

## **3.11 Recreation**

### **3.11.1 Introduction**

This section describes the environmental setting and potential impacts of the Proposed Project related to recreational resources.

### **3.11.2 Environmental Setting**

With regards to current recreational resources in the Project Area, SCVWD has a policy to work with local jurisdictions and recreational users to allow public access to many SCVWD-owned facilities, including creek easements and reservoirs.

#### ***Creek-Side Trails***

Access roads that parallel most proposed maintenance channels (and some canals) also may provide creek-side recreational access. Some of these access roads already are formalized as recreational trails, with signage and other amenities such as benches. Where accessible, these roads and trails are used for a variety of recreational activities, including walking, jogging, biking, dog walking, and bird watching. These trails provide an important recreational resource, particularly in the urban environments of San Jose. Creek-side trails typically are made of consolidated earth or gravel, or they are fully paved.

#### ***Santa Clara County Trails***

Santa Clara County's regional park system has 28 regional parks that span approximately 45,000 acres. Numerous trails are located throughout these parks, providing views of the local mountains and Santa Clara Valley. The County administers approximately 300 miles of trails, of which approximately 35 miles are paved (Falkowski, pers. comm., 2010). In addition to funds received from SCVWD under the District's Trail and Open Space Grant Program, the County supports new trail development and construction from a variety of other funding sources.

#### ***City of San Jose Trails***

In 2000, the City of San Jose implemented a trail program with a mission of constructing a 100-mile trail network along 32 trails, to enhance, strengthen, and connect neighborhoods. As of July 1, 2010, approximately 54 miles of 24 unique trails had been constructed. Many of the constructed (and planned) trails are located along and/or offer views of local streams. Constructed and planned trails along surface water bodies include, but are not limited to: the Guadalupe River trail and trails along Coyote, Fowler, Guadalupe, Los Gatos, Los Alamitos, Penitencia, Saratoga, Upper and Lower Silver, Silver Creek Valley, Thompson, Yerba Buena, Berryessa, Canoas, Fisher, and Calero creeks. A trail-use survey that was conducted on September 23, 2009, counted over 1,300 people utilizing the City's trails on that day. Trail usage increased approximately 9.6 percent from 2008 to 2010, and 51.2 percent of trail uses were for commuting or running errands. (City of San Jose 2010)

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Some City trails have been funded through the SCVWD Trail and Open Space Grant Program, including funding granted in 2010, for the design and construction of 2,000 linear feet of trail along the Penitencia Creek Trail system (SCVWD 2011).

### 3.11.3 Impact Analysis

#### ***Methodology***

This section describes the Proposed Project's potential impacts on recreation. Impacts were evaluated qualitatively, based on the potential for the Proposed Project to disrupt access to and use of existing recreational facilities. Generally, construction activities may result in a short-term loss of recreational opportunities by disrupting use of or access to recreation areas or facilities. A long-term effect could occur if a recreational opportunity was eliminated as a result of long-term maintenance activities.

#### ***Criteria for Determining Significance***

For the purposed of this analysis, the Proposed Project would result in a significant impact on recreational resources if it would:

- A. result in the loss or deterioration of available public recreational opportunities.

#### ***Environmental Impacts***

##### ***Impact REC-1: Temporary Disturbance of Recreational Quality (Significance Criterion A; Less than Significant)***

The Proposed Project could affect the recreational quality of local recreational areas if it created nuisance effects (i.e., air quality, noise, traffic, and aesthetics).

##### ***Sediment Removal/Bank Stabilization***

Sediment removal and bank stabilization activities would involve the movement of heavy equipment, truck traffic, maintenance noise, and air emissions in the vicinity of recreational areas (mainly trails), which could affect recreational quality in the immediate vicinity of work sites. Maintenance projects would be short term and typically would be completed in approximately 10 days. Larger sediment removal projects may last up to 8 weeks. The nuisance effects of maintenance (i.e., air quality, noise, traffic, and aesthetics) are discussed here specifically as they relate to recreational quality, but they are addressed in more detail in the relevant resource sections of this chapter.

Although the location and quality of existing trails adjacent to SCVWD-maintained facilities vary throughout the County, the relative sensitivity of users and potential adverse effects associated with temporary maintenance activities are expected to be similar throughout the Project Area. Although temporary, maintenance-related nuisance effects associated with the implementation of the proposed activities could affect recreational resources by temporarily degrading the quality of the recreational experience in the vicinity of the work site.

