

APPENDIX D

**ISSUES AND IMPACT TOPICS ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER
CONSIDERATION**

ISSUES AND IMPACT TOPICS ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER CONSIDERATION

The following resources were dismissed from further detailed analysis while drafting this Saline Valley Warm Springs Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (plan/EIS). The National Park Service determined that each of the alternatives would have minimal impacts on these resources in the study area, the resources were not present in the study area, and either the impacts are similar across the action alternatives or impacts on the resource are thoroughly analyzed and described under another resource topic. The following resources were dismissed from further analysis in this plan/EIS.

Geologic Resources (Geology, Paleontology, Rare and Unique Geologic Features, Prime and Unique Farmlands)

The National Park Service has the responsibility to preserve and protect geologic resources as integral components of park natural systems, including rare and unique geologic features. Paleontological resources, including both organic and mineralized remains in body or trace form, will be protected, preserved, and managed for public education, interpretation, and scientific research (NPS 2006). Because the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area has been disturbed repeatedly since the late 1940s, additional impacts to geologic and paleontological resources are not anticipated; therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (Title 7 of the United States Code [USC], section 4201 et seq.) was passed to address the effects of federal programs on the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. In support of this legislation, the Department of the Interior issued several memoranda to guide its agencies in addressing prime and unique farmlands in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) process. Prime farmlands are those lands that have the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerant soil erosion. Unique farmlands are those that are used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. Prime and unique agricultural lands were dismissed without analysis because these lands do not exist in the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area.

Floodplains

Executive Order 11988, “Floodplain Management” directs all federal agencies to avoid long- and short-term impacts associated with occupancy, modification, and development of floodplains when possible. National Park Service (NPS) Director’s Order 77-2 implements Executive Order 11988 and established NPS policy to preserve floodplain values and minimize potentially hazardous conditions associated with flooding.

At the time of the development of this plan/EIS, a full floodplain analysis of the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area had not been completed. Death Valley National Park (park) staff determined the watersheds or drainage areas of the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area by examining digital elevation models and current drainage patterns. The alternatives for this plan would not have an appreciable effect on the overall floodplains functions or values; however, the area and visitors would be subject to flooding from storm events. A floodplains statement of findings was produced to address the potential safety risks to visitors of the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area due to flooding (appendix G). The analysis will help predict smaller flood events; however, larger storm events, such as 500-year events, would inundate the

entire valley. The safety concerns are also addressed in the “Health and Safety” section, but impacts on floodplains functions and values were dismissed from further analysis in this plan/EIS.

Water Resources

The National Park Service manages watersheds as complete hydrologic systems in order to minimize human-caused disturbance to the natural upland processes that deliver water, sediment, and wood debris to streams (NPS 2006). The National Park Service protects watershed and stream features primarily by avoiding impacts on watershed and riparian vegetation and by allowing natural fluvial processes to proceed unimpeded. Parks are also tasked with maintaining the natural integrity of thermal systems (NPS 2006).

Visitors of Saline Valley Warm Springs Area have altered the natural flow of the geothermal springs since sometime between 1933 and 1947 when the first developed tub was installed (New South 2015). As the visitors increased development at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area, the infrastructure (pipes and valves) that feed the constructed tubs has increased as well. The diversion of water from the natural source springs to the soaking tubs, showers, bathtub, dishwashing stations, and sprinkler system for the Lower Spring lawn does not affect the natural flow or the quality of the source spring water. For these reasons, water resources was dismissed from detailed analysis.

Special-Status Species

Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act requires that a federal agency consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service on any action that may affect endangered or threatened species or candidate species, or that may result in adverse modification of critical habitat. An environmental assessment or an EIS may provide sufficient information to serve as a biological assessment for section 7 purposes. If a separate biological assessment is prepared, it must be part of any NEPA document.

In section 7 consultation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service identified three wildlife species that may occur in the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area. Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) and least Bell’s vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) are federally listed as endangered, and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) is a federally listed threatened species. Southwestern willow flycatcher and Bell’s vireo require dense willow thickets for nesting and roosting (Zeiner et al. 1990). Yellow-billed cuckoo requires at least 25 acres of willow-dominated habitat for nesting and roosting (Zeiner et al. 1990). The habitat at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area is too sparse to support these species and it would be highly unlikely for them to occur at the site; therefore, these special-status species were dismissed from further analysis in this plan/EIS. If any riparian vegetation were scheduled for removal due to management actions under this plan, surveys for these three bird species would be conducted and time of year restrictions would be followed to avoid impacts. Consultation between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service is discussed in the “Consultation and Coordination” chapter and the consultation letters are included in appendix I.

