EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The staffs of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission or FERC), the California State Lands Commission (CSLC), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepared this draft environmental impact statement/environmental impact report (EIS/EIR) and draft land use plan amendment (plan amendment) for the North Baja Pipeline Project to fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing NEPA (Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR], Parts 1500-1508); the FERC's implementing regulations (Title 18 CFR, Section 380); the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)(Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.); the CEQA implementing guidelines (California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.); and the Federal Land Management and Policy Act. The purpose of this document is to inform the public and the permitting agencies about the potential adverse and beneficial environmental impacts of the proposed project and its alternatives, and recommend mitigation measures that would reduce the significant adverse impacts to the maximum extent possible, and, where feasible, to a less than significant level.

The BLM is participating as a cooperating agency in the preparation of this document because the project would cross Federal land under the jurisdiction of the Palm Springs, El Centro, and Yuma Field Offices. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) is also a cooperating agency in the preparation of this document because lands administered by the BOR would be crossed by the project. This draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment will be used by the BLM to consider whether to grant a right-of-way for the installation of approximately 48.2 miles of pipeline and ancillary facilities across Federal lands managed by the BLM and the BOR. This draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment will also be used by the BLM to consider amending the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (as amended), which would be necessary for pipeline construction outside of designated utility corridors, as well as amending the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (Yuma District Plan), which would be necessary for pipeline construction across the Milpitas Wash Special Management Area (SMA). The BLM proposes to adopt this draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment per Title 40 CFR Part 1506.3 to meet its responsibilities under NEPA and its planning regulations per Title 43 CFR 1610. The BLM Arizona and California State Directors have approved the draft plan amendments for their respective planning areas. The BLM will present its Record of Decision for the North Baja Pipeline Project after the issuance of the final EIS/EIR and proposed plan amendment.

PROPOSED ACTION

North Baja Pipeline, LLC (NBP) proposes to construct and operate a new natural gas transmission pipeline system in Arizona and California. Facilities for this system would be constructed and operated under Sections 3 and 7(c) of the Natural Gas Act and Title 18 CFR, Parts 153 and 157, and would be used to provide natural gas service to customers in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. The new system would have the capacity to transport 500 million cubic feet per day (MMcfd) of natural gas from a proposed interconnect with an existing El Paso Natural Gas Company (El Paso) pipeline in Ehrenberg, Arizona to the United States/Mexico border where it would interconnect with a new pipeline, Gasoducto Bajanorte, to be constructed by Sempra Energy Mexico.

The North Baja Pipeline Project would involve the construction and operation of about 79.9 miles of 36- and 30-inch-diameter pipeline, a new 18,810 to 21,600-horsepower (hp) compressor station, two new meter stations, and related facilities. Specifically, NBP proposes to construct and operate the following facilities:

- 0.1 mile of 36-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline (interconnect pipeline) extending from a tie-in with El Paso to NBP's Ehrenberg Compressor Station in La Paz County, Arizona;

- 11.7 miles of 36-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline (mainline pipeline) extending from milepost (MP) 0.0 at the Ehrenberg Compressor Station in La Paz County, Arizona to MP 11.7 in Riverside County, California;

- 68.1 miles of 30-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline (mainline pipeline) extending from MP 11.7 in Riverside County, California through Imperial County, California to MP 79.8 at the interconnection at the international border between the United States and Mexico;

- a new compressor station (Ehrenberg Compressor Station) consisting of three gas-fired centrifugal compressor units for a total hp ranging from 18,810 to 21,600 (with one additional spare unit) at the El Paso interconnect in La Paz County, Arizona;

- two meter stations, one at the interconnect with El Paso at the Ehrenberg Compressor Station site (Ehrenberg Meter Station) and one in Imperial County, California near the interconnect at the international border (Ogilby Meter Station);

