

E.2.5 Wilderness and Recreation

The BCD Alternative is a 19.6-mile 500 kV overhead segment that would replace MP I8-39.5 to MP I8-58 of the Interstate 8 Alternative. This alternative would traverse or be located adjacent to recreation and wilderness areas under the jurisdiction of BLM and CNF, as set forth below. Refer to Figures E.2.1-1a and 1b for maps of the BCD Alternative and nearby recreation and wilderness areas. This alternative would not traverse any federal or State wilderness or wilderness study areas.

The BCD South Option would diverge from the BCD Alternative at approximately MP BCD-13.6 and head southwest in CNF land to rejoin the Interstate 8 Alternative or the Modified Route D Alternative at MP I8-51, or MP MRD-2.5, respectively

E.2.5.1 Environmental Setting

The BCD Alternative transmission line would deviate from the Interstate 8 Alternative at MP I8-39.5 and turn north, adjacent to the BLM Carrizo Gorge Wilderness, which is described under the Interstate 8 Alternative, and the In-Ko-Pah Mountains ACEC, a 22,000 acres ACEC that includes portions of the Carrizo Gorge Wilderness Area. The route would pass through the McCain Valley Resource Conservation Area, a 38,692 acres area administered by BLM that offers a variety of dispersed recreational activities including ORV use, camping, hunting, hiking, backpacking, and mountain biking. The McCain Valley Resource Conservation Area includes the Lark Canyon Campground and OHV Area, Cottonwood Campground, and the Carrizo Overlook (BLM, 2007d). The alternative route would pass within one mile east of Lark Canyon Campground and OHV Area at MP BCD-4. Lark Canyon OHV Area includes approximately 30 miles of OHV trails that are intended for motorcycle use or for ATVs less than 40 inches wide. Fee camping is permitted at the Lark Canyon Campground, which has 15 developed campsites with fire rings, vault toilets, and tables (BLM, 2007e)

At MP BCD-6.5, the route would turn northwest for 2.5 miles on BLM land and pass approximately three miles southwest of the Carrizo Overlook at MP BCD-8 before heading west through BLM land at MP BCD-9 for approximately five miles. The alternative route would pass approximately two miles south of the Cottonwood Campground near MP BCD-10. Cottonwood Campground is open all year and has 25 developed campsites with fire rings, picnic tables, and vault toilets. Equestrian use is permitted in limited areas within the campground. Two trailheads, the Pepperwood Trail and Sombrero Peak Trail, are accessible from the campground and generally head north, away from the alternative route. (BLM, 2007f)

The route would enter the Cleveland National Forest at MP BCD-13 and head west, crossing the PCT perpendicularly at MP BCD-16.5. The PCT is described in Section D.5.2.3. The Back Country Non-Motorized Land Use designation in this area allows for hiking, horseback riding, and other non-motorized recreation. The BCD Alternative route would pass approximately one mile north of Cibbets Flat Campground near MP BCD-17. Cibbets Flat Campground has 25 developed campsites and a creek running through it (CNF, 2007b). In addition, dispersed camping generally is allowed within CNF with a visitor permit (CNF, 2007a). The route would rejoin the Interstate 8 Alternative at MP I8-58.

E.2.5.2 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section presents a discussion of impacts and mitigation measures for the BCD Alternative as a result of construction, operation, and maintenance of the project. Table E.2.5-1 summarizes the impacts of this alternative on wilderness and recreation.

Table E.2.5-1. Impacts Identified – Alternatives – Wilderness and Recreation

Impact No.	Description	Impact Significance
Route BCD Alternative		
WR-1	Construction activities would temporarily reduce access and visitation to recreation or wilderness areas	Class II
WR-2	Presence of a transmission line or substation would permanently change the character of a recreation area, diminishing its recreational value	Class I
WR-3	Presence of the transmission line would permanently preclude recreational activities	Class II
WR-4	Presence of a transmission line in a designated wilderness or wilderness study area would result in loss of wilderness land	No Impact
BCD South Option		
WR-1	Construction activities would temporarily reduce access and visitation to recreation or wilderness areas	Class II
WR-2	Presence of a transmission line or substation would permanently change the character of a recreation area, diminishing its recreational value	Class III
WR-3	Presence of the transmission line would permanently preclude recreational activities	No Impact
WR-4	Presence of a transmission line in a designated wilderness or wilderness study area would result in loss of wilderness land	No Impact

Construction Impacts

Impact WR-1: Construction activities would temporarily reduce access and visitation to recreation or wilderness areas (Class II)

The BCD Alternative would span Lost Valley Road and McCain Valley Road, which serve as access roads to BLM recreation areas, including Cottonwood Campground, Carrizo Gorge Wilderness Area, and the In-Ko-Pah Mountains ACEC. The location of construction equipment along roadways would temporarily preclude or constrain access to these recreation areas.

