

COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE
TRANSPORTATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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Agency Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report

Date: December 28, 2005

TO:

PROJECT CASE NO./TITLE: Specific Plan No. 00339 (Paradise Valley)

INTRODUCTION

The County of Riverside has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to solicit comments from responsible agencies, utilities and other service providers, interest groups and private individuals on the proposed project. In order to determine environmental issues that may be associated with the approval and development of the Paradise Valley "New Town," Specific Plan. An Initial Study was prepared for the project in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the County Rules to Implement CEQA. The County of Riverside is the lead agency for the preparation of the EIR for the proposed project. Comments should be received by the County within 30 days of the date of this NOP.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Paradise Valley project site is located in an unincorporated area of central Riverside County, California, approximately 7 miles east of the City of Coachella. The planning area includes lands at the base of foothills of the Cottonwood Mountains and within the Pinkham Wash, immediately south of Joshua Tree National Park. The project site is situated along approximately four miles of U.S. Interstate 10.

The planning area can also be described as follows: portions of Sections 2 and 3, and all of Sections 1, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15, Township 6 South, Range 10 East, San Bernardino Baseline and Meridian. The project proponent is also in the process of negotiating a land exchange with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to acquire a portion of Section 4 and all of Section 12, Township 5 South, Range 10 East, which are adjacent to the above-referenced lands. (Please see Exhibits A and B, Regional Locator Map and Project Planning Area Vicinity Map).

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Insert Exhibit A
Paradise Valley
Project Regional Location Map (PSOMAS Figure 1.1)

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Exhibit B
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Paradise Valley
Project Vicinity Map

(shows existing project boundary, plus those lands anticipated to be acquired from BLM) and those offered to BLM

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Exhibit C
County of Riverside
Paradise Valley
Project Location Map
(shows existing project boundary, plus those lands owned by BLM)

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Exhibit D
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Preliminary Land Use Plan

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Exhibit E
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Preliminary Land Use Plan Without BLM Lands

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Paradise Valley “New Town” Specific Plan is proposed as an integrated, “self-sustained” phased master planned community in central Riverside County, seven miles east of the City of Coachella. The proposed project will require a General Plan Amendment (GPA), Change of Zone (CZ), subdivision maps (TPM and TTM), and California Department of Fish and Game Streambed Alteration Agreement (SAA). The subject application includes a Master Parcel Map and Development Agreement (DA). The project will provide for a wide range of residential, commercial, business park/light industrial, resort/hospitality, institutional, and natural and recreational open space uses in an integrated comprehensive planned community. The total project area includes approximately 6,397 acres, of which approximately 3,417 acres, (53% of the site), are planned for natural or improved open space, with a balance of 2,980 acres proposed for development.

The site currently consists of largely undeveloped desert land, with the limited exception of Southern California Gas pipelines and compressor station and associated (active) water supply well, and electric transmission corridors and telephone lines. The site is also bisected by US Interstate-10. The northeasterly and north-central portions of the site are located at the base of the foothills of the Cottonwood Mountains, which form a natural barrier between the subject property and Joshua Tree National Park, located to the north of the property. Devoted to natural open space, the southwesterly portion is near the base of the Mecca Hills and the western portion of the site consists of major drainages including the Pinkham Wash. Smaller drainages, which also pass under US Interstate-10, extend through the central and eastern portions of the project site and would be subject too modification and management through project development.

The Paradise Valley “New Town” community is being planned as a sustainable, self-contained resort-style community. It is designed to balance proposed land use improvements with the preservation of open space, including the Cottonwood Mountains, a substantial portion of the Pinkham Wash and the Mecca Hills. The project provides for a unique community that will maintain the integrity of the environment by preserving natural resources, enhancing built landscapes through the use of native vegetation, and developing a comprehensive project-wide pedestrian and clean vehicle trail system.

Development Principles

Development of the Paradise Valley Specific Plan and associated documents has been guided by three primary development principles, as discussed below:

Principle 1: Meeting the Demand for Diverse Housing Products

The Paradise Valley Specific Plan incorporates policies set forth in the Riverside County General Plan and the Eastern Coachella Valley Area Plan. Population growth in Riverside County doubled during the last two decades and rapid growth is expected to continue in the region. The County’s General Plan recognizes the important role of new towns and self-sustaining communities in the County’s growth and development.