- a pig launcher facility at the Ehrenberg Compressor Station site; a pig receiver facility at the Ogilby Meter Station site; and a separate pig launcher/receiver facility (Rannells Trap) in Riverside County, California; and

- seven mainline valves, one each at the Ehrenberg Compressor Station site, Rannells Trap, and Ogilby Meter Station, and another four spaced as required along the proposed pipeline route.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AREAS OF CONCERN

On December 12, 2000, the FERC and the CSLC issued a *Notice of Intent/Preparation to Prepare a Joint Environmental Impact Statement/Report for the Proposed North Baja Pipeline Project, Request for Comments on Environmental Issues, and Notice of Public Scoping Meetings and Site Visit* (NOI/NOP). The NOI/NOP opened the scoping period and briefly described the project, provided a preliminary list of EIS/EIR issues, announced that the BLM would be using the EIS/EIR to consider an amendment to the CDCA Plan, invited written comments from the public on NBP's proposal, and listed the date and location of two public meetings to be held in communities near the proposed project area. The NOI/NOP was sent to 747 interested parties, including Federal, state, and local agencies; elected officials; environmental and public interest groups; Indian tribes; affected landowners; local libraries, newspapers, and television stations; and other interested parties. The two public meetings were held to provide an opportunity for the general public to learn more about the proposed project and participate in our analysis by commenting on the issues to be included in the EIS/EIR. The first meeting was in El Centro, California on January 10, 2001; the second meeting was in Blythe, California on January 11, 2001.

On May 22, 2001, the FERC and the CSLC issued a supplement to the December 12, 2000 NOI/NOP that announced the BLM would be using the EIS/EIR to consider an amendment to the Yuma District Plan and requested environmental comments on that issue. A separate notice of the BLM's consideration of the CDCA and Yuma District Plan amendments was issued by the BLM on June 5, 2001.

Environmental scoping comments raised issues related to the alternatives analysis, geologic hazards, water and wetland resources, vegetation, wildlife, special status species, biodiversity, weed control, cultural resources, socioeconomics, transportation, agricultural practices, air quality, cumulative impact, and pipeline safety. These concerns as well as issues independently identified by us[1/] are addressed in this draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment.

This draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment was filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, submitted to the California State Clearinghouse, and mailed to agencies and individuals on the project mailing list. A formal notice that the draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment is available for review and comment has been published in the Federal Register, posted in the appropriate county offices in California, and mailed to individuals on the project mailing list that did not request the draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment. The public will have 90 days to review and comment on this draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment. All comments received on the draft EIS/EIR and draft plan amendment will be addressed in the final EIS/EIR and proposed plan amendment.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

We have analyzed the environmental issues associated with construction and operation of the North Baja Pipeline Project. Based on information provided by NBP and data developed from data requests; field investigations; literature research; alternatives analysis; comments from Federal, state, and local agencies; and input from public groups and organizations, we have determined that the project would result in certain adverse environmental impacts. As part of our analysis, we have developed specific mitigation measures that we believe are appropriate and reasonable for the construction and operation of the project. Most of the adverse impact would occur during the construction phase of the project but would be reduced to less than significant levels by mitigation. A table listing the anticipated impacts of the project and measures that would be implemented to mitigate those impacts is included in section 7.0. The environmental effects of constructing and operating the project as proposed are summarized below.

Geology

Since unconsolidated to poorly consolidated alluvial deposits underlie most areas that would be crossed by the proposed pipeline facilities, blasting and/or an excavator with a hydraulic hammering attachment would likely only be needed in a few areas. No adverse impact on the current development or future expansion of mineral resources is anticipated.

Geologic hazards such as seismicity, soil liquefaction, subsidence, and landslides could threaten the integrity of the pipeline facilities. For the most part these risks are minimal. NBP would construct and test the pipeline facilities to meet or exceed U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) construction and safety standards outlined in 49 CFR Part 192, *Transportation of Natural and Other Gas by Pipeline: Minimum Federal Safety Standards*.

