainly during late winter and early spring in the California deserts (Pagel et al., 2010). In the desert, they generally nest in steep, rugged terrain, often on sites with overhanging ledges, cliffs, or large trees as cover. Golden eagles are wide-ranging predators, especially outside of the nesting season, when they do not need to return to their nests to tend eggs or young.

Golden eagle foraging habitat consists of open terrain such as grassland, desert, savanna, and early successional forest and shrubland habitats throughout the regional foothills, mountains, and deserts. They prey primarily on rabbits and rodents, but will also take other mammals, birds, reptiles, and some carrion (Cornell, 2022).

The San Jacinto Mountains to the south, southwest, and southeast; and the San Bernardino Mountains to the northwest of the proposed trails; provide suitable golden eagle nesting habitat. Moderately suitable foraging habitat for the golden eagle is available at each of the proposed trails, but there is no suitable nesting habitat.

Sensitive Wildlife Species

Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*). Burrowing owl is a BLM Sensitive Species and a CDFW Species of Special Concern. As a native bird, it is also protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the California Fish and Game Code. It is a small, terrestrial owl of open country. During breeding season, it ranges throughout most of the western US. It occurs year-around in southern California, but may be more numerous during fall and winter, when migratory individuals from farther north join the regional resident population. Burrowing owls favor flat, open annual or perennial grassland or gentle slopes and sparse shrub or tree cover. They use the burrows of ground squirrels and other rodents for shelter and nesting. Availability of suitable burrows is an important habitat component. Where ground squirrel burrows are not available, the owls may use alternate burrow sites or man-made features such as drainpipes, debris piles, or concrete slabs. In the California deserts, burrowing owls occur in low numbers in scattered populations, but they can be found in much higher densities near agricultural lands where

rodent and insect prey tend to be more abundant (Wilkerson and Siegel, 2011). Burrowing owl nesting season, as recognized by the California Burrowing Owl Consortium (CDFW, 2012), is 1 February through 31 August. Burrowing owls are covered under the CVMSHCP. No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were observed on the proposed trails or at the proposed trailheads.

Several bat species known from the Project vicinity are recognized by CDFW as “Special Animals” as described below. The special-status bats of the local area primarily roost in rock crevices, tunnels, or caves and one species (western yellow bat, *Lasiurus xanthinus*) roosts in the foliage of riparian trees. Roost sites may be used seasonally (e.g., inactive cool seasons) or daily (day roosts, used during inactive daylight hours). Maternity roosts are particularly important overall for bat life histories. Knowledge of bat distributions and occurrences is sparse, and bat life histories vary widely. Some species hibernate during winter or migrate south. During the breeding season, bats generally roost during the day, either alone or in communal roost sites, depending on species. All special-status regional bats are insectivorous, catching their prey either on the wing or on the ground. Some species feed mainly over open water where insect production is especially high, but others forage over open shrublands. The proposed trails lack rock outcrops and crevices which are required for roosting, the trails may provide some roosting habitat for common bat species, but the likelihood is minimal. Special-status bat species in the area are unlikely to utilize the areas for roosting but may forage on any of the proposed trails. The potential for occurrence (foraging) is moderate for the various special-status bat species; see Table Appendix B-2.

Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*). Desert bighorn sheep is a subspecies of bighorn sheep that is found in the desert mountains of southeastern California and into Mexico. It is recognized as fully protected under the California Fish and Game Code except where designated otherwise by CDFW. It lives in the desert mountains of California, Nevada, northern Arizona, and Utah. Populations in the Peninsular Ranges (far west of the Project area) are federally listed as a threatened. Threats to desert bighorn sheep include habitat loss or degradation; limited availability of water sources; barriers to local or regional movement (e.g., highways and aqueducts); disease spread by domestic livestock; and natural predation by mountain lions in some populations. Near the proposed trails, they range in the Little San Bernardino Mountains and bordering the rapidly expanding Coachella Valley (CVAG, 2007). Desert bighorn sheep spend most of the year close to the desert floor, only moving into higher elevations as summer progresses and the foraging conditions diminish, returning after the winter rains for lambing (Ingles, 1965).

No desert bighorn sheep or sign of bighorn sheep were observed on any of the proposed trails. There is a high potential for desert bighorn sheep along the Biskra Palms, and West Deception Canyon trails which are located along the base of the Little San Bernardino Mountains and Joshua Tree National Park. Cathedral Cove and Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector trails are located within the range of the Peninsular bighorn sheep are discussed above.

Wildlife Species Fully Protected Under the California Fish and Game Code. Under the state Fish and Game Code, selected fish and wildlife species are designated as fully protected or as protected furbearers, and take is prohibited except under permit for scientific purposes. Most of the designated fully protected species occur well outside the Project vicinity, but several may be found in the study area. These are golden eagle (discussed above, Species Protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act), desert bighorn sheep (discussed above under Sensitive Wildlife Species), and the desert kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*).

Desert kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*). Desert kit fox is not listed as a special-status species by the State of California or the USFWS, but it is protected under Title 14, Section 460, California Code of Regulations, which prohibits take. Kit foxes are primarily nocturnal and inhabit open level areas with patchy shrubs. Friable soils are necessary for the construction of dens, which are used throughout the year for cover, thermoregulation, water conservation, and rearing pups. Desert kit fox pairs and young may use one or several active den complexes. Pairs raise one litter of about four pups per year, born between late January and March. The pups emerge from the natal den four weeks after birth and begin to forage with the

parents at age three to four months (Cypher, 2003). In early 2012, an outbreak of canine distemper virus was discovered in desert kit fox populations in eastern Riverside County. CDFW is testing desert kit foxes for distemper and monitoring the overall health of the kit fox population (CDFW, 2014). Desert kit fox is known from the region and has a moderate potential to be present on several of the proposed trails.

Other Special-status Wildlife Species

In addition to the statutes and policies described above, several public agencies and private entities maintain lists of wildlife species of conservation concern. The CDFW includes these in its compendium of “Special Animals.” These species are treated here as special-status species.

Red diamond rattlesnakes (*Crotalus ruber*). Red diamond rattlesnakes occur between sea level and about 5,000 feet elevation throughout most of Orange County and western Riverside County, south through San Diego and Baja California and inland to the Colorado Desert margins. Their habitats include coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and woodlands through most of their geographic range, and desert scrub at the eastern margins of their range. They are generally found around boulders and rock outcrops (Stebbins 2003).

Pallid San Diego pocket mouse (*Chaetodipus fallax pallidus*). Pallid San Diego pocket mouse is a small burrowing mammal, widespread in shrublands and grasslands throughout most of the southern California deserts. It tends to be found in open areas with sandy or gravelly soils and herbaceous vegetation (CDFW, 2023). It feeds primarily on grass seeds and is active nocturnally. It reduces its activity during cold weather and may go into torpor (Erikson and Patten, 1999). Habitat at each of the proposed trails is suitable for pallid San Diego pocket mouse, and there is a high probability that it occurs on each of the trails.

San Diego desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*). San Diego desert woodrat is known from coastal and desert scrub and rocky outcrops throughout much of southern California (CDFW, 2023). They frequently build large middens (piles of sticks arranged to form a shelter) in rock outcrops or around the bases of shrubs. Suitable habitat is present throughout each of the proposed trails and middens were observed at the Cathedral Cove Connector and West Deception Canyon Trails.

American badger (*Taxidea taxus*). American badger ranges widely throughout the region. They feed primarily on small burrowing mammals (e.g., ground squirrels) and may occur wherever adequate prey is found, and soils are suitable for vigorous digging. Badgers may use any of the proposed trails periodically for foraging, but no burrows or dens were observed. They would be unlikely to occur at any of the trails regularly, though they could be expected to occasionally forage or travel across them. This species has a moderate potential for occurrence on several of the proposed trails.

Native Birds. The federal MBTA prohibits take of any migratory bird, including active nests, except as permitted by regulation (e.g., waterfowl or upland game bird hunting). The MBTA broadly defines “migratory bird” as “any species or family of birds that live, reproduce or migrate within or across international borders at some point during their annual life cycle” and thus applies to most native bird species. California Fish and Game Code Section 3503 prohibits take, possession, or needless destruction of bird nests or eggs; Section 3503.5 prohibits take or possession of birds of prey or their eggs; and Section 3513 prohibits take or possession of any migratory nongame bird. With the exception of a few non-native birds such as European starling, the take of any birds or active bird nests or young is regulated by these statutes. Most of these species have no other special conservation status as defined in Appendix B-2.

Several other special-status birds of prey are found seasonally in the region, especially during winter and during migration. These are Cooper’s hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*), and prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*). Suitable winter or migratory season foraging habitats for all of these raptors is widely available throughout the region. These species have a high or moderate probability of foraging on any of the proposed trails and have a low to minimal potential to nest at any of the proposed trails.

In addition to birds of prey, several additional special-status bird species are reported from the surrounding area (CDFW, 2023; Appendix B-2). Two of these, Crissal thrasher (*Toxostoma crissale*) and Le Conte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*), are covered species under the CVMSHCP with suitable habitat mapped on several of the proposed trails (Appendix B-2). In addition to these species, southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), and black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*) all have a potential to be present on several of the proposed trails (Appendix B-2).

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The proposed Project would affect habitat for special-status species and, without mitigation, could cause take of special-status plants and animals. Direct impacts would include removal of habitat for special-status plants and wildlife through trail improvements for the West Deception Canyon Trail and minor maintenance activities involving each trail. Trail development activities could also disturb nests on or adjacent to the proposed trails and trailheads. Potential indirect effects of the proposed trail designations include increased use of the area by the public, a potential for increased OHV use, and the spread of invasive weeds.

This project involves minimal development of the proposed trails. The trailhead for the proposed Biskra Palms Trail would require removing 50 feet of curbing and installing a concrete apron in its place. No trailhead or parking lot development is planned for the other trails except for adding informational signage. Development of the proposed West Deception Canyon Trail includes the addition of 200 feet of switchbacks to a steep portion of the trail to avoid soil erosion and facilitate hikers. Installation of trail signage and markers and occasional trail maintenance will facilitate recreational use on all the trails.

These trail development activities could result in direct and indirect impacts to special-status plants and wildlife and the permanent loss of natural vegetation and its habitat value. Since a moderate potential exists for the following species to exist on at least one of the proposed trail alignments, these special status species could be affected:

- | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| ■ Little San Bernardino Mountains
linanthus | ■ ferruginous hawk | ■ desert bighorn sheep |
| ■ glandular ditaxis | ■ Crissal thrasher | ■ desert kit fox |
| ■ narrow-leaf sandpaper-plant | ■ Le Conte's thrasher | ■ American badger |
| ■ desert spike-moss | ■ Southern California rufous-
crowned sparrow | ■ San Diego desert woodrat |
| ■ Mecca aster | ■ loggerhead shrike | ■ pallid San Diego pocket mouse |
| ■ golden eagle | ■ black-tailed gnatcatcher | ■ Mojave desert tortoise |
| ■ burrowing owl | ■ Peninsular bighorn sheep | ■ red diamond rattlesnake |
| ■ Cooper's hawk | | ■ Crotch bumblebee |

The increased use by the public may cause increased disturbance to wildlife and habitat, however, it may also focus visitors into designated areas thereby reducing the current dispersed disturbance. The Project is also expected to increase visitor awareness of regulations, reduce off-road activity, and reduce littering. Weed management would be conducted periodically as a component of routine trail and trailhead maintenance; all weed eradication would be done by hand and no herbicides would be used. The effect of the spread of weeds, if any, is expected to be minimal and no weed-specific mitigation is recommended.

