

the most part, impacts from the alternative right-of-way areas. This assessment focuses on western Riverside County habitat areas, representing the cumulative impact study area of the project.

4.16.5.1 Loss of Natural Vegetation

The WT Corridor alternatives would represent an incremental contribution to the projected loss of natural vegetation within western Riverside County. As shown on Table 4.16.I, most of the alternatives would impact less than one-tenth of one percent of the total area of all natural habitats affected by the proposed General Plan; two alternatives (5a and 5b) would result in slightly larger impacts of between one-tenth and two-tenths of one percent. (Alternative 5a exceeds one-tenth of one percent; 5b exceeds two-tenths.)

4.16.5.2 Habitat Fragmentation

Build out of the General Plan would substantially fragment habitat within western Riverside County. As a result, the WT alternatives would primarily traverse urbanized and rural settings. Thus, the potential for the WT alternatives to fragment or isolate habitat(s) would be limited to those few areas where preserves would exist under the proposed General Plan and where the alternatives would cross major streams or rivers that function as habitat linkages.

Alternatives 1 and 3 would pass through largely developed areas and would not fragment habitat areas or impair linkages joining habitat areas. Alternatives 5a and 5b would traverse and fragment a biological reserve at the Johnson Ranch and Skunk Hollow area. The remainder of Alternative 5a passes through largely developed areas and would not further fragment habitat areas or impair linkages joining habitat areas. The remainder of Alternative 5b would include the expansion of an existing crossing of Temecula Creek and a new crossing of Pechanga Creek. Both Temecula and Pechanga creeks may be important habitat linkages between the Agua Tibia and Santa Ana mountains. Thus, both 5a and 5b have potential to fragment habitat at a local scale, while 5a also has potential to fragment habitat at a regional scale. Alternatives 7a and 7b would pass through largely developed areas and would not fragment habitat areas or impair linkages joining habitat areas. Alternative H would follow an existing Interstate highway. Where the roadway crosses existing linkages (i.e., Temecula Creek), an expanded crossing would further fragment a habitat linkage between the Agua Tibia and Santa Ana mountains.

Although the percentage of contribution of impacts from the WT alternatives seems small compared to the overall impacts of the build out of western Riverside County per the General Plan, habitats such as waters of the U.S. and affiliated riparian and wetland habitats, and sage scrub are considered sensitive due to the amount of disturbance and take that has occurred historically. As such, the alternatives' cumulative contribution to further reduction of these sensitive habitats is considered substantial at the Tier 1 level of analysis. It is noted, however, that the County of Riverside's MSHCP will be implemented concurrent with the General Plan build out and the circulation system improvement projects that will support the land use planning. The MSHCP will provide additional mitigating effects on the cumulative impacts to biological habitats.

Table 4.16.1 - WT Contribution to Cumulative Impacts on Vegetation Types in Western Riverside County

| Existing Habitat Type | hectares/acres | General Plan | | CETAP WT ALTERNATIVES (hectares/acres impacted) | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------|--------|
| | | Impacts | Retained | 1 | 3 | 5a | 5b | 7a | 7b | Hyb |
| WATER | 22,876/56,484 | 473/1,169 | 22,403/55,315 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 0/0 | .4/1 | 0/0 |
| COASTAL SAGE SCRUB | 72,154/178,158 | 46,161/113,978 | 25,993/64,180 | 63/156 | 52/128 | 102/251 | 116/287 | 49/120 | 17/42 | 7/17 |
| CHAPARRAL | 211,200/521,482 | 75,751/187,040 | 135,449/334,442 | 0/0 | 17/41 | 14/35 | 92/227 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 14/35 |
| GRASSLAND | 50,788/125,403 | 37,871/93,509 | 12,917/31,894 | 82/203 | 83/205 | 113/278 | 148/365 | 19/48 | 11/28 | 56/138 |
| PLAYA AND VERNAL POOL | 11,530/28,469 | 1,374/3,393 | 10,155/25,076 | .4/1 | 0/0 | 2/5 | 2/5 | 0/0 | 1/3 | 0/0 |
| MEADOW AND MARSH | 934/2,305 | 583/1,440 | 350/865 | 1/2 | 1/2 | 1/3 | 1/3 | .4/1 | 0/0 | 0/0 |
| RIPARIAN/BOTTOMLAND | 6,079/15,011 | 1,930/4,765 | 4,150/10,246 | 8/19 | 2/4 | 5/12 | 15/36 | 5/12 | 8/19 | 5/13 |
| OAK WOODLAND/ FOREST | 15,905/39,271 | 4,299/10,616 | 11,605/28,655 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 4/11 | 31/76 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 6/14 |
| TOTAL | 391,466/966,583 | 168,443/415,910 | 223,023/550,673 | 154/381 | 154/380 | 241/595 | 405/999 | 73/181 | 38/93 | 88/217 |
| Percentage | | 100% | | 0.09% | 0.09% | 0.14% | 0.24% | 0.04% | 0.02% | 0.05% |