The Paradise Valley Specific Plan provides for the creation of diverse housing products, including entry level housing, apartment/rental units, age-restricted housing, single-family homes, and second homes that are expected to be primarily purchased by retirees. A full range of commercial, business park/light industrial, and institutional uses are also planned to assure a balanced community. The project will also provide for all municipal services and facilities needed to support the community.

Principle 2: Village Planning

In addition to the Welcome Center and Town Center, Paradise Valley is envisioned as a series of four village centers. Each village is comprised of homes clustered around public and civic facilities, such as schools, neighborhood shopping and parks, and other civic amenities. Villages are planned so that commercial

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development and public facilities are within comfortable distances for walking or biking from residential neighborhoods.

The Town Center will include a community center comprised of meeting rooms, recreational facilities and a public library. The Town Center will also include administrative government offices and a 21-acre community college/technical institute, The Welcome Center will include commercial uses with the addition of residential development in future phases. Welcome Center commercial and retail components will serve highway travelers as well as community residents.

An extensive network of trails and pathway improvements are planned to promote pedestrian, bicycle and golf cart uses. Facilities designed to promote alternative forms of transportation are also envisioned. Clean vehicle public transportation services are being explored to serve the proposed community.

Principle 3: Sustainability and Conservation Planning

The project's design incorporates land use principles of sustainable development and conservation planning. This land planning will 1) promote a pedestrian-oriented community with access between neighborhoods and to public facilities; 2) minimize the use of impervious surfaces, reducing storm water runoff and increasing percolation/groundwater recharge; 3) promote energy and water conservation through the use of alternative energy sources, including solar applications, and desert-compatible building construction and landscaping, and use of recycled wastewater for irrigation purposes throughout the project; and 4) integrate and preserve open space.

Development Program

A total of 15,047 single and multi-family residential dwelling units are planned on 2,133± acres, as well as within mixed-use development areas in the Welcome Center and Town Center. Residential densities are anticipated to range from 1.2 du/ac to 30 du/ac. This yields an overall density of 7.05 units per net acre. When the total project area, including open space is considered in the density calculation, the overall residential density is 2.35 units per gross acre. Commercial development is proposed on 70± acres straddling the Interstate-10 corridor, and is also included in the mixed-use components of the Town Center and Welcome Center. Commercial components will include a visitor center, general and neighborhood retail development, hotel/conference facilities, medical center, and business park. Institutional uses, including a spiritual retreat center, a medical center, a community college/technical institute, administrative government facilities, and primary/secondary schools, will encompass a total of 205± acres.

Roads and public services and facilities, which will include a wastewater reclamation facility, groundwater recharge and extraction facilities, storm water facilities, a water treatment facility and water storage reservoirs, and a small power plant, will be developed on 320± acres. The project's main circulation plan is designed to meet the basic requirements of Riverside County's roadway standards, including new and/or improved freeway interchange configurations along US Interstate-10.

As previously noted, approximately 53% (3,417 acres) of the project planning area will be preserved as natural, restored, or improved open space, including mountains and wildlife corridors, parks, water features, and three championship golf courses. The majority of the open space lands will remain in a natural, undisturbed state.

Public Facilities and Roadways

The project will provide for the construction of public facilities and utilities to serve the Paradise Valley community. These facilities will include the conveyance, treatment and storage of potable water; groundwater recharge and extraction; wastewater conveyance and treatment/reclamation; drainage; and a temporary sand and gravel operation to supply the project's construction. (Please see full list, below). These facilities and the internal network of roadways will encompass approximately 320 acres of the total project site.

To assure a sustainable source of water, the local aquifer will be recharged through water transfer agreements under the management of Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD). With the agreement already under contract, the project will utilize imported groundwater purchased from Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District (RRBWS). The re-charge water will be supplied by the Metropolitan Water District's (MWD) Colorado River Aqueduct (CRA), which passes through the property. The underground alluvial aquifer system will be augmented by this source on an equal exchange basis. This subject is further discussed under Water Quality/Resources in this document. The project will also utilize tertiary treated wastewater as recycled water for irrigation of golf courses, parks and other landscaped areas.

As previously noted, the project site is situated along approximately 4 miles of US I-10. The project is served by one existing freeway interchange with east and west-bound on/off-ramps and an underpass. The phased project development will require that modifications to these existing freeway facilities. A traffic study is being prepared for this project and the EIR will analyze the adequacy of the existing freeway interchange. Should the project require a second interchange, its analysis will be addressed in the EIR.

