TOWN OF YUCCA VALLEY

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE GENERAL PLAN

VI. Short Term Use vs. Long Term Productivity of the Environment

This section of the EIR reviews the relationship between the local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity. Cumulative impacts are discussed in Section VIII of this document, while this section addresses the long- term effects of the proposed General Plan and its implementation on the environment. Special attention has been given to those areas of impact which narrow the range of beneficial uses of the environment or pose long-term risks to health or safety, including geophysical conditions, biological resources, scenic/visual resources, air resources, noise environment, and water resources. Why the proposed General Plan is believed to be justified for adoption and implementation at this time, rather than delaying its adoption to consider additional alternatives not addressed in this EIR, is also discussed.

Geophysical Conditions

As discussed in Section III, C of this EIR, the Town of Yucca Valley is subject to significant geotechnical forces associated with several active earthquake faults and areas of steep terrain. The continued urbanization of the Town, even at greatly reduced densities and intensities, can be expected to result in the exposure of greater numbers of residents, workers and shoppers to geotechnical hazards of potential significance. Much has been learned from recent seismic activity, which has actually served to reduce the potential for new development to be exposed to ground rupture by revealing the location of previously undetected active faults. Through the enforcement of provisions and requirements of the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act, Title 24 of the California Administrative Code and enforcement of the Uniform Building Code for Seismic Zone 4 (as amended, risks to public health and safety are expected to be reduced. Nonetheless, impacts from major seismic events cannot be completely removed and the threat to life and property will remain in the long-term.

Biological Resources

As the Town of Yucca Valley continues to develop, the clearing and grading of land and the construction of improvements will result in the continued loss of wildlife habitat on the valley floor and in those foothill areas where developed is still permitted. The proposed General Plan does not exclude but does substantially limit the density and intensity of development permitted in biologically sensitive areas. However, buildout of the Town will degrade or remove significant areas of Joshua Tree Woodland and other habitat types located within the Town boundaries. Continued development of the Town will also impact habitat of the federally listed as endangered Desert Tortoise, and may result in the legal taking of individual animals. The Federal Government is currently working on a broadly based Habitat Conservation Plan to protect this species in the long-term and facilitate development processing. In the meantime, the Town adheres to the Bureau of Land Management protocol for investigating impacts potential and mitigation. Overall, the loss and degradation of foraging habitat and the continued pressure of human activity on local biological resources will all contribute to the long-term reduction of plant and animal habitat.

Scenic/Visual Resources

Scenic and visual resources of the Town of Yucca Valley are one of its most important assets. The combination of unique rock formations and the Joshua Tree Woodland combine to create a high desert environment that attracts visitor, hikers and climbers from all over the county. These resources will be some what affected by continued development within the Town's boundaries. While the proposed General Plan recognizes and provides measures to reduce impacts to these resources, areas of Joshua Tree Woodland and hillside will still be subject

to development. The General Plan policies and programs provide for applicable development criteria and assure the review of development proposals with the potential to have adverse impacts on hillside scenic resources. The General Plan also provides for the preservation and integration of elements of the Joshua Tree Woodland into the urban landscape and the provision on native vegetation within all development. Nonetheless, the clearing of land, grading of hillsides and the construction of roads and structures will all contribute to the long- term impacts to visual resources.

Air Resources

The increased traffic, and residential, commercial and industrial power and energy consumption expected to accompany continued development within the Town will add to emissions currently emitted locally and in air basins outside the Morongo Basin. Locally increased emissions will result in higher concentrations of reactive organic gases and particulates. Local production of ozone is expected to be insignificant since conditions required for its generation are seldom see in the Morongo Basin. Nonetheless, the use of gasoline and diesel fuels in vehicles and the burning of natural gas (and limited use of coal) contribute to the generation of oxides of nitrogen and reactive hydrocarbons that degrade local air quality to a greater or lesser or greater extent, depending on rates of dispersion.

While the General Plan policies and programs direct the regulation of emissions, especially those in close proximity to sensitive receptors, these impacts cannot be completed removed. Further, it is unlikely that without a radical change in methods of transportation and combustion technology reductions in emissions on a unit of energy basis will be seen in the near-term.

Noise Environment

The continued development of the community under the direction of the Yucca Valley General Plan will result in unavoidable increases in the level of noise impacting the community. Specifically, traffic related noise can be expected to increase proportionate to the increase in vehicular traffic to a maximum level sometime after the buildout of the community. Two other sources, operations at the Yucca Valley Airport and overflights from the Twentynine Palms Air Combat Center, can be expected to increase over time and, although generating more intrusive types of noise, will also add to the degradation of the noise environment. The General Plan provides policies and programs which address and establish procedures to help reduce the impacts of noise on the living environment. Also, the substantially reduced land use densities and intensities will contribute to an overall projected reduction in community noise levels from those that would be expected from implementation of the San Bernardino General Plan.

Water Resources

As discussed in Sections II and III of this document, the Town of Yucca Valley, and the Warren Valley Basin specifically, is in a significant groundwater overdraft condition, which has substantially lowered the depth to groundwater in the primary aquifer serving the Town. While State Water Project water began delivery to the Town in 1994, the allotment to be provided is sufficient to counter the overdraft while providing additional flows to serve the current demand, the allotment limits the additional supply available for future development. The general Plan includes policies and programs to encourage the minimal use of water resources for domestic and landscape uses and encourages the use of native, drought resistant planting materials. Nonetheless, with California again in a drought condition and the sources and distribution of State Water Project are in flux, the availability of domestic water resources will continue to be a constraint on future development.