The noise and presence of heavy equipment associated with project construction may temporarily reduce visitation to recreation areas. Recreationists may cancel or schedule their visits to avoid construction periods thereby resulting in temporarily reduced visitation, especially to Lark Canyon Campground, Cottonwood Campground and segments of the PCT, where construction could pose a safety hazard to visitors. Disturbances to recreational activities would cause a temporary reduction of access and visitation would likely reduce to recreation areas along the alternative route during construction activities. Such disturbances to recreational resources would result in significant impacts (Class II).

Construction-related impacts to these recreational resources would be mitigated to a less than significant level through implementation of Mitigation Measures WR-1a (Coordinate construction schedule and activities with the authorized officer for the recreation area), WR-1b (Provide temporary detours for trail users), and WR-1c (Coordinate with local agencies to identify alternative recreation sites).

Mitigation Measures for Impact WR-1: Construction activities would temporarily reduce access and visitation to recreation or wilderness areas

WR-1a Coordinate construction schedule and activities with the authorized officer for the recreation area.

WR-1b Provide temporary detours for trail users.

WR-1c Coordinate with local agencies to identify alternative recreation areas.

Operational Impacts

Impact WR-2: Presence of a transmission line or substation would permanently change the character of a recreation area, diminishing its recreational value (Class I)

The BCD Alternative would be highly visible from the Carrizo Overlook, which provides vistas of the McCain Valley, Carrizo Canyon, and the Salton Sea (60 miles northeast, visible on a clear day). Additionally, the 500 kV steel towers would be highly visible to visitors to the Cottonwood and Cibbets Flat Campgrounds and hikers along the PCT. As described in Section D.5.2.3, National Scenic Trails, including the PCT, are intended to provide conservation and enjoyment of nationally significant scenic and natural qualities of the areas through which they pass (NPS, 1993). The PCT and McCain Valley Conservation Area are valued for their solitude and expansive scenic setting. Presence of a 500 kV transmission line would be contrary to the expectations of many recreationists in these areas.

The BCD Alternative would not be collocated with other overhead utilities, and would therefore introduce new structurally complex, industrial type features to a predominantly natural landscape. As described in Section E.2.3, Visual Resources, long-term, operational visual impacts would be experienced by viewers throughout the length of this alternative. Additionally, the corona noise from the proposed 500 kV segment would substantially elevate the ambient noise levels within 500 feet of the edge of the 500 kV ROW in the natural areas along this alternative route (i.e., PCT corridor and recreation areas within the McCain Valley Resource Conservation Area). Refer to Section E.2.8 for additional information on noise impacts along the BCD Alternative route.

Visual resource and noise impacts would directly adversely affect the character of recreation areas along the BCD Alternative and result in a significant and unmitigable impact (Class I). Visual Resources Mitigation Measures V-3a (Reduce visual contrast of towers and conductors) and V-45a (Prepare and Implement Scenery Conservation Plan) and Noise Mitigation Measure N-3a (Respond to complaints of corona noise) would reduce impacts to the recreational value of the PCT and recreation areas within the McCain Valley Resource Conservation Area, but the impact would remain significant for these recreation areas. The full text of the visual and noise mitigation measures presented below is provided in Appendix 12, along with the full text of all other mitigation measures. Mitigation Measure V-45a is specific to Forest Service land.

One of the access roads required for construction and continued maintenance of the overhead transmission line along the BCD route near MP BCD-16.5 would be collocated with the PCT for approximately 1.6 miles. Along this segment, the PCT would be graded and widened for use as a 20-foot-wide access road. The road/trail would experience a high level of use by equipment during construction activities, but usage would significantly decrease after construction as operation and maintenance vehicles would only need to access the ROW during inspection and repair, as described in Section B.5.1. Although the trails would not be permanently precluded from use by hikers, the occasional and infrequent presence of maintenance vehicles and equipment would diminish the recreational value of this segment of the trail, resulting in a significant impact. However, it is possible that the stretch of access road located on

the PCT is redundant and that the ROW can be accessed using new access roads that are not on the trail. The impact to the recreational value of the PCT would be lessened through Mitigation Measure WR-3a (Coordinate tower and road locations with the authorized officer of the recreation area); however, since the new access roads required to avoid the PCT would be constructed on CNF land, it is at the discretion of the CNF whether the new access roads for this portion of the BCD alternative should be consolidated to the PCT, which is already disturbed and would require further modification to be suitable as an access road, or construct new access roads through undisturbed areas of CNF.