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### *Vegetation Management*

Vegetation management activities could create similar temporary nuisances on recreational quality as those described above, related to the use of hand-held equipment and vehicles. Vegetation management activities would occur on an ongoing basis, but they typically would not occur in any one location for longer than a few days at a time. These activities could temporarily degrade the quality of the recreational experience in the vicinity of the work site.

### *Minor Maintenance*

Minor maintenance activities may involve the use of heavy equipment for grading or sediment removal. Minor maintenance activities would last for a shorter period of time than sediment removal or bank stabilization activities, but because of the use of similar types of equipment, they would have similar temporary effects on the recreational quality.

### *Management of Animal Conflicts*

Animal conflicts management generally would not be anticipated to generate substantial sources of noise that could affect recreational quality. However, these activities could utilize heavy equipment for the physical alteration of animal habitats. Potential effects on recreational quality related to the use of heavy equipment for management of animal conflicts would be similar to those described for bank stabilization/sediment removal activities.

### *Canal Maintenance*

Because routine canal maintenance activities would include all general work activities, effects would be the same as described above for other routine maintenance work.

### *Applicable Best Management Practices*

The following BMPs would be implemented as part of the SMP Update to prevent maintenance activities from substantially affecting the quality of recreational use. Descriptions of each BMP are provided in Chapter 2, *Project Description*.

- BMP GEN-19: Work Site Housekeeping
- BMP GEN-21: Staging and Stockpiling of Materials
- BMP GEN-36: Public Outreach
- BMP GEN-37: Implement Public Safety Measures
- BMP GEN-38: Minimize Noise Disturbances to Residential Areas
- BMP GEN-39: Planning for Pedestrians, Traffic Flow, and Safety Measures

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### *Conclusion*

By implementing these BMPs, general site cleanliness, noise control, and appropriate access and safety controls would be in place to minimize the potential temporary disturbance impact on recreational quality. This impact would be less than significant and no mitigation would be required.

***Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.***

### ***Impact REC-2: Permanent Changes to Recreation Quality (Significance Criterion A; Beneficial)***

The Proposed Project could permanently affect recreational quality if it resulted in adverse permanent impacts on the quality of recreational areas in the vicinity of proposed maintenance activities.

### *Vegetation Management*

As discussed in Section 3.1, *Aesthetics*, vegetation management activities would have an overall long-term beneficial impact on visual quality in the Project Area. Vegetation management activities would keep vegetation from becoming overgrown, which could otherwise affect access to roads and trails. In addition, the on-site revegetation activities conducted as part of the Proposed Project would encourage the development of healthy riparian corridors with fewer nonnative and invasive species, and would create the appearance of a more “natural” stream corridor.

### *Sediment Removal and Bank Stabilization*

Removal of sediment from SCVWD channels and facilities would remove silt, vegetation, and other blockages, which would allow the creek to function more naturally, resulting in a benefit to the recreational quality. Sediment reuse that improves ecological condition or functioning would be anticipated to have positive effects, to the extent that the reuse sites would support recreation. Stabilization and repair of eroding banks would reduce sediment loss and in-channel build-up. Although the use of certain materials (i.e., rock, riprap) to repair banks could appear visually different, on-site revegetation would minimize long-term visual impacts.

### *Minor Maintenance*

Minor maintenance activities, including installation/maintenance of mitigation and landscape sites, debris removal, fence maintenance, and graffiti removal activities, would result in an improvement to the visual quality and character of SCVWD-maintained channels. Therefore, permanent effects on recreational quality from these activities would be beneficial.

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### *Management of Animal Conflicts*

Long-term effects of animal conflicts management could benefit the recreational quality of treated areas. By discouraging damage caused by animal activity (i.e., burrowing), the integrity of SCVWD facilities would be preserved and visual damage would be minimized. Therefore, management of animal conflicts under the Proposed Project would result in a beneficial impact.

### *Canal Maintenance*

Because routine canal maintenance activities would include all general work activities, effects would be the same as described above for other routine maintenance work.

### *Applicable Best Management Practices*

The following BMPs would be implemented as part of the SMP Update to prevent permanent changes to recreation quality. Descriptions of each BMP are provided in Chapter 2, *Project Description*.