The following mitigation measures would minimize the potential impacts from the proposed Project. Requiring adherence to the CVMSHCP avoidance and minimization measures, fee payment to fund the

CVMSHCP as appropriate, and targeting disturbance to previously disturbed habitats for the trails and trailhead sites would reduce the amount of sensitive habitat disturbed. Pre-development surveys for special-status species and biological monitoring, as necessary, during the proposed trailhead and trail development/maintenance activities would ensure that impacts to those species are avoided through moving special-status animals out of harm's way (as allowed); establishing appropriate no-disturbance buffers for nesting birds, burrowing owl, or Peninsular bighorn sheep; and halting activities to allow desert tortoises to leave the work area, if present. Worker training would ensure all project-related personnel are aware of sensitive biological resources they may encounter and all mitigation measures. Training would include identification of special-status species in the area, what to do in the event one is encountered, not bringing dogs or other pets to the Project site, keeping trash and water storage properly contained, minimizing standing water, and reducing speed limits to prevent wildlife mortality.

Mitigation Measures

The following summarizes mitigation measures to reduce or avoid impacts to special-status plants and wildlife.

BIO-1: CVMSHCP Compliance. All applicable avoidance and minimization measures as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP will be observed during construction activities, as well as payment of a fee to fund the CVMSHCP or other appropriate mechanism based on the type of proposed activity as described in Section 11.7.3 of the CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement.

BIO-1A: Consistency Review for the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail. Prior to designation and initiation of any trail work on the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail and associated trailhead and parking area, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy will complete a consistency review with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission on topics including, but not limited to, consistency with CVMSHCP general guidelines for development of perimeter trails, minimum requirements for trailhead facilities, and findings of a research program on the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep described in Element 2 of CVMSHCP Section 7.3.3.2.

BIO-1B: Consistency Review for the West Deception Canyon and Biskra Palms Trails. Prior to designation and initiation of any trail work on the West Deception Canyon Trail and Biskra Palms Trail and associated trailheads and parking areas, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy will complete a CVMSHCP consistency review with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission on topics including, but not limited to, consistency with CVMSHCP Guidelines for Public Access and Recreation on Reserve Lands and compliance with applicable Required Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures and Land Use Adjacency Guidelines.

BIO-2: Limit Disturbance Areas. At all work areas, mechanical disturbance of previously undisturbed habitats (including soils) will be limited to the minimum area necessary. Project disturbance areas will be sited on previously disturbed areas to the extent feasible.

BIO-3: Assign Project Biologist. The CVMC will assign one or more acceptable biologists (according to CVMSHCP requirements) to conduct pre-construction surveys and construction monitoring as described in Mitigation Measures BIO-4 and BIO-5. An "acceptable biologist" means a biologist whose name is on a list, maintained by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), of biologists who are acceptable to CVCC, CDFW, and USFWS for purposes of conducting surveys for Covered Species.

BIO-4: Preconstruction Surveys. An acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) will conduct pre-activity clearance surveys for desert tortoise and their burrows, Peninsular bighorn sheep, and other special-status species. Surveys for desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep will be conducted according to the avoidance and minimization measures in Section 4.4

of the CVMSHCP. Pre-activity surveys will be conducted no more than 7 days in advance of any ground- or vegetation-disturbing activities in any location. For activities at Biskra Palms, monitoring would take place between February 15 and November 15. Preconstruction surveys for nesting birds and burrowing owls will be in accordance with BIO-4A & B.

BIO-4A: Preconstruction Surveys for Nesting Birds. Regardless of the time of year, nesting bird surveys shall be performed by a qualified avian biologist no more than 3 days prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. Pre-construction surveys shall focus on both direct and indirect evidence of nesting, including nest locations and nesting behavior. The qualified avian biologist will make every effort to avoid potential nest predation as a result of survey and monitoring efforts. If active nests are found during the pre-construction nesting bird surveys, a qualified biologist shall establish an appropriate nest buffer to be marked on the ground. Nest buffers are species specific and shall be at least 300 feet for passerines and 500 feet for raptors. A smaller or larger buffer may be determined by the qualified biologist familiar with the nesting phenology of the nesting species and based on nest and buffer monitoring results. Construction activities may not occur inside the established buffers, which shall remain on site until a qualified biologist determines the young have fledged or the nest is no longer active. Active nests and adequacy of the established buffer distance shall be monitored daily by the qualified biologist until the qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged or the Project has been completed. The qualified biologist has the authority to stop work if nesting pairs exhibit signs of disturbance.

Bio-4B: Preconstruction Surveys for Burrowing Owls. No less than 60 days prior to the start of Project-related activities, a burrowing owl habitat assessment shall be conducted by a qualified biologist according to the specifications of the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012, or most recent version).

If the habitat assessment demonstrates suitable burrowing owl habitat, then focused burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted by a qualified biologist according to the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. If burrowing owls are detected during the focused surveys, the qualified biologist and Project proponent shall prepare a Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall describe proposed avoidance, monitoring, relocation, minimization, and mitigation actions. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall include the number and location of occupied burrow sites, acres of burrowing owl habitat that will be impacted, details of site monitoring, and details on proposed buffers and other avoidance measures if avoidance is proposed. If impacts to occupied burrowing owl habitat or burrow cannot be avoided, the Burrowing Owl Plan shall also describe minimization and compensatory mitigation actions that will be implemented. Proposed implementation of burrow exclusion and closure should only be considered as a last resort, after all other options have been evaluated as exclusion is not in itself an avoidance, minimization, or mitigation method and has the possibility to result in take. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall identify compensatory mitigation for the temporary or permanent loss of occupied burrow(s) and habitat consistent with the "Mitigation Impacts" section of the 2012 Staff Report and shall implement CDFW-approved mitigation prior to initiation of Project activities. If impacts to occupied burrows cannot be avoided, information shall be provided regarding adjacent or nearby suitable habitat available to owls. If no suitable habitat is available nearby, details regarding the creation and funding of artificial burrows (numbers, location, and type of burrows) and management activities for relocated owls shall also be included in the Burrowing Owl Plan. The Project proponent shall implement the Burrowing Owl Plan following CDFW and USFWS review and approval.

Preconstruction burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted no less than 14 days prior to the start of Project-related activities and within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance, in accordance with the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 or most recent version). Preconstruction surveys should be performed by a qualified biologist following the recommendations and guidelines provided in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. If the preconstruction surveys confirm occupied burrowing owl habitat, Project activities shall be immediately halted. The qualified biologist shall coordinate with CDFW and prepare a Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW and USFWS for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities.

- BIO-5: Construction Monitoring.** An acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) will monitor construction activities, provide worker education programs, and supervise or perform other related actions. The Biological Monitor will be authorized to temporarily halt construction activities if needed to prevent potential harm to these and any other special-status species. Project activities may not disturb an active bird nest. If an active bird nest is located on or adjacent to the work site, a Biological Monitor will designate and flag an appropriate buffer area around the nest where construction activities will not be permitted. The buffer area will be based on the bird species and nature of the construction activity. The work supervisor will coordinate with the Biological Monitor on planned or ongoing construction activities and any specific pre-activity surveys or monitoring requirements for each activity in those areas.
- BIO-6: Special-Status Species Avoidance and Minimization Measures.** The acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) and all workers shall regularly observe the work areas for desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep, and burrowing owl. The Project will adhere to avoidance and minimization measures for sensitive species as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP. For desert tortoise, installing exclusionary fencing per CVMSHCP guidelines for trailhead or trail construction would be infeasible. Instead, if a desert tortoise or Peninsular bighorn sheep are observed, they will be left to move away from the work site on their own. Burrowing owl measures include establishing appropriate buffers, depending on the season, where no construction activities may occur; and coordinating with Wildlife Agencies on appropriate eviction/passive relocation procedures.
- BIO-7: Worker Training.** Employees will be trained to ensure that all workers on site (including contractors) are aware of all applicable Mitigation Measures for biological resources. Specifically, workers will be required to (1) limit all activities to approved work areas; (2) report any desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep, burrowing owl, or other special-status species, or bird nest observation in the work areas and access routes to the supervisor or Biological Monitor; (3) avoid contact with any wildlife that may approach a work area, and be aware of potential venomous reptile bites from carelessness or unnecessary harassment; (4) pick up and properly dispose of any food, trash, or construction refuse; and (5) report any spilled materials (oil, fuel, solvent, engine coolant, raw concrete, or other material potentially hazardous to wildlife) to the supervisor or on-site Biological Monitor. During the training, the instructor will briefly discuss special-status species that may occur in the work areas, their habitats, and requirements to avoid or minimize impacts. In addition, all workers will be informed of civil and criminal penalties for violations of the federal ESA, CESA, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, relevant sections of the California Fish and Game Code, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.
- BIO-8: Wildlife Avoidance.** Workers will not be permitted to feed, harm, approach, harass, or handle wildlife at any time, except to move animals out of harm's way, and only as directed by a

supervisor. This condition will not exempt workers, including the Biological Monitor, from any safety policies about venomous reptiles.

- BIO-9: Trash, Refuse, Concrete, and Other Construction Materials.** All trash and food materials will be properly contained within vehicles or closed refuse bins while on any site and will be regularly removed from the site (at least on a weekly basis) for proper disposal. All refuse from construction activities will be removed from each work site upon completion of work. No raw cement, concrete, or washings thereof, asphalt, paint, oil, solvents, or other petroleum products, or any other substances that could be hazardous to vegetation or wildlife resources, shall be disposed of on-site or allowed to spill onto soil. Cleanup of any spilled material shall begin immediately.
- BIO-10: Minimize Standing Water.** Water applied to dirt roads and construction areas for dust abatement shall use the minimal amount needed to meet safety and air quality standards, to prevent the formation of puddles, which could attract wildlife to construction sites.
- BIO-11: Water Storage.** All water containers (i.e., tanks or trailers) will be securely covered to prevent wildlife from entering the containers and becoming trapped.
- BIO-12: Speed Limit.** To minimize potential impacts to special-status wildlife, no vehicles will be permitted to exceed 25 mph while traveling on dirt access roads.
- BIO-13: Streambed Avoidance.** Although not proposed, in the unlikely event that trail improvement would disturb existing streambeds, qualified biologist or hydrologist will identify the jurisdictional boundaries of the washes, ephemeral drainages, and wetlands located at the site. If jurisdictional areas are found to be located within the impact area, permits will be obtained from CDFW, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Colorado River Regional Water Control Board.
- BIO-13A: CDFW Lake and Streambed Alteration Program.** Prior to construction, the Project Sponsor shall obtain written correspondence from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) stating that notification under section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code is not required for the Project, or the Project Sponsor should obtain a CDFW-executed Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement, authorizing impacts to Fish and Game Code section 1602 resources associated with the Project.

b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in the City or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The proposed Biskra Palms Trail alignment does have the potential to impact riparian habitat and the desert palm oasis woodland that is recognized as a sensitive natural community (CDFW, 2022). Impacts resulting from trail use and occasional maintenance would have only minimal effects to the desert palm oasis woodland given the small-scale disturbance of the trail. The remaining proposed trail alignments would not affect riparian habitat or other sensitive communities identified in by CDFW.

Participation in the CVMSHCP (in accordance with Mitigation Measure BIO-1) would mitigate impacts to sensitive habitats through payment of a fee to fund the CVMSHCP or other appropriate mechanism as described in Section 11.7.3 of the CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement. Additionally, any potential impacts that may occur would be reduced with implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-2, which would limit any new, and not presently proposed, mechanical disturbance to previously disturbed habitats (including soils) to the greatest extent practicable to minimize impacts to sensitive and other natural communities.

Mitigation Measures

The following summarizes mitigation measures that can be used to reduce or avoid impacts to sensitive natural communities for any new and not presently proposed trail development or construction, as applicable.

BIO-1: CVMSHCP Compliance. All applicable avoidance and minimization measures as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP will be observed during construction activities, as well as payment of a fee to fund the CVMSHCP or other appropriate mechanism based on the type of proposed activity as described in Section 11.7.3 of the CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement.

BIO-2: Limit Disturbance Areas. At all work areas, mechanical disturbance of previously undisturbed habitats (including soils) will be limited to the minimum area necessary. Project disturbance areas will be sited on previously disturbed areas to the extent feasible.

c) *Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?*

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The proposed Biskra Palms trail alignment crosses through potential wetlands at the Biskra Palms oasis. A formal wetland delineation was not conducted however hydrophytic vegetation is present and there is a potential for the area to support wetland hydrology and hydric soils. Since no new trail construction or development is proposed, no adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands is anticipated.