Within the Palo Verde Valley and in the vicinity of the All American Canal, the North Baja pipeline route crosses soils having liquefaction hazard potential. For these two areas and any other area where liquefaction hazard potential exists, we have recommended that NBP evaluate potential liquefaction hazards along the pipeline route that would place people and the pipeline at significant risk and then implement measures to eliminate or reduce this risk.

1/ "We," "us," and "our" refer to the environmental staff of the FERC's Office of Energy Projects and the CSLC staff.

The pipeline route crosses several rock formations that have the potential to contain significant paleontological resources where construction activities could directly and/or indirectly damage, disturb, or result in the loss of these resources. Based on literature and museum archival review and field survey, the paleontological sensitivity for rock formations crossed by the pipeline route was determined. NBP would retain a qualified field paleontologist to prepare a mitigation plan and monitor construction activities in areas categorized as having a high potential for fossils. We have recommended that NBP submit this mitigation and monitoring plan to the FERC and the CSLC for review and written approval before construction.

Soils

Construction of the pipeline and aboveground facilities could expose soils to erosional forces, compact soils, affect soil fertility, and facilitate the dispersal and establishment of weeds. NBP proposes to mitigate these potential impacts by implementing a *Construction Mitigation and Restoration Plan* (CM&R Plan) that was developed in consultation with the appropriate land management agencies and a *Spill Prevention, Containment, and Control Plan for Hazardous Materials and Wastes* (SPCC Plan). Construction of the Ehrenberg Compressor Station would result in the permanent loss of about 12.4 acres of land that has soils important for agricultural use. This loss would equal less than 0.1 percent of the agricultural lands in the Palo Verde Valley. Additionally, about 54.9 acres of soil identified as prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance would be disturbed during construction. These areas would be monitored for at least 2 years following construction to ensure successful restoration of agricultural soils.

Water Resources

For the majority of the project, groundwater levels are generally well below the land surface that would be affected by construction activities. Shallow aquifers underlying a portion of the construction area (*e.g.*, the Palo Verde Valley and portions of the route near the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge) could experience minor impact from changes in overland flow and recharge caused by clearing and grading of the construction right-of-way. Although activities associated with construction of the proposed pipeline and aboveground facilities could affect groundwater resources, most potential impacts would be avoided or minimized by the use of both standard and specialized construction techniques. NBP has prepared an SPCC Plan that includes preventive and mitigative measures that would be used during construction to minimize the potential for a hazardous waste spill to contaminate groundwater resources.

The North Baja pipeline route crosses the Colorado River, 579 dry desert washes (ranging in width from 1 to 250 feet), and 31 manmade irrigation canals and drains (including the All American Canal). Impacts on the two major waterbodies crossed by the project, the Colorado River and the All American Canal, would be avoided through the use of the directional drill crossing method. Similarly, NBP would dry cross all but one of the canals and drains either by boring underneath the culverts along 18th Avenue in Blythe, California or by installing the pipeline between the drain culvert and the road. Rannells Drain would be the only irrigation canal or drain crossed by the use of the open-cut crossing technique. NBP would minimize project-related disturbances to all waterbodies crossed by the pipeline route by adhering to its CM&R Plan.

Dry washes in the project area would generally be crossed using typical cross-country construction methods. Impacts on dry washes would be limited to temporary alteration of beds and banks, loss of wildlife habitat, and possibly increased sediment load during initial storm events following construction. As part of its Streambed Alteration Agreement with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), NBP would provide offsite, compensatory mitigation for disturbances to wildlife habitats located between the banks of dry desert washes.

Wetlands

Construction activities would temporarily disturb a total of 3.5 acres in four scrub-shrub and emergent wetlands. We believe that adherence to NBP's CM&R Plan and its compliance with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 permit conditions would adequately protect wetland resources crossed by the pipeline route.