- BMP GEN-19: Work Site Housekeeping
- BMP SED-3: Restore Channel Features
- BMP REVEG-1: Seeding
- BMP REVEG-2: Planting Material

### *Conclusion*

By implementing these BMPs, good housekeeping practices would be followed at work sites and provide for revegetation activities to be implemented shortly after completing vegetation management, sediment removal, or bank stabilization activities that would remove vegetation. This impact would be beneficial and no impacts would occur.

***Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.***

### ***Impact REC-3: Temporary Disruption of the Use of, or Access to, Recreational Facilities (Significance Criterion A; Less than Significant)***

As described in Section 3.11.2, *Environmental Setting*, a number of channels and canals in the Project Area support public recreation (e.g., creekside trails). Sediment reuse sites also may support recreation, depending on their location. Users of public trails and associated recreational facilities could experience temporary disruptions during active maintenance activities.

### *Sediment Removal/Bank Stabilization*

When sediment removal and bank stabilization activities are conducted, portions of nearby trails or trail parking areas may have to be temporarily closed for the duration of the maintenance activity (from less than a day to up to several weeks, in limited instances) to maximize public safety while they are used as access corridors or staging areas for vehicles, supplies, and equipment. Depending on the extent of area needed to conduct the activities,

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such closures could temporarily impede recreational use. However, closures would be localized to a specific maintenance or sediment reuse site, and alternative recreational opportunities would continue to be available along other streamside trails and recreational facilities in the overall Project Area (e.g., city and county parks). Over the long term, the improvement to stream conditions would improve the quality of many of the trails as recreational amenities.

### *Vegetation Management*

Upland activities for vegetation management, such as mowing or discing, may require temporary closure of portions or entire segments of creekside trails in the vicinity of work sites. In-channel vegetation management activities may result in temporary disruption of recreational facilities for use as access corridors or staging areas for vehicles, supplies, and equipment. Potential short-term effects on the recreational facilities would be similar to those described for sediment removal and bank stabilization activities.

### *Other Maintenance Activities*

Minor maintenance activities could involve both upland activities (i.e., fence repairs), similar to that described for vegetation management, and in-channel activities (e.g., debris removal). Management of animal conflicts may require the temporary closure of areas for the application of fumigants, and physical alterations to habitats. Effects of minor maintenance and animal conflict management activities would be similar to those described for sediment removal, bank stabilization and vegetation management. Because routine canal maintenance activities would include all general work activities, effects would be the same as described above.

### *Applicable Best Management Practices*

The following BMPs would be implemented as part of the SMP Update to address any temporary disruptions on recreational facilities. Descriptions of each BMP are provided in Chapter 2, *Project Description*.

BMP GEN-36: Public Outreach

BMP GEN-37: Implement Public Safety Measures

### *Conclusion*

The Proposed Project would provide advanced public notification of closures and the placement of warning signs, barriers, and detours so that temporary access disruption or safety hazards along public trails or other recreational facilities caused by the proposed activities would be minimized. This impact would be less than significant and no mitigation would be required.

***Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.***

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### ***Impact REC-4: Permanent Use or Access Disruption of Recreational Facilities (Significance Criterion A; No Impact)***

The Proposed Project could result in permanent impacts on recreational facilities if access or use of the facilities were permanently disrupted by proposed maintenance activities.

#### *Sediment Removal*

Sediment removal activities typically would last approximately 10 days but could last up to 8 weeks for larger sediment removal projects. Access to and use of recreational facilities would be disrupted during these maintenance activities. As previously described, once maintenance was completed, all affected paths, trails, and parking areas would be reopened for public use, and the sediment removal activities would not result in a permanent disruption of these facilities.

#### *Other Maintenance Activities*

As described above, other proposed maintenance activities (bank stabilization, vegetation management, minor maintenance, management of animal conflicts, canal maintenance) in any given location would be short-term in any given location, typically lasting no more than 10 days at a time. As described for sediment removal, access to and use of recreational facilities would be restored following the completion of maintenance activities and would not result in a permanent disruption.

#### *Conclusion*

Maintenance activities associated with the Proposed Project would not result in the permanent disruption of access to trails or any other recreation facilities, or in degradation of the recreational experience at these facilities. No impact would occur, and no mitigation would be required.

***Mitigation Measures: No mitigation is required.***