It is NPS policy to inventory, monitor, and manage state and locally listed species in a manner similar to its treatment of federally listed species to the greatest extent possible. In addition, the National Park Service will inventory native species that are of special management concern to parks (such as rare, declining, sensitive, or unique species and their habitats) and will manage them to maintain their natural distribution and abundance (NPS 2006). Two plant species of management concern in the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area could be affected by management activities, Cooper’s rush (*Juncus cooperi*) and whiteflower rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus albidus*). These species are addressed in the “Wetlands” sections of the “Affected Environment” and “Environmental Consequences” chapters.

Cultural Landscapes

Cultural landscapes are expressions of human manipulation and adaptation of the land. NPS policy is to treat cultural landscapes to preserve significant physical attributes, biotic systems, and uses when those uses contribute to historic significance. Treatment decisions will be based on a cultural landscape's historical significance over time, existing conditions, and use. Treatment decisions will consider both the natural and built characteristics and features of a landscape, the dynamics inherent in natural processes and continued use, and the concerns of traditionally associated peoples (NPS 2006).

As of September 2017, the National Park Service completed draft determination of eligibility (DOE) reports to identify historic and ethnographic resources, which include cultural landscape features in the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area, and to evaluate the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of the site. As stated in the "Issues and Impact Topics Retained for Detailed Analysis" section, the National Park Service is treating the site, including cultural landscape resources, as eligible for listing in the NRHP. Although portions of the study area are considered historic and the study area is part of a larger ethnographic site, these aspects are analyzed in "Historic and Prehistoric Resources" and "Ethnographic Resources" respectively. Therefore, cultural landscapes, as a separate impact topic, will not be carried forward for detailed analysis in the "Environmental Consequences" chapter.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," requires federal agencies to make achieving environmental justice part of their mission. Specifically, each agency must identify and address "disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations."

The Saline Valley Warm Springs Area is located in a remote area of the park, far from population centers. The proposed action will not disproportionately affect low-income or minority populations; therefore, this topic was dismissed without analysis.

Urban Quality and Gateway Communities

According to the NPS *Management Policies 2006* (NPS 2006), a gateway community is a community close to a unit of the national park system whose residents and elected officials are often affected by the decisions made in the course of managing the park, and whose decisions may affect the resources of the park. Gateway communities usually offer food, lodging, and other services to park visitors. They also provide opportunities for employee housing and a convenient location to purchase goods and services essential to park administration (NPS 2006).

Saline Valley has four gateway communities: Lone Pine, Big Pine, Bishop, and Ridgecrest. These communities are located in Owens Valley to the west of Saline Valley. Lone Pine is the closest, located just west of Steel Pass. Big Pine and Bishop are located northwest of this entrance, and Ridgecrest is located southwest. Visitors to Saline Valley likely represent only a small portion of persons using services at these two gateway communities. Because of this, Urban Quality and Gateway Communities is dismissed as an impact topic.

Visual Resources

Part of the mission of the National Park Service, as stated in the Organic Act of 1916, is to protect the scenery unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations (54 USC § 100101(a) et seq.), and NPS *Management Policies 2006* includes scenic views in the definition of park resources (NPS 2006). The visual landscape includes factors such as landform, land cover, night sky, and air quality. The plan would have some effect on visual resources at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area, as perceived by the users of the springs; however, the impact would extend to features of the landscape that would not routinely be analyzed under this resource topic, including nonnative vegetation and wildlife and various pieces of artwork. The perception of visual resources is addressed under visitor experience. Any resources determined to have cultural significance are discussed under cultural resources. For these reasons, the topic of visual resources was not carried forward for further analysis.

Soundscapes

Natural soundscape resources encompass all the natural sounds that occur in parks, including the physical capacity for transmitting those natural sounds and the interrelationships among park natural sounds of different frequencies and volumes. The National Park Service will take action to prevent or minimize all noise that through frequency, magnitude, or duration adversely affects the natural soundscape or other park resources or values, or that exceeds levels that have been identified through monitoring as being acceptable to or appropriate for visitor uses at the sites being monitored (NPS 2006).

Vehicle noise is generally not an issue because most of the park is undeveloped and well away from traffic and its noise (NPS 2002). However, nearby off-highway vehicle open areas and mining operations cause noise in some areas of the park. A more widespread noise impact is caused by the frequent low-level military overflights from China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station that occur in the Panamint and Saline Valleys.

Disruptions to the soundscape at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area would result from visitors' vehicles used to drive to the site, unauthorized off-road vehicles used for recreation, and small aircraft landing at the Chicken Strip. The impacts from these sources are minimal, as the interruptions in the natural soundscape are episodic and temporary; therefore, soundscapes was dismissed from further analysis.

References

National Park Service (NPS)

2002 *General Management Plan, Death Valley National Park, Inyo and San Bernardino Counties, California and Esmeralda and Nye Counties, Nevada*. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. April 2002.

2006 *Management Policies 2006*. National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

New South Associates, Inc. (New South)

2015 Saline Valley Warm Springs Assessment of Eligibility, Death Valley National Park. October.

Zeiner, D.C., W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White (eds.)

1990 California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Depart. of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California.