The following is a listing of public facilities that, based on preliminary planning, are expected to be constructed to serve the proposed project:

- MWD CRA Water Turnout (off-site), pump station and pipeline system to percolation ponds and water treatment plant
- Six (6) to ten (10) Percolation Ponds (approximately five (5) acres each) with total estimated percolation capacity of 25,550 acre-feet/year (afy)
- Twenty-Six (26) Production Wells (23 active, 3 in reserve)
- Nine (9) Above-ground Potable Water Storage Reservoirs, ranging in size from one (1) to five (5) million gallons (mg) each and totaling approximately 20 mg
- Potable Water Treatment plant
- Potable Water Distribution System (8 to 20 inch diameter pipelines, ancillary water booster stations and pressure-reducing stations)
- Wastewater Reclamation Plant with an approximate average capacity of 3.5 mg per day
- Sewerage Collection System (8 to 21 inch diameter pipelines, sewer lift station/force main)
- Temporary On-Site Sand and Gravel Plant

Land Use Summary

Table 1, below, summarizes proposed land uses for the Paradise Valley project.

**Table I
 Paradise Valley “New Town”
 Preliminary Acreage Tabulation**

Land Use	Acreage
Natural and Recreational Open Space¹	
Mountains/Natural Open Space	573
Open Space Adjacent to Levee Area	1,766
Utility and Drainage Easements	208
Community Park/Lake	84
Neighborhood Park	88
Linear Park	105
Equestrian Center	7
Golf Courses	586
Total Open Space:	3,417
Residential²	
Low Density (1 – 2 du/ac)	102
Medium Density (2.1 – 5.0 du/ac)	987
Medium High Density (5.0 – 8.0 du/ac)	524
High Density (8.1 to 14.0 du/ac)	401
Very High Density (14.1 to 20.0 du/ac)	119
Total Residential²	2,223
Mixed Use	
Welcome Center ³	41
Town Center ⁴	98
Village Center	27
Total Mixed Use	166
Commercial⁵	
Retail	7
Office/Neighborhood Commercial	21
Hotel/Conference Center	86
Medical Center	20
Business Park/Light Industrial	42
Total Commercial⁵	156
Institutional	
Medical Center	20
Spiritual Retreat Center	19
Primary/Secondary Schools	166
Total Institutional	205
Other Uses	
Waste Water Reclamation Facility	10
Roads ⁶	221
Percolation Ponds	38
Drainage Easement/Natural Drainage	35
Detention Pond	7
Water Treatment Plant	4
Power Plant/Substation	5
Total Other Uses:	320
TOTAL PROJECT SITE:	6,397

¹ Project provides approximately 53% of acreage in natural, park, and other open spaces.

² Includes all residential development outside Town Center and Welcome Center.

³ Includes 41 acres of retail, of which 15 is mixed use with high-density residential development.

⁴ Includes 48 acres of stand-alone highest density residential development, and 50 acres of mixed commercial retail, service, office and public (civic/institutional) development which is mixed use with highest density residential development.

⁵ Includes all retail and commercial development outside Welcome Center and Town Center.

⁶ Includes approximately 16 acres of I-10 ROW to Caltrans for future interchange.

Source: Glorious Land Company, September 27, 2005

Project Phasing

The build-out of Paradise Valley will be phased and is anticipated to occur over a period of approximately 20 years. Public services will be incrementally provided through the establishment of a Community Services District (CSD). Parks and trails will be developed concurrently with other development components, based on the Phasing Plan as set forth in the Specific Plan. The following is a brief description the anticipated project phasing:

•*Phase One: Portions of Village A (Welcome Center), Village B, (Town Center), and Village C (Resort Village)*

Located south of Interstate-10 and adjacent to the eastbound off-ramp, the Welcome Center will utilize the existing freeway interchange for the initial development, which will focus on highway commercial services. Development will include restaurants, a hotel, gas station, convenience store, landscape nursery, and project development and marketing office. This phase will also initiate Town Center commercial development and the medical center. Residential development will include medium density, medium high density development and limited areas of the highest density. Two 18-hole golf courses and resort hotel, a primary school, neighborhood park, and community park and lake are also planned as part of Phase I. Community services and facilities, including the CRA turnout, pump station and pipelines and water supply wells, as well as a water treatment plant south of Interstate-10, and the initial phase of a wastewater reclamation plan in the southeastern portion of the project, will be operated by CVWD. The wastewater treatment facility will be expanded with demand. Approximately 24 acres of percolation ponds will be constructed north of I-10 beginning in Phase I; construction of these ponds may continue into subsequent phases.

