

3.9 MINERAL RESOURCES

3.9.1 Existing Conditions

San Diego's important mineral resources include salt, sand, and gravel, all of which have been produced in San Diego for many decades. San Diego's aggregate mineral resources (sand and gravel) provide necessary materials for the local economy. Extraction of sand, rock, and gravel, began in Mission Valley in 1913. Extraction still occurs in Mission Valley and in other areas of the City such as Carroll Canyon and Mission Gorge. There are also mining operations within the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) subarea plan, consisting mainly of sand, rock, and gravel extraction using open pit mining.

Due to competing demands for precious open lands, access to aggregate reserves in western San Diego County have significantly decreased over the past 20 years. Urbanization, as well as the designation of lands within the MSCP, and the depletion of active mines, contributes to the shortage of materials. Urban preemption of prime mineral resource deposits and conflicts between mining and other uses throughout California led to passage of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA), which requires all cities and counties to incorporate in their General Plans the mapped designations approved by the state Mining and Geology Board. The state geologist classifies mineral lands solely on the basis of geological factors. By statute, existing land use is not considered during categorization. The state Mining and Geology Board has defined Mineral Resource Zones; the zones are established based on the presence or absence of significant sand and gravel deposits and crushed rock resource areas. A description of these zones is provided on **Table 3.9-1**.

Table 3.9-1
Description of Mineral Zones

Zone	Description
MRZ-1	Areas where adequate information indicates that no significant mineral deposits are present, or where it is judged that there is little likelihood for their presence.
MRZ-2	Areas where adequate information indicates that significant mineral deposits are present or where it is judged that there is a high likelihood for their presence.
MRZ-3	Areas containing mineral deposits, the significance of which cannot be evaluated from available data.
MRZ-4	Areas where available information is inadequate for assignment to any other MRZ.

According to Special Report 153, prepared by the Division of Mines and Geology, Portland Cement Concrete aggregate is the scarcest aggregate resource in San Diego County due to the restrictive specifications for that material. Those deposits that meet the specifications for Portland Cement Concrete are therefore of high value and of most concern in planning future

availability. The location of San Diego's high quality mineral resource areas are shown on **Figure 3.9-1** as Mineral Resource Zone (MRZ)-2 areas. These are areas designated for the managed production of mineral resources. State law requires cities to plan for the beneficial management of these valuable mineral resources.

In general the MRZ-2 (**Figure 3.9-1**) areas are concentrated along major drainages such as the Otay River, the Tijuana River, the San Diego River, Carroll Canyon, and the San Dieguito River. Many of the City's existing mining operations are located along rivers and water courses, in areas within the City's Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA). In general, the City's MSCP provides for the continuation of existing mining operations. However, new or expanded mining operations on lands conserved as part of the MHPA are incompatible with MSCP preserve goals for covered species and their habitats, unless otherwise agreed to by the wildlife agencies at the time the parcel is conserved. New operations could be permitted in the MHPA if: 1) impacts have been assessed and conditions incorporated to mitigate biological impacts and restore mined areas; 2) adverse impacts to covered species in the MHPA have been mitigated consistent with the Subarea Plan; and 3) requirements of other City land use policies and regulations have been satisfied. The MSCP requires that existing and new mining operations adjacent to or within the MHPA adequately protect adjacent preserved areas and covered species.

San Diego's salt production occurs within the South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge. Within this refuge, approximately 1,050 acres of salt ponds are currently in active salt production. A commercial solar salt operation is permitted to operate within the refuge. This operation, which occurs on approximately 1,035 acres at the southern most end of San Diego Bay, has produced salt at this site for more than 130 years. The current facility consists of a series of diked ponds that facilitate the concentration and precipitation of salts from bay water. Although the salt ponds are a unique local industry, they do not represent a large share of the salt production market. Most of the salt produced in San Diego is used locally. The salt ponds are also valuable as an irreplaceable habitat for many bird species and provide breeding grounds for numerous mollusks and shellfish. Each year, birds use the ponds to nest, feed, and roost. It is one of the few large areas remaining along the highly urbanized Southern California coast where large bird populations can gather. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife's draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is considering restoring the commercial salt ponds for wildlife. Salt ponds also provide an appropriate use for open space designations in the area.