Although not proposed and depending on the precise location of the jurisdictional limits and trail alignment, any new trail construction in the future may necessitate authorization from regulatory agencies, as follows:

- CDFW, under Section 1600 of the California Fish and Game Code (Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement).
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board, under Section 401 of the federal CWA; or
- US Army Corps of Engineers, according to Section 404 of the CWA.

To minimize impacts to wetlands, Mitigation Measure BIO-13 (Streambed Avoidance) would ensure that no substantial fill or other streambed alterations occur for any new trail construction or development by requiring a jurisdictional delineation at the potential wetland and requiring the Project disturbance area to remain outside of the jurisdictional limit of the wetland. Impacts to the wetland would be regulated through the permitting processes identified above. Therefore, Mitigation Measure BIO-13 and BIO-13 A would reduce impacts by ensuring that wetlands are either avoided or permitted through the regulatory agencies.

Mitigation Measures

BIO-13: Streambed Avoidance. A qualified biologist or hydrologist will identify the jurisdictional boundaries of the washes, ephemeral drainages, and wetlands located at the site. If jurisdictional areas are found to be located within the impact area, permits will be obtained from CDFW, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Colorado River Regional Water Control Board.

BIO-13A: *CDFW Lake and Streambed Alteration Program. Prior to construction, the Project Sponsor shall obtain written correspondence from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) stating that notification under section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code is not required for the Project, or the Project Sponsor should obtain a CDFW-executed Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement, authorizing impacts to Fish and Game Code section 1602 resources associated with the Project.*
d) *Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or*

wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The proposed trail designations are in areas of suitable nesting habitat for numerous resident and migratory bird species. Although no bird nests were observed during the surveys conducted in support of the Project, suitable nest sites are abundant throughout the proposed trail alignments and adjacent open space, and many common bird species are expected to nest there. Implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-4 (Preconstruction Surveys) and BIO-5 (Construction Monitoring) would reduce or avoid any potential impacts to nesting birds.

Given the limited extent of the proposed trail alignments, the absence of wildlife corridors, the nature of the Project activities, and the short duration of construction activities, the proposed Project's impacts on the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species would be less than significant. Impacts to nesting birds would be less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

Mitigation Measures

BIO-4: Pre-Trail Development Surveys. An acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) will conduct pre-activity clearance surveys for desert tortoise and their burrows, Peninsular bighorn sheep, and other special-status species. Surveys for desert tortoise, Peninsular bighorn sheep, burrowing owl, Le Conte's thrasher, and crissal thrasher will be conducted according to the avoidance and minimization measures in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP. Pre-activity surveys will be conducted no more than 7 days in advance of any ground- or vegetation-disturbing activities in any location. For construction activities planned between February 15 and November 15 at the Biskra Palms Trail. Preconstruction surveys for nesting birds and burrowing owls will be in accordance with BIO-4A & B.

BIO-4A: Preconstruction Surveys for Nesting Birds. Regardless of the time of year, nesting bird surveys shall be performed by a qualified avian biologist no more than 3 days prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. Pre-construction surveys shall focus on both direct and indirect evidence of nesting, including nest locations and nesting behavior. The qualified avian biologist will make every effort to avoid potential nest predation as a result of survey and monitoring efforts. If active nests are found during the pre-construction nesting bird surveys, a qualified biologist shall establish an appropriate nest buffer to be marked on the ground. Nest buffers are species specific and shall be at least 300 feet for passerines and 500 feet for raptors. A smaller or larger buffer may be determined by the qualified biologist familiar with the nesting phenology of the nesting species and based on nest and buffer monitoring results. Construction activities may not occur inside the established buffers, which shall remain on site until a qualified biologist determines the young have fledged or the nest is no longer active. Active nests and adequacy of the established buffer distance shall be monitored daily by the qualified biologist until the qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged or the Project has been completed. The qualified biologist has the authority to stop work if nesting pairs exhibit signs of disturbance.

Bio-4B: Preconstruction Surveys for Burrowing Owls. No less than 60 days prior to the start of Project-related activities, a burrowing owl habitat assessment shall be conducted by a qualified biologist according to the specifications of the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012, or most recent version).

If the habitat assessment demonstrates suitable burrowing owl habitat, then focused burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted by a qualified biologist according to the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. If burrowing owls are detected during the focused surveys, the qualified biologist and Project

proponent shall prepare a Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall describe proposed avoidance, monitoring, relocation, minimization, and mitigation actions. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall include the number and location of occupied burrow sites, acres of burrowing owl habitat that will be impacted, details of site monitoring, and details on proposed buffers and other avoidance measures if avoidance is proposed. If impacts to occupied burrowing owl habitat or burrow cannot be avoided, the Burrowing Owl Plan shall also describe minimization and compensatory mitigation actions that will be implemented. Proposed implementation of burrow exclusion and closure should only be considered as a last resort, after all other options have been evaluated as exclusion is not in itself an avoidance, minimization, or mitigation method and has the possibility to result in take. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall identify compensatory mitigation for the temporary or permanent loss of occupied burrow(s) and habitat consistent with the "Mitigation Impacts" section of the 2012 Staff Report and shall implement CDFW-approved mitigation prior to initiation of Project activities. If impacts to occupied burrows cannot be avoided, information shall be provided regarding adjacent or nearby suitable habitat available to owls. If no suitable habitat is available nearby, details regarding the creation and funding of artificial burrows (numbers, location, and type of burrows) and management activities for relocated owls shall also be included in the Burrowing Owl Plan. The Project proponent shall implement the Burrowing Owl Plan following CDFW and USFWS review and approval.

Preconstruction burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted no less than 14 days prior to the start of Project-related activities and within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance, in accordance with the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 or most recent version). Preconstruction surveys should be performed by a qualified biologist following the recommendations and guidelines provided in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. If the preconstruction surveys confirm occupied burrowing owl habitat, Project activities shall be immediately halted. The qualified biologist shall coordinate with CDFW and prepare a Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW and USFWS for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities. **BIO-5: Trail Development Monitoring.** An acceptable biologist (according to CVMSHCP requirements) will monitor construction activities, provide worker education programs, and supervise or perform other related actions. The Biological Monitor will be authorized to temporarily halt construction activities if needed to prevent potential harm to these and any other special status species. Project activities may not disturb an active bird nest. If an active bird nest is located on or adjacent to the work site, a Biological Monitor will designate and flag an appropriate buffer area around the nest where construction activities will not be permitted. The buffer area will be based on the bird species and nature of the construction activity. The work supervisor will coordinate with the Biological Monitor on planned or ongoing construction activities and any specific pre-activity surveys or monitoring requirements for each activity in those areas.

e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT. Riverside County policies and ordinances applicable to biological resources are identified in Section 3.4.2 (Applicable Regulations, Plans, and Standards). These policies direct permanent preservation of important open space lands, compliance with the Multipurpose Open Space Element of the General Plan, protection of environmental resources, cooperation with resource agencies for the voluntary protection or restoration of significant habitats, and preservation of multi-species habitat resources. The Project, including the Mitigation Measures are consistent with the County's overall conser-

vation objectives. Impacts to local policies and ordinances would be less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The Project is within the CVMSHCP area and is subject to the CVMSHCP conservation requirements. Impacts to CVMSHCP covered species located on private lands (including CVMSHCP conservation lands) are authorized by USFWS and CDFW for participants in the CVMSHCP and are mitigated through the CVMSHCP. With incorporation of Mitigation Measure BIO-1, below, the Project would comply with the CVMSHCP requirements, and there would be no conflict with any HCP or NCCP.

Mitigation Measures

BIO-1: CVMSHCP Compliance. All applicable avoidance and minimization measures as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP will be observed during construction activities, as well as payment of a fee to fund the CVMSHCP or other appropriate mechanism based on the type of proposed activity as described in Section 11.7.3 of the CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement.

5.5. Cultural Resources

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to §15064.5?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to §15064.5?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Cultural resources can reflect the history, diversity, and culture of the region and people who created them. They are unique in that they are often the only remaining evidence of activity that occurred in the past. Cultural resources can be natural or built, purposeful or accidental, physical, or intangible. They encompass archaeological, traditional, and built environment resources, including but not necessarily limited to buildings, structures, objects, districts, and sites. Cultural resources include sites of important events, traditional cultural places and sacred sites, and places associated with an important person. Tribal Cultural Resources (TCR) are sites, features, places, cultural landscapes, and sacred places or objects that have cultural value or significance to a Tribe. TCRs are discussed in Section 2.18 of the Initial Study. Many cultural resources are present in the Coachella Valley region that could be affected by development without adequate protections in place.

Three kinds of cultural resources, classified by their origins, are considered in this assessment: prehistoric, ethnographic, and historic period. Prehistoric archaeological resources are associated with the human occupation and use of California prior to prolonged European contact. In California, the prehistoric period began over 12,000 years ago and extended through the eighteenth century until 1769, with the establishment of the first Spanish mission in San Diego. Ethnographic resources represent the heritage of a particular ethnic or cultural group, such as Native Americans or African, European, Latino, or Asian immigrants. Historic-period resources, both archaeological and architectural, are associated with exploration and settlement of the area and the beginning of a written historical record after the arrival of European colonists. Records associated with these periods were reviewed and surveyed conducted to determine if any potential effects of this project exist on these resources. These resources are the subject of an effects analysis related to this project.

On October 11, 2022, Aspen received the results of a records search conducted by the staff at the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) Eastern Information Center (EIC) facility at the University of California, Riverside. This records search included two additional proposed trails on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, including the Blind Canyon Trail in the vicinity of Desert Hot Springs, and Fargo Canyon Trail located northeast of Indio, both in California. The proposed project was amended after this records search and field surveys were completed by removing the BLM portion of the project including these two proposed trails as well as the Area of Potential Effects identified with these two trails. The remaining four trails, including the West Deception Canyon, Biskra Palms, Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector, and Cathedral City Cove Connector Trails remain part of this analysis.

The following record search results include all of the original proposed trails prior to the project amendment. The records search identified 78 previous studies within a 0.5-mile of the Project area. Of these 78 previous reports, 31 of them are within the Project Area. From the record search results, it appears that 9 cultural resources have been previously recorded within the APE. On December 18-23, 2022, and January 16, 2023, an intensive archaeological survey was conducted of the Project Area. The

survey crew intensively covered 100% of the Project Area. Most of the proposed trails within the project are located in natural canyons and washes and were observed to have a high level of erosion activity.

The survey resulted in no new or previously recorded prehistoric or historic resources being discovered on any of the trail routes on California State Park lands. One newly identified historic age resource was located on private land on the Biskra Palms Trail alignment, characterized as a middle to late 20th century historic refuse dump. This site is not recommended as eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR) and thus was not considered a historical resource under CEQA.

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to §15064.5?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The historic resource associated with the Biskra Palms Trail was not recommended as eligible for listing in the CRHP, thus is not considered a historical resource under CEQA and no further action is required.

Indirect impacts to cultural resources generally occur due to increased public access, which could lead to damage of cultural resources or the removal or artifacts over time. Public educational signage and materials emphasizing the need to protect cultural resources in this area would provide additional assurance that these resources will be protected (See CR-1). The guidelines in CR-2 are also recommended in the event of an unanticipated cultural resource discovery during Project development:

Mitigation Measures

CR-1: Cultural Resource Public Education. Trailhead signage and other public educational materials would be provided for all trails to inform the public about the need to respect and not disturb potential cultural resources found in the vicinity of these trails.

CR-2: Inadvertent Discovery of Archaeological Resources: In the event of the unanticipated discovery of archaeological materials, project activities will immediately cease in the area (within approximately 50 feet) of the discovery until it can be evaluated by the qualified archaeologist. Trail development activities will not resume until the qualified archaeologist has conferred with the landowner on the significance of the resource.