Vegetation

Construction activities would result in disturbances of about 747.4 acres of vegetated land. This includes 574.4 acres of Sonoran creosote bush scrub, 96.9 acres of desert wash woodland, 68.7 acres of agricultural lands, and 7.4 acres of tamarisk and wetland communities. Although vegetation disturbed in agricultural areas or wetlands is expected to regrow rapidly, the removal of desert vegetation would have a local but longer-term impact. The arid environment characteristic of these vegetation habitats is not conducive to plant growth and would slow the regeneration of vegetation following construction. Moreover, because of the dryness of the area, regeneration by actively seeding or planting is typically ineffective. Natural regeneration of disturbed areas would take years and in some cases could take more than a century.

To aid in the natural revegetation process, NBP developed its CM&R Plan that includes measures specifically designed for minimizing and restoring disturbances to native vegetation. One of these measures includes NBP's proposal to salvage larger species of cactus (primarily *Opuntia*) and ocotillo from the construction right-of-way before ground-disturbing activities. NBP would store and then replant these cactus and ocotillo after pipeline installation. Sites for replanting cactus and ocotillo would be selected to assist in off-highway vehicle (OHV) control. NBP would annually monitor areas of desert vegetation disturbed by construction for 5 years after construction is completed.

The removal of existing vegetation and the disturbance of soils during construction could create optimal conditions for the invasion and establishment of exotic-nuisance species. NBP's CM&R Plan includes measures to minimize the spread of invasive exotic species. These measures were developed in consultation with appropriate natural resource agencies. Additionally, NBP proposes to conduct surveys for non-native plant species after construction is complete to determine locations of weed infestations attributable to the project. NBP would conduct these surveys and implement weed control measures twice a year for 2 years after construction is complete. NBP would also implement weed control measures as part of routine maintenance and operation of the pipeline.

Wildlife and Aquatic Resources

The primary impact of the project on wildlife habitat would be the cutting, clearing, and/or removal of existing vegetation within the construction work area. Construction through agricultural areas would have the least impact. The vegetation growing in these areas is regularly disturbed, receives ample water through irrigation, and would quickly reestablish on the right-of-way following replanting by the farmers. The removal of desert vegetation would have a local, but longer-term impact. In some areas it may take over 100 years for even small trees to regrow in desert dry wash woodland disturbed by pipeline construction. The relatively slow regeneration of forested communities within the temporary right-of-way would result in the long-term loss of habitat for those species that utilize these communities. NBP's CM&R Plan includes measures to avoid or minimize impacts on wildlife habitats as well as facilitate the recovery of native vegetation communities. NBP's proposed conservation measures to minimize or avoid impacts on special status species would also serve to avoid, minimize, or compensate for impacts on general wildlife and their habitats.

Pipeline construction or operation would not directly affect aquatic resources. An inadvertent chemical or fuel spill in or near a waterbody could release contaminants, which could affect fish through changes in food sources or by contaminating the water resources. NBP's adherence to the CM&R Plan and the SPCC Plan would reduce the potential for indirect adverse impacts on aquatic resources.

Special Status Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) identified 11 federally listed or proposed endangered or threatened species that could potentially occur in the general vicinity of the North Baja Pipeline Project. Based on our analysis of information regarding these species, we have determined that, with implementation of NBP's proposed minimization and conservation measures and its CM&R Plan, the project would have no effect on two species (brown pelican, desert pupfish), would not likely adversely affect seven species (bald eagle, southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, bonytail chub, Gila topminnow, razorback sucker, and Peirson's milkvetch), and would not jeopardize one species (mountain plover). We believe that the proposed project is likely to adversely affect the desert tortoise and its designated critical habitat. However, the proposed action as described would not make any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources that would foreclose the formulation or implementation of any reasonable or prudent alternatives needed to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of listed species. We have requested the FWS issue a Biological Opinion (BO) regarding whether the project would jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise. This draft EIS/EIR also serves as the Biological Assessment that is necessary for the FWS to develop a BO and that is required to comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Copies of this draft EIS/EIR have been sent to the FWS along with a letter requesting formal consultation.

