

VII. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL SHORT-TERM USES OF MAN'S ENVIRONMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

According to CEQA, EIRs must examine the relationship between local short-term uses of the human environment and enhancement of long-term productivity. This requirement also applies to a public agency's adoption, amendment, or enactment of a plan, policy, or ordinance. The discussion must focus on impacts that restrict the range of beneficial environmental uses or pose long-term risk to public health and safety. In addition, the discussion must explain the rationale to proceed with the project in the present rather than reserving an option for future alternatives (CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15126 and 15127, and Public Resources Code, Section 21000). The relationships between these issues and the proposed action are addressed in this chapter. Attention is given to program-level impacts related to adoption of the proposed General Plan Update, and to future project-level impacts associated with its implementation.

A. Impacts Restricting the Range of Beneficial Environmental Uses

Adoption of the proposed General Plan Update would allow for more intensive land uses than presently occur in certain areas of Imperial County, thereby facilitating planned growth in these areas, but would not restrict beneficial land uses. In recognition of its economic significance to the international market, the central Imperial Valley area will remain predominantly in agricultural production. Another long-term productive use resulting from implementation of the General Plan would consist of the accommodation of housing needs for the region's growing population, along with the provision of necessary public services/facilities concurrent with need. The public facility thresholds established in the General Plan Land Use Element require compliance with adopted performance standards prior to approval of future development projects.

B. Impacts Posing Long-Term Risk to Public Health and Safety

Impacts to public health and safety are analyzed in Sections J and K of this EIR. Existing public health issues are primarily related to the use of raw canal water and septic systems in rural areas. Septic systems are used in many urban areas that are not connected to a municipal sewer system, and in all of the County's rural areas located outside of current sewer service boundaries. The groundwater table is close to the surface in many of these areas, and wastewater does not adequately percolate. As a result, public health is jeopardized due to potential contamination of the potable water supply. Adoption and implementation of the Plan Update could reduce the dependency on raw canal water and septic systems in many rural areas by providing necessary water treatment facilities and sewer hookups to new developments nearby. This would increase the feasibility of extending public sewer systems from newly developed areas into adjacent non-sewered areas. The proposed action would therefore reduce long-term public health and safety risks related to water quality degradation. Entities would be