If it is determined that the discovered archaeological resource constitutes a historic property under Section 106 of the NHPA, or a historical resource under CEQA, avoidance and preservation in place is the preferred manner of mitigation. If preservation in place is determined to be infeasible and data recovery through excavation is the only feasible mitigation available, a Cultural Resources Treatment Plan will be prepared and implemented by the qualified archaeologist in consultation with the landowner. The Cultural Resources Treatment Plan will provide for the adequate recovery of the scientifically consequential information contained in the archaeological resource.

b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to §15064.5?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. There were no archaeological resources identified within the project area during the project related research and surveys. The guidelines in CR-2 (above) are recommended in the event of an unanticipated cultural resource discovery during Project construction.

c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED. The proposed Project is not known to contain any previously identified human remains, thus no impact is anticipated. Additionally, the proposed trail alignments are in areas that have been heavily impacted by erosion. In the unlikely event

human remains are encountered during construction of the Project, Mitigation Measure CR-3 would be implemented, reducing the potential for the Project to impact human remains to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measures

CR-3: Assess and Treat Inadvertent Discovery of Human Remains. All human remains discovered are to be treated with respect and dignity including following the requirements of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979 (Public Law 96-95) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), enacted in 1990. In addition, additional requirements are to be followed provided by the State of California Native American Heritage Commission entitled *Discovery of Human Remains That May Be Native American*,¹ and Information Bulletin No. CA-IB-2016-012, issued by the BLM's California State Office, entitled *Procedures and Requirements When Human Remains Are Discovered on Bureau of Land Management - California Lands*, dated August 23,2016.²

¹ <https://nahc.ca.gov/tools/discovery-of-human-remains/>

² <https://www.blm.gov/policy/ib-ca-2016-012>

5.6. Energy

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Result in potentially significant environmental impacts due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Result in potentially significant environmental impacts due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. During development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead, the Project would consume energy through fuel consumption related to vehicle and equipment use, and through energy bound-up in manufactured construction materials utilized, such as gravel and concrete. Equipment utilized at the Biskra Palms Trailhead would include concrete demolition equipment, loader, dump truck, and concrete pumping truck in order to remove 50 feet of curbing and replace with an apron for vehicle access to the trailhead site. This vehicle and equipment use would be temporary and associated with the development of this trailhead. Use of a local labor force, as well as mechanically sound and operable vehicles and equipment would be encouraged to ensure against inefficient use of energy resources from lengthy commutes and low-efficiency equipment. In addition, use of hand crews for the planned and minor development of the West Deception Canyon Trail, as well as providing for on-going trail maintenance, is not anticipated to result in wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy.

The Project is expected to increase recreation use at these trails, thus increasing utilization of fuel for accessing these recreational areas. This increase would not be significant as these existing but undesignated trails are used by recreationists now and the net increase in recreationists would not significantly increase the use energy in an inefficient, wasteful, or unnecessary manner. Additionally, development of the Project, including interpretive and informational materials, may decrease needed services at these trails and trailheads for trash removal, law enforcement, trail maintenance, and for other management actions. Impacts would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Project would not include any activities or components that would conflict with or obstruct the state or local renewable energy or energy efficiency plans. These four trail designations would be expected to increase the number of recreationists using these trails, resulting in an increase in the number of vehicle trips and subsequent consumption of fuel. It is anticipated, however, that a portion of these additional vehicle trips would be made in lieu of traveling to other and previously designated trails. In addition, the distribution of these four additional trails throughout the Coachella Valley would allow more recreations to drive fewer miles to access quality hiking areas that are in proximity to their residences. In addition, designating these trails would not have any foreseeable effect on the additional construction of renewable energy facilities within Coachella Valley.

5.7. Geology and Soils

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Would the project:				
i. Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii. Strong seismic ground shaking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii. Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv. Landslides?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Be located on geologic units or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18 1 B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f. Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:

i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Coachella Valley is traversed by several active and potentially active fault zones, including the San Andreas Fault. Seismic hazards associated with these faults include ground shaking and the potential for ground rupture along the surface of the fault. Conditions affecting seismic hazards include soil and bedrock conditions, liquefaction, settlement, and potential landslides. The California Department of Conservation’s Alquist-Priolo Fault Hazard Zones Map identifies that several of the proposed trails are within this seismic hazard zone. The West Deception Canyon Trail is associated with the West Deception Canyon Fault, a Holocene aged fault, and the Dillon Fault of pre-quaternary age. The Biskra Palms Trail is within the Coachella Section of the San Adreas fault zone, a Holocene aged fault.

Except for informational signage and trail markers, the proposed Project would not include any structures. Workers developing the Biskra Palms Trailhead, trail maintenance workers, or recreational users could be affected by surface ruptures and ground shaking involving these faults. However, due to the short

construction period for the one trailhead and the anticipated sporadic and transitory nature of both trail maintenance and recreational use during proposed Project, the likelihood of serious effects due to fault rupture or ground shaking is very low and not unique to this activity. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The entire proposed Project area is traversed by the San Andreas fault zone, including the North and South Branches of the San Andreas Fault in the San Bernardino Mountains section and the San Andreas Fault in the Coachella section, which are classified as active Holocene faults exhibiting displacement in the last 11,700 years (CGS, 2015). More detailed information on these and other earthquake faults are described in the previous section.

The proposed Project would not include any housing or habitable structures. Therefore, structural damage due to fault rupture or strong ground shaking would not occur. The trails and trailheads would be located in areas characterized as open space and would not be subject to hazards from collapsed buildings or falling objects. Strong ground shaking could cause trail workers or recreational users to lose their footing or fall, particularly on steep sections of trail, which could result in potential injury. However, strong ground shaking during past large earthquakes in Southern California has rarely resulted in injury in the absence of structures or falling objects. Informal recreation already occurs in the proposed Project area. Due to the short construction period and the anticipated sporadic and transitory nature of recreational use during proposed trail use, the likelihood of injury or death from strong seismic ground shaking is very low. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Most of the proposed Project area, with the exception of the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail that has no liquefaction potential, is classified by Riverside County as having a moderate potential for liquefaction. However, the proposed Project would not include any housing or habitable structures and the potential for injury or death due to liquefaction would be negligible. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

iv) Landslides?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The areas of the proposed Project within steeper slopes are susceptible to landslide, especially seismically induced landslides. No existing designated landslides are identified by Riverside County as being located within these proposed trail areas. However, the areas within and surrounding the proposed trails are generally in areas of moderate to very high susceptibility to landslides, based on the State of California's Department of Conservation data (Map Sheet 58). This data depicts the relative likelihood of deep landslides based on regional estimates of rock strength and steepness of slopes. No proposed trails, however, are predominately affected by areas of high or very high landslide susceptibility. The West Deception Canyon is within a narrow canyon. In addition, the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail has steep and potentially unstable slopes to the immediate west of the trail. Adding 200 feet of switchbacks along a ridge on the West Deception Canyon Trail, to avoid soil erosion, would be done in a manner to provide trail stability. These trail improvements would slightly reduce the potential for seismically induced landslide or rock fall because any unstable slopes would be reinforced to resist the forces of strong ground shaking.

Although seismically induced landslides could result in injury to recreation users, the likelihood is low due to very low probability of seismic events sufficient to cause substantial and wide-spread landslides and that maintenance planned for these trails would allow for increased trail stability. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. This project involves designating hiking trails where use is already occurring. Formally designating these trails allows for a more focused management of these areas including trail maintenance designed to substantially lessen soil erosion and loss of soil. Trail markers and efforts to keep visitor impacts to a minimum, including providing educational signage and brochures, would decrease impacts to areas adjacent to these trails that would cause erosion and damage to soils including soil crusts.

c) Be located on geologic units or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The proposed Project is in a seismically active area that contains several soil types and geologic formations that could become unstable. The proposed Project is located on fine to coarse sand, badlands, and rock outcrops including soils that are susceptible to erosion. The areas associated with the proposed trail designations, within steeper slopes, are susceptible to landslide, especially seismically induced landslides. A moderate potential for subsidence and liquefaction exists in the canyon and valley bottoms with the exception of the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail that has no liquefaction potential. The risk that the designation and use of these trails would damage unstable soils or result in landslides, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse is low to non-existent as the proposed Project would not include new structures except for informational signage and trail markers and overall surface disturbance associated with these trails is very low. Also, any localized unstable areas along the trails would be strengthened or stabilized during minor trail maintenance, which would further reduce the potential for these potential effects. These areas would remain subject to natural, not trail-related forces. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18 1 B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project does not contain expansive soils (soils with high clay particle content, typically classified as Vertisols). Except for informational signage and trail markers, the proposed Project would also not include structures, including housing or habitable structures, which would be affected by expansive soils. Therefore, no impact would occur.

e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project would not include the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. No wastewater facilities would be constructed as part of the proposed Project. If sanitation facilities are required during trail development, temporary portable toilets would be provided for the workers by a licensed contractor. No impact would occur.

f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project was inventoried for potential paleontological resources, including a paleontological records search from the Western Science Center and a search of paleontological literature of the area. A variety of geologic maps were consulted for the geology of the trail areas. The primary maps used for this analysis were those of Dibblee and Minch, 2004 and 2008a and b. In addition, the Multipurpose Open Space Element of the County of Riverside General Plan (2015) has a map (figure OS-8) showing "paleontological sensitivity." The ratings from this map are indicated for each of the four contemplated trails. This inventory concluded that all the trail areas do not require paleontological surveys or monitoring due to the very low probability of these resources existing in these areas.

5.8. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Conflict with any applicable plan, policy or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: **Would the project:**

a) *Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?*

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The Project would include minor short-term and localized effects associated with activities involving installation of parking lot access at the Biskra Palms Trailhead. In addition, minor trail improvements and installation of trail signage would be completed by trail crews using hand tools, including adding 200 feet of switchbacks along a ridge on the West Deception Canyon Trail to avoid soil erosion. Vehicle and equipment use associated with these trail improvements would generate nominal quantities of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through activities using gasoline and diesel transportation fuels. There is no incremental electricity use associated with this Project.

The period of trailhead development would be short-term (one to two days), with GHG emissions only occurring from vehicle and equipment use. Trail development, using crews with hand tools, would involve vehicle use to and from the job sites and would last for short periods of time (two to five days each). Trail operation emissions are not known and may or may not cause an increase in GHG emissions due to the existing use of these trails by the public. The net increase in public vehicle trips to these trails, after trail designation, would be similar to other existing trail use in the region. In addition, the distribution of these new trails throughout the valley would likely reduce vehicle miles traveled due to the Coachella Valley public having to drive fewer miles to hike on a designated trail. The nominal quantities of GHG produced by the project, either directly or indirectly, would have a less than significant impact on the environment.

b) *Conflict with any applicable plan, policy or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?*

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project would generate nominal GHG emissions and would not conflict with any applicable plan, policy or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases, including provisions established in the County of Riverside Climate Action Plan Update (November 2019). Vehicle and equipment use associated with these trail improvements would generate nominal quantities of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are short-term, involving one to two days for development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead and three to five days for the trail crew to develop switchbacks on the West Deception Canyon Trail. These nominal GHG emissions would end once the development activities are complete. Fuel utilized by the associated vehicles and equipment would be anticipated to be purchased within California and be covered under the California Air Resources Board’s (CARB) Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS). The LCFS is a program in California to reduce GHG emissions by ensuring the use of cleaner low-carbon transportation fuels.

Trail operation emissions are not known and may or may not cause an increase in GHG emissions due to the existing use of these trails by the public. The net increase in public vehicle trips to these trails, after

trail designation, would be offset by the existing trail use. This project, therefore, would have no potential to conflict with applicable plans, policies or regulations adopted to reduce GHG emissions.