•*Phase Two: Village D (Lake Village)*

Phase Two, which focuses on development within the south central and southeastern portions of the development site, will include the construction of medium, medium high and the highest density residential uses with community parks and lakes, a hotel, one 18-hole golf course, primary/secondary schools, and community services and facilities. The wastewater treatment plant is located in the southeastern portion of the project site within the Phase Two boundary. Construction of drainage structures in the northern portion of the project site is also expected to occur during Phase Two.

•*Phase Three: Additional Village A (Welcome Center) development, and Village B (Town Center) buildout*

Phase Three continues the mixed use and commercial development south of Interstate-10. It also provides for the expansion of the internal roadway system into the easterly planning area north of Interstate-10, and the development of business park/light industrial uses north of I-10. Further development of the Town Center “core” will include mixed uses, including commercial and medium high and the highest density residential development, and an 8-acre lake. Administrative government offices, a community college/technical institute, and a neighborhood park, are also envisioned for the Town Center during this Phase. Welcome Center mixed use development will continue. A linear park is planned for the east and central portions of the project south of Interstate-10.

•*Phase Four: and Village A (Welcome Center) buildout and Village E (Reserve Village)*

Phase Four encompasses areas of development north and south of Interstate-10 in the east central and northeastern portions of the site. It provides for development of additional residential development, ranging from medium to the highest densities, with higher density development clustered north and south of Interstate-10. This phase will include primary educational facilities, neighborhood parks and a linear park. A spiritual retreat center is also planned in the Reserve Village. Mixed-use commercial and high density residential development within the Welcome Center are planned for buildout. Approximately 14 acres of additional percolation ponds will be developed south of Interstate 10 near the eastern boundary of the project site

•*Phase Five: Village F (Equestrian Center) and buildout of Village E (Reserve Village)*

In Phase Five, the Equestrian Center is planned for development north of Interstate 10 in the northwesterly portion of the project site. It will include medium, medium high and the highest density residential development, primary/secondary schools, a neighborhood park, linear park, and the equestrian center. The potential for a second water treatment plant is planned in the northeastern corner of Village F. The build-out of the Reserve Village in the northeastern portion of the planning area will include medium high and the highest density residential development north of and adjacent to Interstate-10. A boutique hotel is planned in the central portion of the Reserve Village.

Project Permits/Approvals

The project will also be required to obtain a variety of local, state and federal regulatory permits and approvals. These permits and approvals may include the following:

- Riverside County Board of Supervisors: Specific Plan approval; General Plan Amendment, Change of Zone; Subdivision Maps (Parcel and Tract Maps)
- Regional Water Quality Control Board: Section 401 Water Quality Certification and approval for the design, construction and operation of the wastewater reclamation plant and recycling of treated effluent
- California Department of Fish and Game: 1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement
- US Bureau of Land Management: land exchange (see project description, above)
- US Army Corps of Engineers: Section 404 Permit
- US Fish and Wildlife Service: Section 7 Consultation and Section 10 Incidental Take Permit
- Federal Highway Administration & California Department of Transportation: approval of proposed interchange (if needed)
- Riverside County LAFCO Annexation: The project site is currently located outside the boundaries of a water agency or district. Coachella Valley Water District is the nearest agency; therefore the project will be annexed to CVWD to provide water, wastewater, and recycled water services and stormwater management services.

PROJECT WITHOUT BLM LAND EXCHANGE

As previously noted, the project proponent and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are in the process of negotiating a land exchange wherein BLM would acquire approximately 2,300 acres of GLC-owned lands in the project vicinity, in exchange for approximately 1,100 acres of land currently owned by BLM and adjacent to/contiguous with the proposed project site. Should the land exchange not occur, the proposed project would be developed without the BLM lands. The total project site would encompass 5,356 acres, of which approximately 2,830 acres (52.8%) would be retained as natural and improved open space, and approximately 2,526 acres would be developed.