Additionally, 48 other special status species were identified by the BLM, the CDFG, and the Arizona Department of Game and Fish as potentially occurring in the general vicinity of the project. Based on the results of habitat evaluations and species-specific surveys provided by NBP, 27 special status species potentially occur in the area that would be impacted by construction of the project. NBP developed a series of general and species-specific conservation measures that would allow the project to avoid, minimize, or compensate for project impacts on these species.

Land Use, Transportation, Special Management Areas, Recreation, and Visual Resources

Construction of the pipeline and aboveground facilities would temporarily affect about 959.6 acres of land. Of this, about 81 percent would be open desert, 7 percent would be transportation features, 7 percent would be agricultural land, 5 percent would be industrial/commercial lands, and <1 percent would be open water. Most of this land would be allowed to return to previous uses after construction is completed, although about 13.6 acres (primarily agricultural lands) would be replaced by aboveground facilities.

There are 18 residences and 2 businesses located within 100 feet of the construction work areas for the North Baja Pipeline Project. These 20 establishments are located along 18th Avenue in Blythe, California where NBP proposes to install the pipeline in the paved road or abutting road shoulders. Temporary impact during construction of the pipeline facilities in residential areas could include: inconvenience caused by noise and dust generated by construction equipment and traffic, and by trenching of roads or driveways; increased localized traffic; ground disturbance of lawns; removal of trees, landscape shrubs, or other vegetative screening between residences and adjacent rights-of-way; and potential damage to existing septic systems or wells. NBP has prepared site-specific residential construction plans and mitigation measures to minimize impact on residents of 18th Avenue. NBP would also prepare a traffic management plan in consultation with the County of Riverside Transportation Department to minimize disruptions to the flow of traffic along 18th Avenue.

The pipeline route would cross two special management areas administered by the BLM; the CDCA and the Milpitas Wash SMA. A CDCA Plan amendment would be needed for BLM-managed land crossed outside of a designated utility corridor within the CDCA. An amendment to the Yuma District Plan would be needed to cross BLM-managed land within the Milpitas Wash SMA. The amendments would only accommodate the North Baja Pipeline Project and would not amend the majority of the decisions, goals, and objectives established in either the CDCA Plan or the Yuma District Plan.

The project facilities would be located in an area that experiences heavy OHV use primarily during the winter months. NBP has stated that it has no plans to maintain an improved permanent right-of-way for operation and maintenance of the pipeline facilities. However, NBP would have to maintain access to all portions of the permanent right-of-way by four-wheel drive vehicles in order to conduct emergency and periodic maintenance. The level of routine maintenance required by NBP should not increase the accessibility the right-of-way provides for OHV use into previously restricted, inaccessible, or environmentally sensitive areas. NBP has also agreed to install blocking measures to further reduce the potential for OHV use of the right-of-way.

Visual impacts of the project would be greatest where blasting is necessary to install the pipeline, at aerial crossings, and at the aboveground facility sites. To reduce the contrast between the pipeline right-of-way and landscape, NBP would chemically treat scars created by blasting where they would have a high visibility to a moderate to high number of viewers and paint the pipeline to match the surrounding landscape at all aerial crossings. The visual impact of the Ehrenberg Compressor Station would be low due to its distance from existing residences and the intervening vegetation along the Colorado River. The facility would also be seen in the context of several nearby industrial and commercial facilities. The majority of the facilities at the Rannells Trap would be located below ground, which would limit the visibility of this facility and minimize effects on the surrounding visual landscape. The Ogilby Meter Station would have a long-term impact on travelers using Interstate 8 (I-8). However, it would be seen in the context of existing landscape features, which include other manmade structures such as I-8 and high voltage electric lines. To minimize visibility, NBP would paint the meter station building so that it would blend with the surrounding landscape. Four MLVs would be located along the right-of-way and would have a minor effect on the surrounding visual landscape. Most of the facilities would be located below ground and the aboveground structures would be painted to blend with the surrounding landscape.