5.9. Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d. Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code §65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f. Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
g. Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Trail development and maintenance activities would involve use of hand crews that would not be transporting, using, or disposing of hazardous materials. Development at the Biskra Palms Trailhead would require concrete demolition equipment, loader, dump truck, concrete pumping truck, and crew trucks. The operation of these vehicles and equipment could result in a spill or accidental release of hazardous materials, including fuel, engine oil, engine coolant, and lubricants. Due to the short construction period of one to two days, and the minimal amount of equipment and associated hazardous materials to be used, the potential for an accidental release of hazardous materials, potentially harming the public or the environment would be minor. This potential would be further reduced through compliance with applicable regulations and standards, including adherence to a spill prevention plan. Because this trailhead development would disturb less than 1-acre in total³, the CVMC would not be required to obtain coverage under the General Permit for Discharges of Storm Water Associated with

³ Biskra Palms Trailhead is 0.01 acres total.

Construction Activity (Construction General Permit Order 2009-0009-DWQ) to comply with Clean Water Act NPDES requirements.

In addition to the potential spill or accidental release of hazardous materials, these activities have the potential to encounter or mobilize previously unidentified and existing contamination. The potential for existing contamination at these sites is small due to the small area of ground disturbance planned and the low risk of contamination associated with past and present land uses. Any previously unidentified contamination encountered during development activities would be properly handled, transported, and disposed of at an appropriate disposal facility in accordance with applicable regulations. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Other than the hazardous materials associated with vehicles and equipment that are described above (fuel, engine oil, engine coolant, and lubricants), neither construction nor operation of the Project would involve the storage or use of hazardous materials. Other than accidental spills or leaks from construction equipment, there are no foreseeable spill conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?

NO IMPACT. There are no schools within 0.25 mile of the proposed Project, therefore, no impact would occur.

d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code §65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?

NO IMPACT: Pursuant to a search of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control's EnviroStor database (DTSC's Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List – Site Cleanup Cortese List), there are no sites meeting this definition within or in proximity to the project sites. Therefore, no significant hazards to the public or the environment are associated with these four proposed trails.

e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?

NO IMPACT: The two airports within the project area are the Palm Springs International Airport and the Bermuda Dunes Airport. The northern portion of the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail is located 2.68 miles from the boundary of the Palm Springs International Airport and is within Zone E of the Palm Springs International Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. This zone is identified as having no current incompatible uses with airport operations and any proposed objects over 200 feet in height would require an airspace review. Similarly, the Biskra Palms Trailhead, located 2.08 miles from the Bermuda Dunes Airport, is within Zone E for this airport. Designation, including development and operation of these two proposed trails would not result in any new lighting or any new structures, and would not result in an air traffic safety hazard.

As identified in Section 2.13, Noise, no excessive noise is anticipated to affect people residing or working in the project area, including trailhead development, trail improvement, trail maintenance, or recreationists traversing these two trails. Therefore, no impacts would occur.

f) *Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?*

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project is not known to physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. Development or operation of this Project would not block any existing road or access. No emergency or evacuation plans have been developed for these trail areas. Therefore, no impact would occur.

g) *Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?*

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The proposed Project would increase recreational use in the four proposed trail areas including in proximity to the communities of Indio, Rancho Mirage, and Cathedral City and the unincorporated Sky Valley. This increase in recreational use could lead to an increase in wildland fire ignition sources, such as improperly discarded smoking materials or illegal campfires. However, these wildland areas are already accessible to the public and increased recreational use on established trails is not expected to substantially increase the risk of wildland fire. Further, the Project would increase opportunities to educate trail users on the proper methods to avoid accidental ignition of fires during wildfire conditions. Overall, this impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

As discussed in Section 5.20 Wildfire, all the proposed trails are within Moderate or lower Fire Severity Zones with a scattering of adjacent High Severity Zone areas on adjacent, and often upslope lands. Desert shrubs associated with these trail areas generally lack the continuity to cause a rapid rate of fire spread. The interspersed nature of the High Severity Zones would also allow for trail users to utilize the trail and adjacent open areas to avoid any uncontrolled wildfire event. None of the trails are located within or adjacent to landscape features that exacerbate fire risks or make the site or adjacent areas more susceptible to wildfire. Although the slopes and intermittent high winds characteristic of Coachella Valley could contribute to a rapid rate of wildfire spread, the non-contiguous nature of the fuels in the project area would allow for safe zones and escape routes for trail users. Overall, there would be a less than significant impact.

5.10. Hydrology and Water Quality

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
i. results in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
ii. substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or offsite;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
iii. create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
iv. impede or redirect flood flows?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d. In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Development at the Biskra Palms Trailhead would require concrete demolition equipment, loader, dump truck, and a concrete pumping truck. The operation of these vehicles and equipment could result in a spill or accidental release of hazardous materials, including fuel, engine oil, engine coolant, and lubricants. Due to the short construction period and the minimal amount of equipment and associated hazardous materials to be used, the potential for an accidental release of hazardous materials that could degrade surface or ground water quality would very low. This potential would be further reduced through compliance with applicable regulations and standards, including adherence to a standard spill prevention plan. Because this trailhead development would disturb less than 1-acre in total, CVMC would not be required to obtain coverage under the General Permit for Discharges of Storm Water Associated with Construction Activity (Construction General Permit Order 2009-0009-DWQ) to comply with Clean Water Act NPDES requirements. In addition, development of the trail segments using trail crews and hand tools, would not result in degradation of surface or water quality or violate any water quality standard or waste discharge requirement.

b) *Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?*

NO IMPACT. The small amount of water that would be required during development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead would be obtained from a private water purveyor or through an agreement with a local municipality. No groundwater would be extracted for development or operation of the proposed Project. No new impermeable surfaces would be created, and neither construction nor operation of the proposed Project would interfere substantially with groundwater recharge.

c) *Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:*

i. result in substantial erosion or siltation on or off site.

NO IMPACT. The small size and level location of the Biskra Palms Trailhead would not result in substantial erosion or siltation on or off-site during development or throughout trail operation. The proposed trail improvements associated with the West Deception Canyon Trail would be completed using standard erosion control structures for backcountry trails and to the minimum width to accommodate hikers, ensuring that substantial erosion or siltation on or off site would not occur. In addition, minor trail maintenance using trail crews and using standard trail maintenance methods would ensure that offsite erosion or siltation would not occur.

ii. substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on or off site.

NO IMPACT. These trails, proposed for designation, are presently used by recreationists, and do not exhibit substantial rates of surface runoff or off-site flooding. The anticipated increase in recreation use on these trails is not anticipated to change conditions such that surface runoff would substantially increase. Trail designations would also include provisions for trail maintenance and public education on low-impact trail use. These educational efforts would include information on not creating short-cut trails in steep terrain or additional trail alignments that often result in increased erosion and surface runoff.

iii. create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or

NO IMPACT. As described above, neither trailhead development nor operation of the proposed Project would increase the rate or amount of runoff water. Existing or planned stormwater drainage systems would not be affected by the Project, and no impact would occur.

iv. impede or redirect flood flows?

NO IMPACT. Only minor trailhead development for the Biskra Palms Trailhead, 200 feet of trail switchbacks on the West Deception Canyon Trail, and both informational trail signage and markers are planned for these four trails. As no water channels or other features would be redirected or affected, impacts would not occur, and no mitigation is required.

d) *In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?*

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project is not located near an ocean or enclosed waterbody and would not cause or be subject to inundation by tsunami or seiche. The following identifies the flood zones involving these respective trails:

- West Deception Canyon: subject to State Dept of Water Resources (DWR) flood zone for the first 2,500 feet from the trailhead, from water emanating from East Deception Canyon.
- Biskra Palms Trail: located within a FEMA Zone (AO) from trailhead to the entrance of the Biskra Palm Grove area.

- Cathedral Cove Connector: nearly the entire alignment, with the exception of the access road on eastern side of flood control channel (levee), is within a FEMA flood zone (AE, Floodway).

The proposed Project would not alter the rate or amount of runoff in the area, nor would it substantially alter the existing topography or soil characteristics. The minimal impact of the Project would also not cause formation of or inundation by mudflows during major rain events. No sources of pollutants are known to occur within the project area that could be released if project inundation were to occur.

e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

NO IMPACT: The low levels of new surface disturbance and water consumption associated with the development and use of these trails would not conflict with implementation of any water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan.

5.11. Land Use and Planning

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Physically divide an established community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Physically divide an established community?

NO IMPACT. A community may be divided if a project were to introduce a new physical barrier through that community (e.g., a highway or railroad). The Chuckwalla-Overlook and Cathedral City Connector trails are the two proposed trails that are within communities. The remaining two trails are located outside of existing communities, within open space, and do not present any physical barriers to established communities.

The Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail, within the City of Rancho Mirage, is located alongside Frank Sinatra Drive with the southwestern trail portion between the Villas of Mirada and the Ritz Carlton Rancho Mirage Hotel and the remaining trail portion bisecting open space areas. This proposed trail extension, involving minimal trail development, is adjacent to the roadway and is designed to keep users off the roadway and potentially impeding traffic. No part of this trail would present a barrier or physically divide the community.

The same is true with the Cathedral City Connector Trail, within Cathedral City, which is located adjacent to Cathedral Cove within the Riverside County Flood Control facility. Residential development, associated with Cathedral Cove, is on the eastern side of the trail and open space is located to the west. The existing flood control facility presents a barrier between the trail and the community. The trail, with a minimally developed trail bed, would not be a physically barrier dividing this community.

b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?

NO IMPACT: The following discussion describes the Project’s consistency with each applicable set of plans, policies, or regulations. Each land use plan, policy or regulation is discussed associated with its effect on the proposed four trails. The Project would be consistent with all applicable land use plans, policies and regulations and therefore would create a less than significant impact.

Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Management Plan, Updated 2017

The southern terminus of the Cathedral Cove Connector Trail is adjacent to the BLM’s Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (SRSJMNM), under the SRSJMNM Management Plan. This Monument was designated under the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 (PL. 106-351, 106th Congress), with a goal of preserving the nationally significant biological, cultural, recreational, geological, educational, and scientific values found within, and securing for future generations the opportunity to experience and enjoy the magnificent vistas, wildlife, landforms, and natural and cultural resources in these mountains. The Management Plan identifies goals and objectives for managing recreational activities and to provide for visitor experiences consistent with the objectives of the enabling Act that include hiking, camping, mountain biking, sightseeing, and horseback riding.

The southern end of the proposed trail ends at the BLM boundary, in the vicinity of the Dunn Road Trail and a major north-south trail within the monument and a connector to numerous other hiking and mountain bike trails, all within the Monument. As there is no formal trailhead or parking area for the Dunn Road Trail, the public utilizes adjacent street parking at the intersection of Channel and Carroll Drives within Cathedral Cove. An additional Cathedral Canyon Trail has its beginning in the close vicinity of the Dunn Road Trailhead, providing an alternative access south to a connection with the Dunn Road Trail.

Many miles of multi-purpose trails are found in the Monument, providing beautiful scenic vistas and access to natural treasures to be enjoyed by hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians. Mountain biking is allowed on BLM roads and trails in the non-wilderness portions of the Monument, including the Dunn Road Trail. The proposed Cathedral Cove Connector Trail would facilitate access to the Dunn Road and Cathedral Canyon Trails by providing a connector trail to and from Hwy 111. Nothing in the Monument Management Plan precludes a new connector trail that would provide public access to these lands.

Riverside County General Plan

The West Deception Canyon and Biskra Palms Trails are within lands covered under the Riverside County General Plan (September 2017). The General Plan contains policies that are applicable countywide and those that are unique to specific areas, as well as designations under the Land Use Element that directs the general distribution and intensity of uses within the plan area and the Multipurpose Open Space Element that directs uses within designated Conservation and Open Space lands.

West Deception Canyon Trail is within Rural Desert (RD) that applies to remote desert areas characterized by poor access and a lack of water and other services. Applicable policies under the General Plan are to design any grading to blend into undeveloped natural contours of the site, avoid an unvaried unnatural appearance and ensure that development does not adversely impact the open space and rural character of the surrounding area. Allowable uses include limited animal keeping, agriculture, recreational, renewable energy uses including solar, geothermal and wind energy uses, compatible resource development (which may include the commercial extraction of mineral resources with approval of SMP), and governmental and utility uses.

