

## 3.22 Invasive Species

### 3.22.1 Regulatory Setting

On February 3, 1999, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13112 requiring federal agencies to combat the introduction or spread of invasive species in the United States. The order defines invasive species as “any species, including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species, that is not native to that ecosystem whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.” Federal Highway Administration guidance issued August 10, 1999 directs the use of the state’s noxious weed list to define the invasive plants that must be considered as part of the NEPA analysis for a proposed project.

### 3.22.2 Affected Environment

The California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) 2006 Invasive Plant Inventory is based on information submitted by members, land managers, botanists, and researchers throughout the state as well as published sources. The inventory highlights nonnative plants that are serious problems in wildlands (natural areas that support native ecosystems, including national, state, and local parks, ecological reserves, wildlife areas, national forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, etc.). The inventory categorizes plants as High, Moderate, or Limited based on the species’ negative ecological impact in California. Plants categorized as “High” have severe ecological impacts. Plants categorized as “Moderate” have substantial and apparent, but not severe, ecological impacts. Plants categorized as “Limited” are invasive, but their ecological impacts are minor on a statewide level. There were 47 invasive/exotic plant species observed within the Biological Study Area (BSA) for the MCP project. Of these 47, the invasive plant ratings are as follows: 7 species are categorized as “High,” 19 species are categorized as “Moderate,” and 21 species are categorized as “Low.”

Species observed within that BSA that are rated as “High” include hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), yellow star-thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), Mediterranean tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*), giant reed (*Arundo donax*), red brome (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*), and pampas grass (*Cortaderia*

*selloana*). Of these, red brome was observed in grassland and scrub areas throughout the BSA. The remaining species were observed in isolated patches.

### **3.22.3 Environmental Consequences**

#### **3.22.3.1 Permanent Impacts**

##### ***Build Alternatives***

The construction of the MCP Build Alternatives has the potential to spread invasive species by the entering and exiting of construction equipment contaminated by invasives, the inclusion of invasive species in seed mixtures and mulch, and the improper removal and disposal of invasive species so that its seed is spread along the highway. During the operation of the MCP facility, vehicles using the facility also have the potential to spread invasive species; however, these impacts would be minimal since areas adjacent to the facility will be landscaped with native species that should outcompete the invasive species. Mitigation Measures IS-1 through IS-4, provided below, will avoid or reduce the impact of invasives from spreading from or into the project area during project construction.

##### ***No Build Alternatives***

The construction of other projects included in the No Build Alternatives would have similar potential to spread invasive species as described in the Build Alternatives above. Similar measures to reduce this impact would be implemented for the No Build Alternatives as described above for the Build Alternatives.

##### ***Discussions of Impacts Relative to MSHCP Amendment***

The EIR/EIS for the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) analyzed potential edge effects that were anticipated to occur to species and habitats within the MSHCP Conservation Area resulting from land uses and activities in take-authorized areas in proximity to the MSHCP Conservation Area. Edge effects analyzed included use of exotic landscape plant materials that may invade native vegetation communities within the MSHCP Conservation Area.

The MSHCP EIR/EIS discussed features incorporated into the MSHCP that will minimize edge effects, including implementation of the Land Use Guidelines Pertaining to the Urban/Wildlands Interface (Section 6.1.4 of the MSHCP). These Guidelines include measures to control invasion of exotic species into the MSHCP Conservation Area. The EIR/EIS concluded that, with features incorporated to control edge effects, the MSHCP's edge effects are substantially reduced.

The MSHCP includes coverage of a regional transportation corridor upon which the project alternatives for the MCP have been developed. An amendment to the MSHCP would be required to provide coverage to a modified alignment for the transportation corridor. This discussion is provided as a supplemental environmental analysis to provide supporting documentation under CEQA and NEPA for such an amendment to the MSHCP. It should be noted that this discussion pertains specifically to the analysis of consistency for Alternative 9 TWS DV, which has been identified as the Locally Preferred Alternative. If a different alternative were to be pursued for coverage, additional CEQA/NEPA analysis may be needed.

Section 3.17 contains a detailed analysis of the effects of providing coverage of Alternative 9 TWS DV under the MSHCP, pursuant to the specific criteria identified in the MSHCP to demonstrate consistency. As noted in Section 3.17, a consistency determination is not being made at this time. However, the analysis contained in Section 3.17 provides a framework for consistency and identifies the environmental effects of MSHCP coverage for Alternative 9 TWS DV. In addition, the analysis contained in this section addresses measures consistent with the requirements of the MSHCP relative to the control of invasive species, such that consistency with the MSHCP can be demonstrated. Therefore, impacts related to invasive species would not be of a different character or intensity compared with what was anticipated and analyzed in the MSHCP EIR/EIS. Therefore, an amendment to the MSHCP to provide coverage for Alternative 9 TWS DV would not result in impacts related to invasive species beyond that previously analyzed.

#### **3.22.3.2 Temporary Impacts**

Impacts related to invasive species are considered permanent impacts because the introduction of invasive species into previously undisturbed areas would permanently affect the habitat. Therefore, impacts related to invasive species are described below under permanent impacts.

#### **3.22.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures**

The following mitigation measures applicable to all MCP Build Alternatives will be implemented during construction of the MCP project to avoid potential adverse impacts related to invasive species. Additionally, to avoid potential adverse impacts during operation of the facility, Mitigation Measure U&ES-5 will also be implemented to further prevent the spread of invasive species within the right of way by complying with fuel modification requirements.

- IS-1** During construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will ensure that bare soil will be landscaped with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) recommended seed mix and container plants from locally adapted species to preclude the invasion of noxious weeds. Seed mixtures for portions of the project under Caltrans jurisdiction shall be approved by a Caltrans District Landscape Architect. The use of site-specific materials adapted to local conditions increases the likelihood that revegetation will be successful and maintains the genetic integrity of the local ecosystem. Prior to construction, RCTC will require the Project Biologist to make arrangements well in advance of planting (at least 9 months prior) to ensure that plant materials are located and available for the scheduled planting time. Sufficient time shall be allocated for a professional seed company to visit the project site during the appropriate season and collect the native plant seed. If local propagules are not available or cannot be collected in sufficient quantities, materials collected or grown from other sources within southern California shall be substituted. For widespread native herbaceous species that are more likely to be genetically homogeneous, site specificity is a less important consideration, and seed and container plants from commercial sources may be used.
- IS-2** Prior to construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Project Biologist certify seed purity by planting seed labeled under the California Food and Agricultural Code or that has been tested within a year by a seed laboratory certified by the Association of Official Seed Analysts or by a seed technologist certified by the Society of Commercial Seed Technologists.
- IS-3** During construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Construction Contractor ensure that construction equipment is cleaned of mud or other debris that may contain invasive plants and/or seeds and inspected to reduce the potential of spreading noxious weeds both before mobilizing to arrive at the site and before leaving the site. Construction equipment will be cleaned at established truck wash facilities within the project vicinity.

- IS-4** During construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Construction Contractor ensure that trucks carrying vegetation shall be covered and that vegetative materials removed from the site shall be disposed of in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.
- IS-5** During construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Construction Contractor ensure that if material is obtained from a borrow site, the material will be inspected for the presence of noxious weeds and invasive plants to ensure that the material does not contain noxious weeds or invasive plants.
- IS-6** The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that, during construction, the Construction Contractor control, kill, and remove noxious weeds and invasive plants from the project site, subject to verification by the Project Biologist.

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