Development Program

Under this land use scenario, a total of 12,078 single and multi-family residential dwelling units would be constructed. Residential development would occur on 1,746± acres, as well as within mixed-use development areas in the Welcome Center and Town Center, with a range of residential densities of 1.2 du/ac to 30 du/ac. The overall density would be 6.92 units per net acre. When the total project area, including open space is considered in the density calculation, the overall residential density is 2.09 units per gross acre. Commercial development is proposed on 70± acres straddling the Interstate-10 corridor, and is also included in the mixed-use components of the Town Center and Welcome Center. As with the project with BLM lands, commercial components will include a visitor center, general and neighborhood retail development, hotel/conference facilities, medical center, and business park. Institutional uses, including a spiritual retreat center, a community college/technical institute, administrative government facilities, and primary/secondary schools, will encompass a total of 167± acres.

Roads and public services and facilities, which will include a wastewater reclamation facility, groundwater recharge and extraction facilities, storm water facilities, a water treatment facility and water storage reservoirs, and a small power plant, will be developed on 290± acres. The project's main circulation plan is designed to meet the basic requirements of Riverside County's roadway standards, including new and/or improved freeway interchange configurations along US Interstate-10.

As previously noted, approximately 52.8% (2,830 acres) of the project planning area will be preserved as natural, restored, or improved open space. Open space lands would include mountains and wildlife corridors, parks, water features. Two championship golf courses would be developed. As with the project with BLM lands, the majority of the open space lands will remain in a natural, undisturbed state.

Development of the project without BLM lands would be guided by the same development principles as those outlined in the Project Description with BLM lands, above.

The following table shows preliminary acreage calculations. Exhibit E, Preliminary Land Use Plan Without BLM Exchange, illustrates this scenario.

Table 2
Paradise Valley “New Town” Without BLM Lands
Preliminary Acreage Tabulation

Land Use	Acreage
Natural and Recreational Open Space¹	
Mountains/Natural Open Space	573
Open Space Adjacent to Levee Area	1,416
Utility and Drainage Easements	206
Community Park/Lake	88
Neighborhood Park	55
Linear Park	101
Equestrian Center	7
Golf Courses	384
Total Open Space:	2,830
Residential²	
Low Density (1 – 2 du/ac)	105
Medium Density (2.1 – 5.0 du/ac)	783
Medium High Density (5.0 – 8.0 du/ac)	321
High Density (8.1 to 14.0 du/ac)	423
Very High Density (14.1 to 20.0 du/ac)	104
Total Residential²	1,746
Mixed Use	
Welcome Center ³	40
Town Center ⁴	98
Village Center	29
Total Mixed Use	167
Commercial⁵	
Retail	7
Office/Neighborhood Commercial	21
Hotel/Conference Center	86
Medical Center	20
Business Park/Light Industrial	42
Total Commercial⁵	156
Institutional	
Medical Center	20
Spiritual Retreat Center	19
Primary/Secondary Schools	128
Total Institutional	167
Other Uses	
Waste Water Reclamation Facility	10
Roads ⁶	219
Percolation Ponds	24
Drainage Easement/Natural Drainage	21
Detention Pond	7
Water Treatment Plant	4
Power Plant/Substation	5
Total Other Uses:	290
TOTAL PROJECT SITE:	5,356

¹ Project provides approximately 55% of acreage in natural, park, and other open spaces.

² Includes all residential development outside Town Center and Welcome Center.

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³ Includes 40 acres of retail, of which 15 is mixed use with high-density residential development.

⁴ Includes 40 acres of stand-alone highest density residential, and 58 acres of mixed commercial retail, service, office and public (civic/institutional) development which is mixed use with highest density residential development.

⁵ Includes all retail and commercial development outside Welcome Center and Town Center.

⁶ Includes approximately 16 acres of I-10 ROW to Caltrans for future interchange.

Source: Glorious Land Company, November 28, 2005

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**INSERT EXHIBIT E, PRELIMINARY LAND USE PLAN
NO BLM LANDS**

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following briefly describes the Paradise Valley project planning area and the surrounding environment. Environmental resources, which may be adversely affected by the major project components, and environmental hazards that currently or may in the future impact the development, are also described.

The Paradise Valley planning area is located in Shavers Valley in central Riverside County, in southern California. The site occurs immediately south of the Joshua Tree National Park, approximately 7 miles east of the City of Coachella. The region consists of largely undeveloped desert open space and varied topography characterized by steep slopes of the Cottonwood Mountains on the north, the Mecca Hills and Orocochia Mountains on the south, and the gently sloping Shavers Valley and other active alluvial plains in between. Elevations on the subject property range from 1,080 feet above sea level in the southeast corner, to 2,000 feet above sea level along the northerly property boundary.