Biskra Palms is located with Open Space-Water (OS-W) applies to designated areas that include bodies of water and major floodplains and natural drainage corridors. Ancillary facilities or uses may be permitted for flood control or recreational uses. Proposed uses are to be addressed in cooperation with the CDFW, USFWS and other appropriate agencies for protection and restoration of significant habitats (LU 24.1; p LU-53).

These two proposed trails are well within the parameters for land uses within each of these Riverside County General Plan Elements. The project is designed to minimize additional environmental disturbance associated with designating these trails by using existing old roads or social trails to form the basis of these trail alignments, in lieu of creating new trails in areas where none exist. No trail or parking lot layout or design work will be required, and no paved parking is proposed. Proposed trail development is very minimal and associated with avoiding erosion, trail proliferation and facilitating trail use. Minor development also includes use of trail markers and signage to facilitate trail hikers throughout the project area. Trail designation would include provisions for on-going trail maintenance and control of potential unauthorized activities that degrade scenic values.

City of Indio General Plan

The Biskra Palms Trail is within lands covered under the City of Indio General Plan. The trailhead is located within a Suburban Neighborhood (SN) designation that provides for low-intensity neighborhood development for single-family detached homes. Suburban Neighborhoods have neighborhood parks, linear parks, greenways, trails, and other park types. Landscape patterns may be naturalistic or formal. The Biskra

Palms Trailhead, located at the intersection of Madison and 38th Avenues and incorporating the 60 X 100-foot parking area with informational signage, would be compatible with providing trails and related facilities within this Suburban Neighborhood designation.

The actual trail is outside of the Indio City limits; however, it is located within Indio's Sphere of Influence (SOI) and includes lands designated for implementation of the CVMSHCP as part of the Indio Hills Palms Conservation Area. Goal CE-7, Biological Resources, in the General Plan identifies the need to protect and conserve sensitive biological resources in this area. Policy CE-7.1 CVMSHCP and Other Regulations, identifies that any development within the CVMSHCP is to be consistent with federal, State, and regional regulations for habitat and species protection.

Measures, including proposed mitigation to ensure consistency of this proposed trail with the CVMSHCP are addressed in Section 5.4. These measures would also ensure consistency of this trail with the City of Indio General Plan and regulations to protect habitat and listed species.

City of Rancho Mirage General Plan

The Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail is within lands covered under the City of Rancho Mirage General Plan, 2017 Update. The City's Conservation and Open Space (COS) Element identifies goals of a balanced system of parks, trails, and recreation facilities that meets active and passive recreation needs of all residents and visitors. Goals are also identified to pursue opportunities to obtain additional trail corridors and ensure that designated Mountain Reserve (MR) lands be accessible for hiking, equestrian, and non-motorized biking trails, provided sensitive biological resources are protected.

This proposed trail is designed to connect two exist trails listed in the City's Parks and Trails list, the Chuckwalla and Overlook Trails. This proposed trail would facilitate public use of these two existing trails by providing a safe connection between these trails for a longer and quality hiking experience. In addition, this proposed connector trail would facilitate use of these two existing trails that are both within designated Mountain Reserve lands. The low-impact nature of this trail ensures that this proposed trail is consistent with maintaining sensitive biological resources.

City of Cathedral City 2040 General Plan & Active Transportation Plan

The Cathedral Cove Connector Trail is within lands covered under the City of Cathedral City 2040 General Plan & Active Transportation Plan, adopted in 2021. Policy 5 of the Plan's Open Space and Conservation Goals, Policies and Programs identifies the need to allow for appropriate public access to open space lands for recreation activities while protecting and restoring the natural ecosystem and minimizing environmental damage, as appropriate. These areas include areas that serve as links between major recreation and open space reservations, including utility easements, riverbanks, and trails (Open Space Categories #3).

This proposed trail is within a major wash utilized by the Riverside County Flood Control District (RCFCD) for placement of a flood control facility. Policy 7 of the Open Space and Conservation Element states that the City shall preserve all substantial watercourses and washes necessary for regional community flood control and drainage for open space and/or multi-purpose recreational purposes. As part of the City's effort to provide for a comprehensive, interconnected recreational trails system, Program 6.A of the Open Space Element identifies opportunities to coordinate with the RCFCD to maximize the use of flood control levees and watercourses, and utility easements, for inclusion in the City's regional multi-use trails system. The Open Space and Conservation Element also identifies the need to coordinate with the RCFCD and other appropriate agencies to conduct optimum revegetation management in flood control channels and drains to retain wildlife habitat and a natural appearance as possible without compromising functionality.

Consistent with the Open Space and Conservation Element of the City's General Plan, this proposed trail utilizes both designated open space and an existing RCFCD flood control facility as a location for the trail alignment, as well as providing a connector trail between the easily accessible HWY 111 and the beginning of the Dunn Road Trail, a major trail within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. The low-impact nature of this trail, and measures identified in other sections of this IS/MND, ensures that this proposed trail is consistent with maintaining sensitive biological resources, as well as protecting the natural ecosystem and minimizing environmental damage within this area.

California Department of Parks and Recreation; Indio Hills Palms Park Property Strategic Plan (2003)

The Indio Hills Palms Park Property, incorporating two parcels totaling 2,223 acres, was acquired in 1983 because of the existing and significant palm groves, including the Biskra Palms Oasis. These lands are managed under a 2003 Strategic Plan by the Department's Ocotillo Wells District. The Mission Statement for these park lands includes partnering with other agencies and organizations to preserve and protect the fragile nature and cultural resources of this key segment of the San Andreas Fault System and its associated native palm oases and desert habitats, and to ensure that these unique communities continue to flourish for present and future generations of park visitors.

The plan also identifies recreation goals including establishing Indio Hills Palms as a viable recreation resource in the region including maintaining and publicizing trails as well as developing parking areas and trailheads (Strategic Plan, Sec. V Goal: Recreation). In addition, the plan identifies objectives to provide, develop, and implement self-guided interpretation including interpretive panels, and to maintain infrastructure in good repair, including delineated trails (Strategic Plan, Sec. II, III & IV, Interpretation, Infrastructure and Public Safety respectively). There are no measures identified in the plan that are inconsistent with this trail proposal. The low impact trail design, measures for ongoing trail maintenance, and the identified trailhead and parking area are all consistent with measures identified in the Strategic Plan.

5.12. Mineral Resources

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the State?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the State?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Portions of the Biskra Palms Trail would be in areas that have been designated by the State Mining and Geology Board (SMGB) as an Aggregate Mineral Resource Area in the SMGB’s Designation Report No. 13, dated January 2015. Approximately 0.75 miles of the trail between the CVWD percolation ponds and the southern boundary of the California State Park lands were newly designated as a regionally significant construction aggregate resource area, as identified in Figure 5 of this report. This designation is reflected in the 2015 County of Riverside General Plan (OS-40), Figure OS-6, as being proposed as a significant state designated sector.

Designation and public use of the proposed Biskra Palms Trail within this county proposed mineral resource area would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource because no permanent structures are proposed, involving only installation of trail markers and signage. Although the recreational use of the area, as identified by the proposed Project, would not be compatible with mineral resource extraction, none of the proposed Project components, including a hiking trail and trail markers, would permanently preclude mineral resource extraction in the area. This impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan?

NO IMPACT. As stated in the March 2014 County of Riverside Environmental Impact Report No. 521 Public Review Draft, which was prepared in support of a General Plan amendment, Riverside County does not contain any “locally important mineral recovery sites.” (County of Riverside, 2015). No impact would occur under this criterion.

5.13. Noise

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Generation of excessive ground borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project result in:

a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Improvements, maintenance, and use of the proposed Project would take place during daylight hours, Monday through Saturday, or as required by the local jurisdiction. The Riverside County Municipal Code, Chapter 7.35, General Noise Regulations prohibits construction noise between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. on weekdays, between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. on Saturdays, and on Sundays and federal holidays if the noise creates a disturbance across a residential or property line or at any time exceeds the maximum permitted noise level for the underlying land use category, except otherwise authorized by variance. Development of the short section of switchbacks for the West Deception Canyon Trail would utilize trail crews with hand tools during normal work hours. As this area is in a remote area, approximately 0.9 miles from the nearest residence, no potential for noise impacts exists.

The Biskra Palms Trailhead is within the boundary of Indio City and is covered under the City of Indio General Plan, Chapter 95C (Noise Control) of the City of Indio Code of Ordinances. This ordinance prohibits excessive noise that causes discomfort or annoyance to any reasonable person of normal sensitivity in an area that is plainly audible and at a distance of greater than 50 feet from the point source for any purpose. The Biskra Palms Trailhead is approximately 300 feet from the nearest residence located on Avenue 38. At this distance, activities associated with improving the parking area access are expected to be audible, including noise associated with cutting and excavating the curb, removal and loading excavated materials, pouring cement, and other related activities associated with replacing the 50 feet of curb with a concrete apron. Noise is expected to be of short duration, performed during the approved times under Section 95C.08 of the General Plan (weekdays, 7am-6pm PST or 6am-6pm PDT) and lasting intermittently for one or two days. Noise inhibiting mufflers and devices would be utilized as required construction equipment.

The Chuckwalla Overlook Connector trail is located within the City of Rancho Mirage. Only minor trail development activities, not requiring construction equipment or activities, are proposed for this trail including maintaining a foot path along Frank Sinatra Road and installing a pedestrian crosswalk. Therefore, the Project would comply with noise requirements as identified by the City of Rancho Mirage.

The Cathedral City Cove Connector trail is located within Cathedral City and is covered under the Cathedral City Municipal Code, Section 6.08.045 (Disturbances by Construction Noise). Since no construction or related development activities are proposed, the Project would be in compliance with applicable noise regulations.

Use of hiking trails by the public, in general, would not cause a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project trails, especially noise in excess of standards established in the local general plans, noise ordinances, or applicable standards of other agencies. Formally designating these trails allows for educational signage and more frequent patrols to ensure that trailhead parking areas do not become locations for non-trail related congregating and a potential for noisy gatherings.

b) Operation and maintenance of the proposed Project would therefore not create a temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise level and represent a less than significant impact. Generation of excessive ground borne vibration or ground borne noise levels?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Vibration is an oscillatory motion through a solid medium in which the motion's amplitude can be described in terms of displacement, velocity, or acceleration. Typically, ground-borne vibrations generated by man-made activities attenuate rapidly with distance from the source. Ground vibrations from construction activities do not often reach the levels that can damage structures but can achieve the audible and feelable ranges in buildings very close to the source (FTA, 2006).

Chapter 95C.03 (General Provisions) of the City of Indio Code of Ordinances prohibits excessive or offensive vibration which causes discomfort or annoyance to any reasonable person of normal sensitivity in the area or that is plainly audible at a distance greater than 50 feet from the source point for any purpose. The Biskra Palms Trailhead is located within the City of Indio and approximately 300 feet from a residence located on Avenue 38. Vibration during development of the trailhead is expected to be at low levels, intermittent and of short duration, performed during the approved times under Section 95C.08 of the General Plan (weekdays, 7am-6pm PST or 6am-6pm PDT) and lasting up to one to two days.

No vibration associated truck trips would be expected to damage nearby roadways, facilities, or structures. Truck haul trips with demolition or other materials are expected to utilize roads within weight or use restrictions ensuring that any structures located in proximity to those roads are not subject to levels of truck vibration outside of ordinance limits. Once trailhead development is complete, any maintenance activities would not be expected to utilize trucks or equipment that would generate localized vibration or significant noise levels.