Socioeconomics

Construction and operation of the project would have a minor positive effect on local tax revenue and economies. The aboveground facilities and four permanent staff would permanently contribute to the area's property and sales tax revenues.

Cultural Resources

The FERC and the BLM are responsible for complying with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), which requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties and affords the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) an opportunity to comment. As the lead Federal agency, the FERC is responsible for officially determining National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility and project effects in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and the BLM. If it is determined that the proposed project would adversely affect any cultural resources listed or eligible for listing on the NRHP, site-specific treatment plans would be required.

The CSLC is responsible under CEQA for the protection of historic properties on its lands, and historic properties that may be impacted by projects for which it is the lead agency. The CSLC is responsible for identifying any part of a proposed project that may affect a historic property and proposed mitigation to eliminate or lessen that impact.

One hundred forty-four cultural resources were identified during identification-level archaeological surveys. One of these resources is the Bradshaw Trail. The BLM has expressed concern regarding the Bradshaw Trail because it is a National Back Country Byway. While NBP's consultants have recommended the trail as potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP, the location that would be crossed by the North Baja pipeline has been previously disturbed and NBP's consultants do not recommend additional work. Of the remaining 143 resources located during identification-level surveys, NBP's consultants recommended that 72 be evaluated for their eligibility for listing on the NRHP. Evaluations are currently underway.

NBP contacted 23 Native American groups which had been identified by the SHPO or another knowledgeable party as having a potential cultural resources concern such as traditional territories in or close to the project area of potential effect. Four tribes have submitted comments on the project. NBP has indicated that it intends to continue its consultations with Native American groups throughout the environmental review and construction process. We believe NBP's continued cooperation with these tribes should address the tribal issues associated with the proposed project.

At this time we have not completed the process of complying with Section 106 of the NHPA. NBP has not yet identified all historic properties within the area of potential effect and additional investigations need to be completed at identified cultural resources. To ensure that the FERC's responsibilities under the NHPA and its implementing regulations are met, we have recommended that NBP defer construction and use of its facilities and any staging, storage, or temporary work areas and new or to-be-improved access roads until it files the remaining cultural resources reports, all testing and evaluation reports, and any necessary treatment plans, and files the comments of the appropriate parties on all reports and plans.

Air Quality and Noise

None of the project-related emissions during construction or operation are expected to result in violation of Federal or state air quality standards, nor would they interfere with attaining Federal or state air quality standards.

Noise attributable to the full-load operation of the Ehrenberg Compressor Station could exceed a day-night equivalent sound level (L_{dn}) of 55 decibels of the A-weighted scale (dBA) at nearby noise-sensitive areas. We have recommended that NBP conduct noise surveys at the Ehrenberg Compressor Station and file the results with the FERC and the CSLC within 60 days of placing the compressor station in service. If the noise attributable to the full-load operation of the compressor station exceeds an L_{dn} of 55 dBA at any nearby noise-sensitive areas, additional noise controls would be installed within 1 year of the in-service date.

Reliability and Safety

The North Baja Pipeline Project would be constructed to meet or exceed all applicable safety standards. This includes the DOT's construction and safety standards outlined in 49 CFR Part 192, *Transportation of Natural and Other Gas by Pipeline: Minimum Federal Safety Standards.* While the primary focus of these standards is prevention of accidents, NBP would also be required to develop an emergency response plan that would be coordinated and tested (through drills and exercises) with local fire/police departments and emergency management agencies.