The subject site straddles U.S. Interstate-10, and direct access is provided to the site by an existing freeway interchange that facilitates access in both (east and west) directions. Local roads in the project vicinity include State Route 195/Box Canyon Road/Cottonwood Springs Road, which is accessed by a freeway interchange approximately 5 miles east of the site.

Current Land Use

As noted above, the planning area is primarily vacant open space land in an area east of the Coachella Valley, and consists of varying terrain, ranging from steep mountainous foothills to gently sloping alluvial plain. The Pinkham Wash, which extends from the northwesterly to south-central portions of the site, drains the Cottonwood Mountains to the north. It is typically dry, but occasionally includes ephemeral streams and surface water associated with intermittent flooding and mountain runoff.

Existing on-site improvements include east-west trending utility easements and public rights-of-way along the Interstate-10 corridor and within the southeasterly portion of the site. Two existing electricity transmission corridors and power lines operated by Southern California Edison (SCE) and Imperial Irrigation District (IID) traverse the property. A Southern California Gas Company natural gas transmission line and pumping station, and Southern California Telephone, Pac Bell, and U.S. Sprint telephone easements, also occur on-site.

The Metropolitan Water District's (MWD) Colorado River Aqueduct, which transports Colorado River water to communities in the Coachella Valley and Los Angeles metropolitan area, crosses the northerly portion of the subject property. The planning area exhibits some signs of human disturbance, including off-road vehicle use, shooting, and trash dumping of domestic trash. Most of this disturbance is concentrated along the Interstate-10 corridor and within on-site utility easements.

Surrounding land uses are similar to those found on the subject property and are largely limited to vacant desert open spaces, with east-west trending utility rights-of-way near the I-10 corridor. The vast majority of land immediately north of the subject site is contained within the Joshua Tree National Park and managed by the National Park Service. Limited land to the north consists of public land managed by BLM and the State of California. Lands to the west are privately and publicly (BLM) owned and include the Cactus City travel stop approximately one and one-half miles west of the subject property. To the south are BLM-managed lands, most of which are managed as the Mecca Hills Wilderness. Lands to the east are privately or publicly (BLM) owned and remain largely vacant.

AREAS OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Introduction

An Initial Study has been prepared for the Paradise Valley EIR in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the County Rules to Implement CEQA, and is included as part of this Notice of Preparation. The Initial Study identified several issue areas with the potential for impacts to important resources, as well as impacts to proposed land uses resulting from environmental hazards affecting the planning area. Each of these areas of concern is briefly discussed below and will be addressed in greater detail in the EIR being prepared for this project.

Land Use Compatibility

The Riverside County General Plan currently designates the proposed project site as “Open Space – Rural,” for which permitted land uses include limited single-family residential development (1 dwelling unit per 20 acres), and compatible resource development and associated uses. Zoning designations for the subject property include W-2-10 and N-A, which allow for Controlled Development (10-acre minimum lot size) and Natural Assets, respectively. Surrounding lands are designated for similar uses.

The subject property is included within the planning area of the Eastern Coachella Valley Area Plan (ECVAP), which is an integral component of the recently adopted update to the Riverside County General Plan. Under the Eastern Coachella Valley Area Plan, the Paradise Valley site is designated as “Open Space – Rural.” The proposed project is consistent with policies established in the ECVAP for planned communities, or “new towns,” which the General Plan recognizes as important in the growth and development of the eastern County, including the eastern Coachella Valley. The ECVAP sets forth policies for such developments and specifies that they are exempt from the 5-year limit placed on Foundation Component amendments established in the Administrative Element of the General Plan, subject to all applicable development criteria set forth in the ECVAP. Policy ECVAP 2.3 refers to the proposed project site and vicinity.

The proposed project includes single and multi-family residential development, with densities that could range up to 30 units per acre, as well as a wide range of commercial, institutional, and open space uses. A General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone will be required to facilitate the proposed project. Adjacent land uses primarily consist of vacant desert open space, interspersed with I-10 freeway right-of-way, utility easements, and limited highway commercial development at the Cactus City travel stop to the west. Approval of the General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone, required to allow the proposed development, may also impact surrounding land uses, and this potential should be addressed further in the EIR. The applicant has also filed applications for a Master Parcel Map and a Development Agreement, which are also part of the project to be analyzed in the EIR.