3.9.2 Thresholds of Significance

A significant impact could occur if implementation of the Draft General Plan:

- Results in the loss of significant mineral resources (e.g. sand and gravel) that could be of value to the region and residents of the state.

3.9.3 Impact Analysis

Could implementation of the Draft General Plan result in the loss of significant mineral resources (e.g. sand and gravel) that could be of value to the region and residents of the state?

Impacts to significant mineral resources occur when access to the resource is restricted or prohibited through development of lands containing the resource or when non-compatible land uses are developed in close proximity thereby reducing the likelihood for extraction of those resources. There are a number of objectionable characteristics that typically accompany the extraction, processing and transportation of sand and gravel products. These include noise, vibration, air pollution, dust, heavy trucks causing traffic congestion, and the often significant visual impacts.

The Draft General Plan includes a number of policies aimed at preserving access to mineral resources, reducing the need for new construction materials, and to accommodate mineral extraction to occur under less objectionable circumstances. These policies are provided below:

1. Promote the recycling and reclamation of construction materials to provide for the City's current and future growth and development needs.
2. Permit new or expanding mining operations within the MHPA in accordance with MSCP policies and guidelines.
3. Produce sand and gravel with minimal harm and disturbance to adjacent property and communities.
4. Plan rehabilitation of depleted mineral areas to facilitate reuse consistent with state requirements, the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA), and local planning goals and policies, including the MSCP.
5. Consider local evaporative salt production for future economic value, open space use, and for important ecological habitat.

The use of locally mined materials for San Diego's development is desirable as it reduces the need for trucking materials over long distances. This, in turn, results in decreased energy use, and reduced traffic, infrastructure, and air quality impacts, as well as lower direct costs to the consumer and local government. Local use may also result in fewer direct mining environmental impacts to remote, less regulated areas outside the City. Reclamation and recycling of building materials must take on a greater importance in order to continue meeting local needs. Recycling has the added benefit of reducing the amount of waste entering landfills.

Although the Draft General Plan proposes several policies aimed at protecting mineral resources, there is a potential for future land development that is consistent with the General Plan to impact these resources. Determinations of land use compatibility between a future project and significant mineral resources and the conflicts of mining within the MSCP preserve would be addressed through the entitlement process. Conflicting goals and policies between habitat and open space preservation and mineral extraction may lead to the loss of access to significant mineral resources, resulting in impacts.

Approval of the proposed project, the Draft General Plan, would not have a significant impact on the availability of mineral resources; however, future projects developed consistent with the General Plan may result in loss of significant mineral resources. It is infeasible at this Program EIR level to provide more specific mitigation that would reduce impacts to a less than significant level, since specific development projects are not known. Thus, potential impacts related to mineral resources are considered significant and unavoidable.

3.9.4 Mitigation Framework

No Mitigation Measures are available at the Program EIR level of review that could reduce significant impacts to important mineral resources.

3.9.5 Significance of Impact with Mitigation Framework

Goals, policies, and recommendations enacted by the City combined with the state and local regulations described above provide a framework for developing project level mineral resources mitigation measures for future discretionary projects. The City's process for the evaluation of discretionary projects includes environmental review and documentation pursuant to CEQA as well as an analysis of those projects for consistency with the goals, policies and recommendations of the General Plan. It is infeasible at this Program EIR level to provide specific mitigation that would reduce impacts to a less than significant level, since specific development projects are not known. Thus, there is a potential for significant unavoidable impacts related to mineral resources.

Notes and References

Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975

Mineral Resource Zones

City of San Diego MSCP