Cumulative and Growth-inducing Impacts

When the impacts of the North Baja Pipeline Project are considered additively with the impacts of other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects, there is some potential for cumulative effect on resources such as vegetation and wildlife (including special status species), land use, recreation, visual resources, socioeconomics, cultural resources, air quality, and noise. For the North Baja Pipeline Project, mitigation has been developed or recommended to minimize, avoid, or compensate for adverse impacts on each of these resources. Also, the duration of the majority of the impact would be limited to the relatively short construction period, and impacts from this project and other projects are not expected to interact synergistically. Consequently, we do not anticipate that the North Baja Pipeline Project would contribute significantly to a cumulative effect on the region's environment.

NBP anticipates adding about four permanent staff to handle project operations, with additional support provided as needed by locally based contractors. This small staff would have little or no impact on the population in the region.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

We considered the No Action or Postponed Action Alternative. We concluded that while the No Action or Postponed Action Alternative would eliminate the environmental impacts identified in this EIS/EIR, NBP's proposed service area would be denied access to the 500 MMcfd of natural gas NBP proposes to transport. Consequently, the new and existing power plants would need to use alternative fuels or obtain natural gas from other sources. We did not find any alternative fuels to be feasible or preferable to the proposed project and we determined that the use of an alternative source of natural gas would require the construction of new facilities that would have their own set of specific impacts.

We evaluated alternatives involving the use of other existing pipeline systems. No system alternative was found to be both environmentally preferable to the proposed facilities and able to meet the project's objectives.

We evaluated 11 route alternatives in comparison with the corresponding segment of NBP's proposed route. Four of these alternatives would avoid 18th Avenue, three of these alternatives would place the pipeline within a designated utility corridor, and four alternatives would change the route near the southern terminus (border alternatives). We eliminated the four border alternatives from further consideration and are seeking additional information and comments on the 18th Avenue and designated utility corridor alternatives for consideration in the final EIS/EIR and proposed plan amendment.

We evaluated five route variations in comparison with the corresponding segment of NBP's proposed route. Three of these route variations would avoid the steep terrain in the Palo Verde Mountains foothills and reduce the crossing of the Milpitas Wash SMA. The two remaining route variations would maximize use of existing rights-of-way and increase distance from the Imperial Sand Dunes. We are seeking additional information and comments on these five route variations for consideration in the final EIS/EIR and proposed plan amendment.

We evaluated one alternative site for the Ehrenberg Compressor Station and one alternative site for the Ogilby Meter Station. We determined that neither alternative site offers a clear environmental advantage over the respective proposed site.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

We have concluded that if the project is constructed and operated in accordance with NBP's proposed mitigation and our recommendations, it would be an environmentally acceptable action. Although many factors were considered in our determination, the principal reasons are:

- most of the impact from the project would occur during construction of the project and be temporary or short term;
- about 81 percent of the proposed pipeline route would be in or adjacent to various existing rights-of-way and/or within a designated utility corridor;
- NBP would implement its CM&R Plan to protect natural resources during construction and operation of the project;
- use of the directional drill method would avoid disturbances to the bed and banks of the Colorado River and the All American Canal, the only major waterbodies crossed by the project; and
- the appropriate consultations with the FWS, the SHPOs, the BLM, the BOR, and the ACHP, if required, and any appropriate compliance actions resulting from these consultations, would be completed before NBP would be allowed to begin construction in any given area.

We are responsible for identifying any significant environmental impact so that it can be considered by our respective Commissions in deciding whether to approve the project. As part of the analysis, specific mitigation measures were developed that we believe would be appropriate and reasonable because they would significantly reduce the environmental impact that would result from construction of the project. The additional studies, plans, surveys, or field investigations that are recommended typically result in additional site-specific mitigation and further reduction of impact. Our present determination of environmental acceptability would, therefore, be unaffected by the outcome of the recommended studies. We will recommend that all mitigation measures in this EIS/EIR be attached as conditions to any Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity issued by the FERC and to any approval issued by the CSLC. The FERC and CSLC would ensure compliance with the mitigation measures included in this EIR/EIR through the adoption of an environmental inspection and mitigation monitoring program for the project.