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**CHAPTER 2  
ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

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## **CHAPTER 2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

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In accordance with Section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.), this chapter provides a description of the general environmental setting for the Proposed Project area, including existing site conditions and land uses and surrounding land uses at the time the notice of preparation was published. More detailed descriptions of the environmental setting for each environmental issue area are provided in the corresponding sections in Chapter 4, Environmental Analysis, of this Draft EIR.

### **2.1 LOCATION**

The proposed reservoir site consists of a combined total of approximately 556 acres of primarily agricultural land located within Imperial County, approximately 8 miles southeast of Holtville, California, and approximately 11 miles east of Calexico, California (Figure 1-1, Project Location). The proposed reservoir site is located on five parcels (Assessor's Parcel Numbers 055-250-020, 059-310-005, 055-310-007, 055-310-006, and 059-310-006), cumulatively totaling approximately 556 acres (Figure 1-2, Vicinity Map). The AAC is located approximately 1.3 miles south of the proposed reservoir site. The proposed reservoir site is located approximately 1.1 miles north of SR-98 and 2 miles south of Interstate 8. To the northeast and east of the proposed reservoir site is open and vacant desert land with desert shrubbery and patches of groundcover owned by BLM. Agricultural fields are to the northwest, west, and south of the proposed reservoir site, with the EHL Canal directly adjacent to the west and a few scattered single-family dwellings and farming structures to the south and west. The proposed intake channel would run north–south, connecting the proposed reservoir to the AAC, crossing under SR-98. The Proposed Project site is primarily flat land zoned as A-2 (General Agriculture) and A-3 (Heavy Agriculture), with a small portion that crosses a parcel of federal lands withdrawn to the Reclamation.

The major arterial roads within the project vicinity are Bonds Corner Road, which runs north and south, and SR-98, which runs east and west. Access to the project site is provided via Verde School Road, a dirt road running east–west, and Holdridge Road, a dirt road running north–south. The nearest active airport is the Calexico International Airport, located 13.5 miles west of the Proposed Project site. The nearest residence is located approximately 150 feet south, across Verde School Road. The nearest school is Emmett S. Finley Elementary School, located approximately 7.5 miles northwest of the Proposed Project.

## **2.2 EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS**

The Proposed Project site is southeast of the Salton Sea. The Proposed Project site is located within the Sonoran Desert, which is bounded on the west by the Peninsular Ranges and on the east by the Colorado River. The Proposed Project site is relatively flat and ranges from approximately 30 feet above mean sea level (amsl) at its western extent to 50 feet amsl near SR-98. The dominant topography of the Proposed Project site consists of flat fallow agriculture fields.

There are no current commercial or industrial operations conducted at the site. Utilities for the adjacent residence consist of overhead power, telephone, and cable lines. The Imperial Valley has historically been used for farming and water infrastructure since irrigation was brought to the area in 1901. The project site has historically been used for agriculture and is currently dominated by levelled agricultural land and linear earthworks; however, there is a section of unmodified desert land that would be bisected by the proposed intake channel.

### **2.2.1 Vegetation and Land Covers**

The dominant topography of the Proposed Project site consists of flat fallow agriculture fields and disturbed areas (roads) irrigation canals, drains and small amounts of scrub habitat. Vegetation communities consists of arrow weed thickets, bush seepweed scrub, cattail marshes, creosote bush scrub, mesquite bosque/mesquite thicket, and tamarisk thickets; there are two land covers (disturbed habitat and open water). Descriptions of additional on-site physical features, such as biological, cultural, and water resources, are provided in Section 4.3, Biological Resources; Section 4.4, Cultural Resources; and Chapter 5, Effects Found Not to Be Significant, of this Draft EIR.

### **2.2.2 Hydrological Setting**

The Proposed Project site is located within the Sonoran Desert, which is bounded on the west by the Peninsular Ranges and on the east by the Colorado River. The Proposed Project site is relatively flat and ranges from approximately 30 feet amsl at its western extent to 50 feet amsl near SR-98. The project is located within the Imperial Valley Planning Area, which comprises 2,500 square miles within the Colorado River Basin (RWQCB 2017). Surface flows from the Imperial Valley drain north towards the Salton Sea. The project is located within the Brawley Hydrologic Area. The Colorado River is the main feature found within the Colorado River Basin and is located approximately 40 miles east of the Proposed Project site. Water is diverted to the AAC at the Imperial Dam along the Colorado River. The 82-mile AAC runs along the south side of the Imperial Valley. The EHL Canal runs north and receives water from the AAC and distributes it to agricultural fields downstream. The AAC is the only source used for irrigation, industrial, and domestic purposes in the Imperial Valley (RWQCB 2017). The AAC also diverts water into the Coachella Canal located approximately 18 miles east of the Project site. Other major hydrologic

features of the region include the New and Alamo Rivers, which convey irrigation drainage from agricultural and surface runoff and wastewater from Imperial Valley.

### **Colorado River**

Except for a small volume from Lower Colorado Water Supply Project pumping, Colorado River surface water is Imperial Valley's sole water resource. The Colorado River's unregulated flow is subject to great annual variation, and reservoirs have been constructed on the Colorado River to regulate this variability. Drought conditions have impacted the Colorado River watershed. At the beginning of water year 2018, total system storage in the Colorado River Basin was 32.9 million acre-feet (55% of 59.6 million acre-feet total system capacity). This is an increase of 2.7 million acre-feet over the total storage at the beginning of water year 2017, when total system storage was 30.2 million acre-feet (51% of capacity) (Reclamation 2018). Palo Verde Dam serves as the Colorado River diversion structure for irrigated agriculture in eastern Riverside County, California, and the Imperial Dam serves as the Colorado River diversion structure for the AAC in California, which supplies water to IID, CVWD, and the Gila Gravity Main Canal in Arizona and Mexico.

## **2.3 SURROUNDING LAND USES**

The project site is primarily surrounded by agricultural farmland to the west and south. There is one residence located approximately 150 feet south of the project site, across Verde School Road, as shown on Figure 1-2. To the north and east of the project site, the undeveloped land with natural vegetation is maintained by BLM. Directly adjacent to the west of the project site is the EHL Canal, which is a large earthen canal that redirects water from the AAC to the south and directs the water north to agricultural fields throughout the eastern Imperial Valley. Approximately 1.2 miles south of the proposed reservoir site is the AAC, from which the proposed intake channel would divert water.

## **2.4 GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION AND ZONING**

The County's General Plan, adopted in 1993 and revised and adopted in 2015 by the Imperial County Board of Supervisors, is a comprehensive, long-term planning document that prescribes overall goals and policies for development in the County. The land use designation for the Proposed Project location is Agriculture (County of Imperial 2007). The County's Zoning Map has designated the Proposed Project location as A-2 (General Agricultural Zone) and A-3 (Heavy Agricultural). Both the A-2 and the A-3 zones permit agricultural accessory structures outright. The Proposed Project would be considered an accessory structure to IID's current irrigation and distribution system which contains similar accessory reservoir structures throughout which are designed for operational flexibility and increase IID's water delivery efficiency, of which 97 percent of its water goes to agricultural operations.