In addition, any temporary or permanent increases in ambient noise levels from operation and maintenance of the four trails is expected to represent a less than significant impact. Trail maintenance would be minor and completed by trail crews using hand tools. A minor increase in trail use, and potential for additional noise levels may result over the existing use that is now occurring on these undesignated trails. However, these increases are expected to be minor given that hiking and related non-motorized trail use is typically not an activity associated with high noise levels. Formally designating these trails allows for educational signage regarding trail etiquette and for more frequent patrols to ensure that trailhead parking areas do not become locations for non-trail related congregating and a potential for noisy gatherings.

c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: The nearest civil aviation facilities to the proposed Project sites are listed below:

- West Deception Canyon Trail is approximately 10 miles from the Palm Springs International Airport
- Biskra Palms Trail is approximately 2.08 miles from the Bermuda Dunes Airport

- Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail is approximately 4 miles from the Palm Springs International Airport
- Cathedral City Cove Connector Trail is approximately 2.68 miles from the Palm Springs International Airport

The Biskra Palms Trailhead is located well outside of the designated Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) contours for the Bermuda Dunes Airport. These levels are adopted by the State of California for describing airport noise impacts and represent points having the same CNEL value associated with airport use. For the recreational land use category, including parks, sound levels (in dB) are normally acceptable within the 50-65 dB range, however, become marginally acceptable in the 65-70 dB range, and normally unacceptable in the 70-75 dB range. The Biskra Palms Trailhead is located well outside of the lowest identified CNEL Zone of 55 dB at approximately 1.2 miles.

The Cathedral City Cove Connector trail is also located well outside of the designated Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) contours for the Palm Springs International Airport. The nearest portion of the trail is located approximately 1.8 miles from the designated 60 dB CNEL contour, well outside of an unacceptable noise contour zone.

Due to the distance of the proposed Project to these aviation facilities, and the lack of potential aircraft noise levels associated with the Palm Springs International and Bermuda Dunes Airport Plans, neither development nor operation of the Project would subject workers or recreationists to excessive aviation-generated noise levels. The impact would be less than significant.

5.14. Population and Housing

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?

NO IMPACT. Developing the Biskra Palms Trailhead would last one to two days and involve a crew sufficient to remove 50-feet of curb and install an apron to allow for vehicular access into the parking area. This minor development would not result in substantial unplanned population growth, directly or indirectly, as no growth-inducing infrastructure or long-term project development is involved.

Trail maintenance and minor development activities would be conducted by local volunteers or Urban Conservation Corps members. A person with trail building experience would be retained to design and supervise trail maintenance and improvement activities. Proposed trail development, involving adding 200 feet of switchbacks on the West Deception Canyon Trail, would be completed within one to three days by a trail crew utilizing hand tools and low-impact trail construction and maintenance equipment. Trail maintenance would include routine trail inspections and patrols to identify any maintenance needs and unauthorized uses. Routine trail maintenance and emergency repairs would be conducted with hand tools and similar low-impact trail maintenance equipment. It is expected that workers would commute to the proposed Project sites from surrounding communities. No new roads or additional infrastructure is contemplated. Therefore, the proposed Project would not induce an increase in population levels or a decrease in available housing, and no impacts to existing or future population growth levels would occur.

b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?

NO IMPACT. There are residential land uses adjacent to the West Deception Canyon, Biskra Palms, Chuckwalla Overlook Connector, and Cathedral City Cove Connection trails. However, these trails are currently used by hikers and both the designation and improvement of these trails would not cause a displacement of existing people or housing. No housing would be removed or displaced due to the construction or operation of the proposed Project, and it would not necessitate the construction of replacement housing elsewhere. No impacts would occur.

5.15. Public Services

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Fire Protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Police Protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. Schools?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d. Parks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Other public facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times, or other performance objectives for any of the public services:

a) Fire protection?

NO IMPACT. Fire suppression and emergency medical services to the Project area are provided by multiple agencies. CAL FIRE has contracts with Riverside County and the cities of Indio and Rancho Mirage to provide fire protection and emergency services within the respective proposed trail areas. The Cathedral Cove Connector Trail is under the protection of the Cathedral City Fire Department. The proposed Project does not include any facilities or material storage which would be subject to fire department regulation. Given that the project involves designating public hiking trails where existing trail use is occurring, no new or substantially altered fire facilities would be required to serve the Project. Development activities for the proposed Project would not affect routes used by the Fire Department to respond to emergencies. The proposed Project, therefore, would not result in an impact on fire protection and no impact would occur.

b) Police protection?

NO IMPACT. Police protection services are provided by multiple jurisdictions and the primary station varies depending on the location. Associated with the proposed trails, Riverside County Sheriff’s Office provides law enforcement services in Sky Valley, Indio Hills, and Rancho Mirage. The Cities of Cathedral City and Indio all have their own police departments; however, all departments have mutual aid agreements. Search and rescue services would be coordinated by the Riverside County Desert Sheriff’s Search and Rescue Unit.

No new or substantially altered police facilities would be required to serve the Project. The Project could increase recreation use in the respective trail areas; however, by formally designating the four trails and providing increased education and informational signage at the trailheads, the Project is expected to reduce unauthorized uses such as illegal dumping, firearms shooting, and vandalism. This may have a beneficial effect on police protection in the proposed Project area by reducing the need for enforcement actions and patrol requirements. The increase in trail use may result in a slight increase in search and rescue services, however, this potential increase is not significant due to increased trail maintenance and both informational signage and trail brochures that stress safety in the backcountry.

c) Schools?

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project would not induce an increase in population levels that could adversely affect local school service levels or require new or expanded school facilities.

d) Parks?

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project would not induce an increase in population levels. Consequently, the Project would not increase population in a manner that would result in additional demand for new park facilities. These four additional trails would have the effect of distributing recreational trail use throughout the valley, providing a greater variety of trail experiences and options, and meeting an increased demand for park and trail opportunities in Coachella Valley.

e) Other public facilities?

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project would not require a large number of workers, and therefore would not result in an increase in the local population. Consequently, the Project would neither substantially affect public facilities nor create the need for any new or altered public facilities such as post offices or libraries.

5.16. Recreation

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Would the project increase 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?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discussion:

a) Would the project increase 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?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector, and Cathedral City Cove Connector Trails are associated with and connected to other existing trails that are utilized by recreationists. Given that these two proposed trail designations are within alignments that are presently being utilized for recreation use, any incremental increase in use after formal designation is anticipated to be compatible with the use on the other connecting trails and is not expected to cause substantial physical deterioration of the other trails and associated facilities. In addition, designation of these trails would allow for increased public education on low-impact trail use, as well as trail monitoring and maintenance. Other than these two trails connecting to other utilized trails, this project is not associated with existing neighborhood or regional parks or other recreational facilities, therefore, there is no potential for substantial physical deterioration of any such facilities to occur or be accelerated.

The purpose of the Project is to designate existing informal trails in the Coachella Valley for pedestrian use, as well as other non-motorized uses such as equestrian, dog walking, or mountain biking, where allowed under local ordinance or landowner regulations. The Project is designed to minimize additional environmental disturbance associated with designating these currently used trail alignments by using the existing old roads or social trails to form the basis of the trail designations, in lieu of creating new trails in areas where none exist.

Although the Project would directly increase public use of all four trail alignments, the Project would also reduce adverse impacts to habitat in the surrounding areas resulting from potential overuse and trail proliferation, as well as discouraging unauthorized activities. This would be achieved through trailhead informational signage, trail markers, and trail features such as switchbacks. Each of the four trails would have a new informational signage that would include a map of the designated trails, applicable regulations, contact information, and information about sensitive resources in the area. Informing the public of its role in protecting the resources along the trail would encourage authorized uses of the trail. Impacts resulting from increased recreational use would be less than significant.

b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. Project facilities would be minimal and would include visitor information signage on the edge of each parking area, trail markers, and developed trail features such as switchbacks. All project activities would adhere to the CVMSHCP’s avoidance and minimization measures and required

surveys, as well as any required mitigation measures. The project is intended to minimize damage to the surrounding natural environment that has occurred from informal use by establishing and designating formal trails. The potential for the Project to have an adverse physical effect on the environment would be less than significant.

5.17. Transportation

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines §15064.3, subdivision (b)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Result in inadequate emergency access?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Require helicopter use that would have potential impacts on public safety and create nuisance conditions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The Project would generate temporary vehicle trips during trailhead development for the Biskra Palms Trailhead, as well as for minor trail work performed by hand crews that is associated with improvements to the West Deception Canyon Trail. Although the trails are currently being used informally, once the trails are designated and fully operational, the Project would result in incremental increases in vehicle trips to the trails by recreationists as the formal trail designations become known and established. Additional vehicle trips would also occur during occasional trail monitoring and maintenance activities. These trips would not exceed any performance standard measuring effectiveness of the circulation system due to the relatively small number of additional vehicle trips compared to the current use of these roadways.

b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines §15064.3, subdivision (b)?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. As discussed in CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3(b.3), a qualitative analysis of construction traffic vehicle miles travelled (VMT) may be appropriate for activities such as the proposed Project. Temporary construction worker commute trips are assumed to come from the local area. Due to the short-term nature of these activities, amounting to one or two days for development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead, and relatively low number of vehicle miles traveled during trailhead development, the proposed Project would not result in significant VMT under State CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b). This also applies to the trail work, performed by hand crews, and associated with development of minor portions of the West Deception Canyon Trail.

The Project would increase low-impact, non-motorized, mixed-use outdoor recreation in natural open space lands within the Coachella Valley. Currently, informal recreational use occurs along all four trails in the Project. Therefore, the net increase of VMT from new/increased recreational use is not expected to be significant. Additionally, it is expected that the majority of recreationists utilizing the Project would come from the local areas around each trailhead. These recreationists are assumed to already make vehicle trips to access similarly designated or undesignated trails in the area. Therefore, any new trips to the proposed trails are considered to offset existing trips at some level. At this time, no applicable VMT thresholds of significance, indicating a significant impact for increased trips associated with a recreational

facility, are known. Therefore, while the Project is expected to increase VMT from expanded recreational use, the Project would not affect existing transit uses or corridors and it would cause a less-than-significant impact under CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3(b.3).

c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The proposed designation of the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail includes adding a new pedestrian crosswalk on Frank Sinatra Drive, within the City of Rancho Mirage. Currently, recreationists walk along Frank Sinatra Drive, often crossing the road in an uncontrolled manner. The trail improvements, and crosswalk would remove the need to walk within the roadway and would add a crosswalk which would increase safety on the roadway for both hikers and drivers. No changes in geometric design of the roadway are contemplated.

The Cathedral City Cove Connector Trail is either accessed from curbside parking at the southern end of Channel Drive, within Cathedral Cove, or utilizing pedestrian access from a sidewalk on the south side of Highway 111 and at the northern terminus of the trail. No changes in roadways or introduction of incompatible uses are contemplated.

The proposed parking area for the Biskra Palms Trail is located at Madison Street and Avenue 38, within the City of Indio, and would utilize minor improvements involving removal of curbing and installation of an apron to allow vehicle access to a trailhead area. The West Deception Canyon trailhead would utilize existing road shoulders at the corner of Hot Springs Road and 20th Avenue, in unincorporated Sky Valley. For all four proposed trails, no changes in roadways or incompatible uses are contemplated.

d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

NO IMPACT. The Project does not include any temporary or permanent roadway encroachment or alterations that may impede emergency vehicle access and flow. No impact would occur.

e) Require helicopter use that would have potential impacts on public safety and create nuisance conditions

NO IMPACT. No helicopter use is contemplated as part of the project; therefore, no impact would occur.

5.18. Tribal Cultural Resources

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code §21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(i) listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code §5020.1(k), or	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(ii) a resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code §5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion:

The APE and Project Area are located within Cahuilla traditional territories. The Cahuilla occupied a 2,400-square-mile territory that covered a wide ecological range extending from the San Jacinto Mountains to the Salton Sea and was divided into geographical areas claimed by corporate groups called a Sib, composed of several lineages and villages (Bean 1972; Bean and Smith 1978). The territory was in a strategic location that provided access to resources through trade, as it was bisected by the Cocomaricopa Trail, a major trade route. In addition, the territory was located at the periphery of two other routes; the Santa Fe Trail which connected what is now the city of Needles to Cajon Pass, and the Yuman Trail which crossed the Borrego Desert beginning in the city of Yuma and ending in San Diego (Bean 1972; Bean and Smith 1978). The Cahuilla, although separated from neighboring tribes by geographical features, still interacted with groups such as the Serrano, with whom the Cahuilla shared a similar ecological base, subsistence system, social and political structure, and belief system. They also regularly interacted with the Gabrielino, a group essential in the diffusion of ideas and natural resources from the coast to inland (Bean 1972).