Transportation/Circulation

Direct access to the project site is provided by U.S. Interstate-10, via an existing freeway interchange and underpass that facilitate access in both (east and west) directions. Although no other roads occur on the subject property, frontage roads have been constructed adjacent and parallel to I-10. A traffic impact analysis is being prepared to estimate project-generated traffic volumes (average daily trips). The residential component is expected to generate the highest volume of activity. Recent traffic counts for Interstate-10 (Caltrans 2004) indicate that the average annual daily traffic in the project vicinity is 22,500 ADT (35,355 PCE), equating to about 50% of capacity. Buildout of the proposed project either with or without BLM lands will increase traffic volumes on I-10. The EIR will evaluate the adequacy of the existing interchange and the need for additional facilities to serve the project. Traffic safety issues may also be affected and shall be examined in the project EIR.

Geology

The planning area is located in a seismically active region. Although no active or potentially active faults occur on-site, several faults are in sufficient proximity to cause moderate to intense ground shaking on the subject property. The San Andreas Fault occurs approximately seven miles to the southwest, and several smaller faults (Painted Canyon, Grotto/Hidden Springs, Eagle Canyon, and Clemens Wells Faults) occur in the vicinity. The site is susceptible to ground shaking, seismically induced settlement, slope instability, and other secondary seismic hazards, which can cause damage to structures and other urban improvements. In addition, portions of the site are situated on sloped terrain, which can create limitations to development. The potential impacts of significant geologic events on the proposed project and other geotechnical restrictions will be reviewed and mitigation measures developed, as necessary, to ensure that impacts are adequately reduced.

Hydrology

The Pinkham Wash, a broad alluvial plain that drains the Cottonwood Mountains, extends from the northwesterly to the south-central portion of the subject property. This drainage is typically dry, but occasionally contains ephemeral flows associated with flooding events and intermittent mountain runoff. The project site is currently designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as Zone D – “undetermined but possible flood hazard.” Detailed hydrologic evaluation will be required to further determine the on-site flooding potential. The project will be designed to mitigate flooding hazards to acceptable levels and to limit Zone A designations (areas prone to 100-year flood) to natural and improved drainage areas. Potential impacts to and from these drainages will be analyzed in the project EIR. Other hydrology issues, including the alteration of surface water flows and changes in the amount of runoff associated with buildout of the proposed project, will also be addressed.

Air Quality

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) manages and regulates air quality in the project vicinity and the nearby Coachella Valley. This region generally has good air quality, but has historically exceeded state and federal standards for ozone and particulate matter (PM₁₀) emissions. The nearest air quality monitoring station to the subject property is located in Indio, and the data collected at this station is expected to reflect higher levels of PM₁₀ and other contaminants than air quality in the project vicinity. Analysis of these and other data collected in the Coachella Valley region indicate that vehicular traffic is the major source of regional pollutant emissions. Other significant sources include construction equipment emissions, emissions from stationary sources, and fugitive dust emissions from human activities (especially grading) and natural wind events.

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Lead Agency: County of Riverside

Buildout of the Paradise Valley project either with or without BLM lands has the potential to generate substantial emissions of various types, including short-term emissions from the operation of construction vehicles, and grading and other ground surface disruptions. Long-term emissions will include air pollutants associated with project-generated traffic (moving emissions) and the consumption of natural gas and electricity (stationary emissions). These emissions shall be quantified and their impacts analyzed in the EIR.

Water Resources

The Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) is the primary water purveyor in the project vicinity; however, the subject site is located just outside (approximately one mile east of) CVWD's district boundaries. To accommodate buildout of the proposed project, groundwater will be pumped from the Shavers Valley groundwater basin, which underlies the subject property. The project proponent has entered into an agreement with CVWD to artificially recharge the groundwater basin with water imported via the Colorado River Aqueduct, which passes through the northerly portion of the site. It is anticipated that the MWD aqueduct would deliver approximately 10,000 acre-feet per year to on-site percolation ponds. Over the long-term, no net loss of groundwater in storage is anticipated. Pending CVWD Board approval, it is expected that the project site will be annexed into CVWD's district boundaries. Should this occur, the community water delivery system would be managed by CVWD. The EIR will quantify project buildout demand for water resources for the project with and without BLM lands, and will provide mitigation measures to address anticipated impacts.

