

CHAPTER 2 SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

2.1 Approach to the Environmental Analysis

This program environmental impact report (PEIR) evaluates and discloses the environmental impacts associated with the Cannabis Program, in accordance with the CEQA (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR], Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 1500 et seq.). Sections 2.2 through 2.19 of this PEIR present a discussion of the existing conditions; regulatory framework; environmental impacts associated with implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 1 through 5, which are evaluated at an equal level of detail (as described in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting”); mitigation measures to reduce the level of impact; and residual level of significance (i.e., after application of mitigation, including impacts that would remain significant and unavoidable after application of all feasible mitigation measures).

Issues evaluated in these sections consist of the environmental topics identified for review in the notice of preparation (NOP) prepared for the Cannabis Program (see Appendix A of this PEIR). The subsection, “Cumulative Impacts,” in Sections 2.2 through 2.19 of this PEIR, presents an analysis of Alternatives 1 through 5 impacts considered in combination with those of other past, present, and probable future projects producing related impacts, as required by Section 15130 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Chapter 4, “Alternatives,” presents a summary analysis of the environmental effects of Alternatives 1 through 5, as required by Section 15126.6 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Chapter 5, “Other CEQA Sections,” includes an analysis of the project’s growth-inducing impacts, as required by Section 21100(b)(5) of CEQA.

Sections 2.2 through 2.19 of this PEIR each include the following components.

Existing Conditions: This subsection presents the existing environmental conditions in the program area (unincorporated area of the county under the County of San Diego’s jurisdiction where cultivation and noncultivation activities may be permitted), in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15125. The discussions of the environmental setting focus on information relevant to the issue under evaluation. The extent of the environmental setting area evaluated differs among resources, depending on the locations where impacts would be expected to occur.

Regulatory Framework: This subsection presents information on the laws, regulations, plans, and policies that relate to the issue area being discussed. Regulations originating from the federal, state, and local levels are discussed as appropriate.

Analysis of Project Effects and Determination of Significance: This subsection presents thresholds of significance and discusses potentially significant effects of the Cannabis Program on the existing environment under Alternatives 1 through 5, in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2. The methodology for the impact analysis is described, including the technical studies upon which the analyses rely. The thresholds of significance are defined, and thresholds for which the Cannabis Program would have no impact are disclosed and dismissed from further evaluation. Impacts are numbered sequentially in each subsection (Issue 1, Issue 2, Issue 3, etc.). The discussion includes the analysis, rationale, and substantial evidence on which conclusions are based.

A “less-than-significant” impact is one that would not result in a substantial adverse change in the physical environment. A “potentially significant” impact or “significant” impact is one that would result in a substantial adverse change in the physical environment; both are treated the same under CEQA in terms of procedural requirements and the need to identify feasible mitigation. Mitigation measures are identified, as feasible, to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate for significant or potentially significant impacts, in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4. Unless otherwise noted, the mitigation measures presented are recommended in the PEIR for consideration by the County for adoption.

Where an existing law, regulation, or permit specifies mandatory and prescriptive actions about how to fulfill the regulatory requirement as part of the project definition, leaving little discretion in its implementation, and would avoid an impact or maintain it at a less-than-significant level, the environmental protection afforded by the regulation is considered before determining impact significance. Where existing laws or regulations specify a mandatory permit process for future projects, performance standards without prescriptive actions to accomplish them, or other requirements that allow substantial discretion in how they are accomplished, or have a substantial compensatory component, the level of significance is determined before applying the influence of the regulatory requirements. In this circumstance, the impact would be potentially significant or significant, and the regulatory requirements would be included as a mitigation measure.

Cumulative Impacts: This subsection presents an analysis of the Cannabis Program Alternatives 1 through 5 impacts considered in combination with those of other past, present, and probable future projects producing related impacts, as required by Section 15130 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Significance of Impacts Prior to Mitigation: This subsection identifies the significance of each impact before the application of mitigation measures.

Mitigation: This subsection describes the mitigation measures for impacts identified to be significant.

Conclusion: This subsection summarizes the conclusion reached in each of the above impact analyses and the level of impact that would occur after mitigation measures are implemented. Significant and unavoidable impacts are identified as appropriate in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(b). Significant and unavoidable impacts are also summarized in Chapter 5, “Other CEQA Sections.” The full references associated with all references cited in this PEIR are presented in Chapter 6, “References,” organized by chapter or section number.