The first extensive contact with Europeans occurred when the Juan Bautista de Anza expedition passed through the area, setting up a trade route to provide resources to the missions by land. While the first contact was hostile, later interaction included contact at the surrounding missions, and eventually, the adoption by the Cahuilla of Euro-American cattle and agricultural practices. The Cahuilla managed to maintain their political and economic autonomy through the Spanish period, Mexican period, and into the American pioneer period. A smallpox epidemic in 1863 decimated a large part of the population and weakened their sovereignty. The Cahuilla for the most part remained on their own lands until 1877 when reservations were established (Bean and Smith 1978).

Aspen requested that the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) complete a search of its Sacred Lands Files on May 16, 2022, to determine if resources significant to Native Americans have been recorded within the Project footprint. On June 28, 2022, Aspen received a response from the NAHC stating that the search of its Sacred Lands File was negative for the presence of resources within the Project footprint. The NAHC also provided their contact list of Native American tribal governments to contact for additional information regarding resources in the area. All tribal outreach, coordination, and consultation is the responsibility of the lead agency.

To identify Tribal Cultural Resources (TCR) that could be impacted by the proposed Project, CVMC did send AB-52 consultation letters on July 1, 2022, to the NAHC contact list and received a request for consultation on August 11, 2022, from Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. The CVMC had one Zoom-call with the Operation Manager for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, on August 22, 2022. The project was discussed; however, no tribal issues or concerns were identified pending the results of the Phase I Cultural Resources Assessment Report.

a) *Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code §21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:*

i. listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code §5020.1(k), or

NO IMPACT. No TCRs were identified as a result of AB-52 consultation, within the trail alignments and APE that are listed on a local register of historical resources, or a list of properties officially designated or recognized as historically significant by a local government pursuant to a local ordinance or resolution.

ii. a resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code §5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.

NO IMPACT. No TCRs were identified as a result of AB-52 consultation within the trail alignments and APE nor were any cultural resources determined by the lead agency to be TCRs under its discretion.

5.19. Utilities and Services

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project’s projected demand in addition to the provider’s existing commitments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d. Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e. Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?

NO IMPACT. No new water, wastewater treatment or stormwater drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities would be constructed or expanded as a result of construction or operation of the proposed Project.

b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. The proposed Project would require small amounts of water for development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead as well as for minor trail maintenance and development activities. This water would be obtained from a private water purveyor or through an agreement with a local municipality. During operation of the designated trails, trail users would provide their own water for personal use, anticipated to be well within the limits of available municipal water supplies.

c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project’s projected demand in addition to the provider’s existing commitments?

NO IMPACT. No wastewater would be generated during either construction or operation of the proposed Project. No housing or sanitation facilities would be constructed, and no wastewater would be discharged. If sanitation facilities are required during the construction period, temporary portable toilets would be provided for the workers.

d) *Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?*

NO IMPACT. The proposed Project would generate a very small amount of solid waste. Examples of construction waste include broken concrete, concrete forms, and potential excess fresh concrete from demolition of the curb and installation of an apron during development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead, as well as packaging for trail signage, markers, and other information materials. Any solid waste that would be generated during development of the proposed Project would be disposed of at an acceptable solid waste disposal facility as identified by the Riverside County Department of Waste Resources, including their list of approved construction and demolition debris recyclers located in Coachella Valley. The amount of waste generated by development of the proposed Project would not adversely affect operations at the Coachella Valley Transfer Station (CVTS) nor would it exceed the facility's permitted capacity. No solid waste would be generated during operation of the proposed Project. Information would be provided to trail users at the trailheads to "pack-out" any materials that are brought into the trail areas, thereby eliminating any need for refuse containers and formal trash removal.

e) *Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?*

NO IMPACT. The very small amount of solid waste generated during development of the Biskra Palms Trailhead would be properly disposed of at an appropriate facility, such as the CVTS. Solid waste disposal for the proposed Project would adhere to all federal, state, and local statutes and regulations related to solid waste.

5.20. Wildfire

If located in or near State responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of wildfire?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines, or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discussion: Would the project:

a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

NO IMPACT. Small and scattered areas designated as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones do exist within proximity of the Cathedral City Connector and Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trails. These very high severity zones are located at the southern end of the Cathedral City Connector Trail and are either separated from the trail by low and moderate fire severity zones, or at the southern trail terminus by an area of high fire severity zone. Similarly, a very high severity zone in the vicinity of the Chuckwalla-Overlook Connector Trail is separated from the trail by a moderate severity zone and is up-slope and behind two existing water reservoirs.

Roadways accessing the trailhead sites are not part of an adopted or designated emergency evacuation route or plan. Trail development for the Project would not block ingress, egress on any roadway, or alter any existing evacuation route. Trail improvements, including parking areas, would not impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan.

b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of wildfire?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT. All the proposed trails are within Moderate or lower Fire Severity Zones with a scattering of adjacent High Severity Zone areas on adjacent, and often upslope lands. Desert shrubs associated with these trail areas lack the continuity of fuels to create extreme fire behavior. The interspersed nature of High Severity Zones would allow for trail users to utilize the trail and adjacent open areas to avoid any uncontrolled spread of a wildfire and associated pollutant concentrations. None of the trails are located within or adjacent to landscape features that exacerbate fire risks or make the site or adjacent areas more susceptible to wildfire. Although the slopes and potential high winds characteristic of the trail

areas may potentially result in a rapid rate of wildfire spread, the non-contiguous nature of the fuels and the trail itself would allow for escape routes for trail users.

Any development and maintenance of the trails would be done with handheld tools. Because the Project involves minimal trail and trailhead development activities and the use of hand tools for trail maintenance, the potential for fire ignition is expected to be low. In addition, all trail development and maintenance activities would be conducted in accordance with standard safety measures to reduce the potential for fire ignition.

The increase in recreational use could lead to an increase in wildfire ignition sources and incidents, such as improperly discarded smoking materials or illegal campfires. However, trail designations would increase opportunities to educate trail users on fire safety while utilizing the trail areas.

The Project would not introduce new development or population increases that could introduce a significant wildfire risk. Trail users may also be exposed to particulate emissions generated by wildland fires in the surrounding region; however, the potential impacts would not be exclusive to these trails or users since criteria pollutant emissions would affect the entire locality including incorporated and unincorporated areas.

c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines, or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT. The Project would not require installation of new specialized infrastructure such as fire roads, fuel breaks, or emergency water sources or expanded electrical, water, natural gas, or other infrastructure. Each proposed trail is accessed using existing roads, is within areas of ongoing recreational trail use, and utilizes existing or minimal trail development.

d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, because of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT. None of these trails are located within areas that are subject to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides. The trails utilize undesignated hiking routes that are currently being used by the public. The Project does not include any drainage changes associated with the trails and areas surrounding these trails are not affected by post-wildland fire conditions including lack of slope instability. No structures are identified that could be subject to risks associated with this project. Any risks to the public are within the scope of those commonly associated with traversing rugged terrain and experiencing potential weather extremes associated with trail use in this desert region. Formally designating these trails would allow for increased opportunities to educate the public on ways to safely experience these areas including minimizing risks.

5.21. Mandatory Findings of Significance

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated	Less-than-Significant Impact	No Impact
a. Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Does the project have environmental effects that would cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discussion:

a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION. As discussed in Section 5.4, Biological Resources, the proposed Project would have impacts on sensitive biological resources, including listed species, other special-status plants and animals, and migratory birds, however, mitigation has been provided to reduce these impacts to less-than-significant levels. The Project would reduce some currently ongoing impacts to biological resources by focusing recreational use onto designated trails and away from the most biologically sensitive areas. The Project would discourage current practices such as trash dumping and unauthorized OHV use in listed and other special-status species’ habitats by encouraging recreational use in appropriate areas and providing information to on the sensitive resources associated with these trails and how the public can protect and avoid these resources. Periodic trail maintenance and patrols would also minimize unauthorized uses that could adversely affect biological resources. After mitigation, the Project would not have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment; would not substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species; would not cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels; would not threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community; and would not reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plants or animals.

As discussed in Section 5.5, Cultural Resources, no cultural resources would be directly affected by the designation and use of these trails. Indirect effects to cultural resources, along with the unanticipated discovery of cultural resources would be addressed through implementation of mitigation measures. This mitigation would result in a less than significant impact after mitigation and ensure that important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory would not be eliminated.

b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS. The proposed designation of these trails, in areas of current and past recreation trail use, is not anticipated to have considerable cumulative impacts. A minimum level of improvements is proposed for these trails including minor development of a trailhead, trail improvement to facilitate hiker access, and minor trail informational signage and markers.

Past and ongoing projects in the vicinity of the trails and trailheads include roads, transmission lines, residential development in both rural and urban settings, flood control facilities, open space, and both park and conservation lands. The impacts of the Project would be limited due to the relatively small size, scattered locations, and type of trail improvements proposed. Since Project impacts would be less than significant after mitigation, impacts associated with the proposed Project are not expected to contribute considerably to cumulative impacts in the vicinity of the trail alignments. Cumulative impacts would be less than significant.

c) Does the project have environmental effects that would cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS. Trail designations, including development and use, would not have the potential to generate significant adverse impacts on human beings, either directly or indirectly, with the implementation of mitigation measures. Potential impacts related to all the elements except for biological and cultural resources were found to be less than significant and do not warrant mitigation or would not occur at all from the Project. Potential impacts to biological and cultural resources would be avoided or reduced to less than significant levels with compliance with existing regulations and with the implementation of mitigation measures. Therefore, potential environmental impacts on human beings, either directly or indirectly, would be less than significant after mitigation.

6. LIST OF PREPARERS

Name	Title
John Kalish	Project Manager/Hazards/Hazardous Materials/Hydrology/Water Quality
Justin Wood	Biological Resources
Jacob Aragon	Biological Resources
Matthew Schaap	Biological Resources
Lauren DeOliveira	Cultural Resources
Anne Maloney	Cultural Resources
David Clinnick	Cultural Resources
Elliot D'antin	Cultural Resources
Emily Smith	Cultural Resources
Mark Robinson	Cultural Resources
Joe Stewart	Paleontological Resources
Brewster Birdsall	Air Quality/Greenhouse Gasses
Grace Weeks	Public Services /Utilities /Traffic/Wildfire/Energy/Land Use/Recreation
Chris Notto	GIS

7. REFERENCES

General

- BLM Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/66459/570>
- _____. California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/67036/510>
- _____. Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Management Plan: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/86596/510>
- California Department of Conservation; CGS Seismic Hazards Program: Alquist-Priolo Fault Hazard Zones: <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/alquist-priolo>
- _____. Map Sheet 58, Susceptibility to Deep-Seated Landslides in California data. <https://data.ca.gov/dataset/cgs-map-sheet-58-deep-seated-landslide-susceptibility>
- _____. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program: <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/Index.aspx>
- _____. 2016. California Important Farmland Finder Online Map. Accessed June 10, 2022. <https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/CIFF/>.
- CALFIRE; 2022 Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps: <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/divisions/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/wildfire-preparedness/fire-hazard-severity-zones/fire-hazard-severity-zones-map/>
- City of Cathedral City General Plan: [General Plan | Cathedral City](#)
- City of Desert Hot Springs General Plan: <https://www.cityofdhs.org/general-plan-update/>
- City of Indio General Plan: <https://www.indio.org/departments/community-development-department/general-plan-2040/general-plan-2040-documents>
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