Biological Resources

The subject site is located in the Colorado division of the Sonoran Desert, which is generally characterized by mountain-basin topography and sparse vegetation. That portion of the site north of Interstate-10 occurs within the Joshua Tree Desert Wildlife Management Area, and that portion south of I-10 is within an area designated as the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area. The entire site is within the Chuckwalla Unit of Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat, as defined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Two broad vegetation communities occur on-site: 1) Creosote-Bursage Scrub, and 2) Paloverde-Ironwood Woodland and Scrub. Biological surveys were conducted on the subject property to determine the presence or absence of special-status species. No threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species were observed. However, two sensitive wildlife species, the desert tortoise (federal and state threatened) and rosy boa (BLM sensitive), were observed, and the desert bighorn sheep was tentatively identified by scat and tracks near the northeastern project boundary. The EIR will define the site's biological resources more thoroughly and identify mitigation measures which reduce impacts to acceptable levels.

Noise

The predominant noise source in the project area is vehicular traffic on Interstate-10. Otherwise, the existing noise environment in the area is relatively quiet and characteristic of undeveloped desert open space. Project buildout will introduce new noise sources to the subject site, including those generated by grading and construction activity, vehicular traffic, outdoor heating/cooling/ventilation equipment, and daily commercial and residential activity. The EIR will more thoroughly evaluate potential noise impacts to the subject property and adjacent lands and provide mitigation measures to address anticipated impacts.

Archaeological and Cultural Resources

Cultural resources within the Coachella Valley region include Native American (Cahuilla) settlements established before and after the arrival of European-Americans, as well as historic structures and features that were built and used as early as the 1700s by European settlers. Cultural resources in close proximity to the project planning area include World War II military training camps, which were constructed approximately 8 miles to the east. Although the project site is located in an area with a low probability for archaeological or historic resources, there is a potential for such resources to occur on-site. A site-specific cultural resources survey has been conducted to determine the presence or absence of any on-site cultural resources, and a detailed analysis will be presented in the EIR.

Scenic Resources

The subject property commands views of the Cottonwood and Santa Rosa Mountains, Mecca Hills, and Salton Sea. Site topography ranges from mountainous foothills at elevations of about 2,000 feet above sea level, to gently sloping alluvial plains that descend to elevations of about 1,080 feet. Development of the proposed project will alter the existing visual character of the subject site through grading and other surface disruptions, construction of buildings, roads, and other urban improvements, and increased lighting and glare. The EIR will further assess impacts to visual resources.

Public Services and Facilities

Buildout of the Paradise Valley project will increase the demand for a variety of public services, including police and fire protection, water and sewer service, schools and libraries, healthcare facilities, and solid waste management. Furthermore, the project will require a full range of utility services and facilities, including natural gas, electricity, telephone and cable. The project will provide for services and facilities to serve the Paradise Valley community. Buildout of the project with or without BLM lands may have an incremental impact on the capacity of service providers and facilities, which will be further addressed in the EIR.

Socio-Economic Impacts

Buildout of the proposed project will result in the development of a “new town” east of the Coachella Valley, which is envisioned as a self-contained destination resort community. Development will include a wide range of land uses, including single and multi-family residential units, commercial uses, resort and conference center facilities, and institutional facilities. Project development will generate new employment opportunities and potentially significant revenues for both the private and public sectors from increased sales taxes, property taxes, and other revenue streams. Inversely, the project will also result in incremental costs associated with the provision of police and fire protection services, school facilities, and general governmental costs. The potential socio-economic impacts of the project, both with and without inclusion of BLM lands, will be further addressed in the EIR

LEAD AGENCY:

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Attn: R. James Fagelson, Principal Planner

PROJECT SPONSOR:

Glorious Land Company
13181 Crossroads Parkway North
Suite 530
City of Industry, CA 91746

Paradise Valley
Notice of Preparation
Lead Agency: County of Riverside

Pursuant to Riverside County Rules to Implement the California Environmental Quality Act notice is given to responsible and interested agencies, that the Riverside County Planning Department plans to oversee the preparation on an Environmental Impact Report for the above described project. The purpose of this notice is to solicit guidance from your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR. Information in that regard should be submitted to this office as soon as possible, but **not later than thirty (30) days** after receiving this notice.

Attached is a copy of the issues to be included in the draft EIR. If you have any questions please contact R. James Fagelson, Principal Planner, at (951) 955-9514.

Sincerely,

RIVERSIDE COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
Robert C. Johnson, Planning Director

R. James Fagelson, Principal Planner