Mitigation Measures for Impact WR-2: Presence of a transmission line or substation would permanently change the character of a recreation area, diminishing its recreational value

- V-3a Reduce visual contrast of towers and conductors.**
- V-45a Prepare and implement Scenery Conservation Plan.**
- N-3a Respond to complaints of corona noise.**
- WR-2a Coordinate tower and road locations with the authorized officer for the recreation area.**

Impact WR-3: Presence of the transmission line would permanently preclude recreational activities (Class II)

The BCD Alternative would cross the PCT at MP BCD-16.5. If transmission support structures were sited on the trail, recreationists would be precluded from these locations. Exact locations of transmission support structures have not been determined. Although preliminary locations have been proposed, these may be modified based on site-specific environmental conditions (i.e., slope stability, presence of sensitive biological or cultural resources). This impact analysis, therefore, conservatively assumes that structures would be sited on trails. Impacts to existing recreational resources that resulted from locating new towers on or immediately adjacent to the trail would be significant (Class II). Preclusion of the use of the PCT would be mitigated to a less than significant level through implementation of Mitigation Measure WR-3a (Coordinate tower and road locations with the authorized officer for the recreation area).

Mitigation Measure for Impact WR-3: Presence of the transmission line would permanently preclude recreational activities

- WR-3a Coordinate tower and road locations with the authorized officer for the recreation area.**

Impact WR-4: Presence of a transmission line in a designated wilderness or wilderness study area would result in loss of wilderness land (No Impact)

The BCD Alternative ROW would not traverse any wilderness areas or WSAs. As such, direct impacts to these resources would not occur.

E.2.5.3 BCD South Option

Environmental Setting

Construction and operation of the BCD South Option would eliminate recreation impacts to the PCT and Cibbets Flat Campground (Cleveland National Forest) that would result from construction and operation of MP BCD-14 to BCD-19.5. There are no wilderness areas or wilderness study areas in the vicinity of the BCD South Option, though the option is located primarily on National Forest lands, so Impacts WR-3 (Presence of the transmission line would permanently preclude recreational activities) and WR-4 (Presence of a transmission line in a designated wilderness or wilderness study area would result in loss of wilderness land) would not occur.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Construction Impacts

Impact WR-1: Construction activities would temporarily reduce access and visitation to recreation or wilderness areas (Class II)

The BCD South Option would generally follow La Posta Road along the eastern edge of National Forest lands. This is one of few roads providing access to this area of the Forest. The noise and presence of heavy equipment associated with project construction may temporarily reduce visitation to recreation areas. Disturbances to recreational activities would cause a temporary reduction of access and visitation would likely reduce to recreation areas along the alternative route during construction activities. Such disturbances to recreational resources would result in significant impacts (Class II).

Construction-related impacts to these recreational resources would be mitigated to a less than significant level through implementation of Mitigation Measures WR-1a (Coordinate construction schedule and activities with the authorized officer for the recreation area), WR-1b (Provide temporary detours for trail users), and WR-1c (Coordinate with local agencies to identify alternative recreation sites).

Mitigation Measures for Impact WR-1: Construction activities would temporarily reduce access and visitation to recreation or wilderness areas

- WR-1a** **Coordinate construction schedule and activities with the authorized officer for the recreation area.**
- WR-1b** **Provide temporary detours for trail users.**
- WR-1c** **Coordinate with local agencies to identify alternative recreation areas.**

Operational Impacts

Impact WR-2: Presence of a transmission line or substation would permanently change the character of a recreation area, diminishing its recreational value (Class III)

The nearest recreational resource to the BCD South Option is the PCT (approximately 1.5 miles west) and, although the BCD South Option would be visible to hikers along the PCT, it would be of sufficient distance as to not result in significant impacts to the recreational value of this portion of the trail (Impact WR-2, Class III). No mitigation is required.