

SECTION 3.11

Aesthetics

3.11 Aesthetics

3.11.1 Introduction and Summary

This section presents the environmental setting and impacts related to aesthetic resources in the four geographic subregions. The aesthetic characteristics of an area are determined by the manner in which the resources contained in that area are perceived. Baseline aesthetic conditions are primarily described in terms of existing visual resources.

Aesthetics discussions related to the Salton Sea also include a description of the olfactory character (odors) of that specific geographic subregion, which are briefly described below.

Visual resources along the LCR include volcanic mountain ranges and hills; distinctive sand dunes; broad areas of the Joshua tree, alkali scrub, and cholla communities; and elevated river terraces (California Department of Water Resources [DWR] 1994). Views of the LCR occur at various locations along I-95.

The IID water service area is characterized visually by substantial agricultural production and associated heavy machinery. Beyond the IID water service area, deserts, sand dunes, mountains, and the Salton Sea characterize the visual resources.

Visual resources in the area of the Salton Sea geographic subregion include various landforms, vegetation, man-made structures, and the Sea itself. The Salton Sea covers approximately 211,000 acres (330 square miles) and is immediately surrounded by a sparsely vegetated desert landscape, which gives way to rocky, sandy hills (SSA and Reclamation 2000). The presence of odors at the Salton Sea currently affects both visitor numbers and resident populations in the area. Factors contributing to odors at the Salton Sea include water quality, high nutrient levels, and biological factors, such as fish and bird die-offs.

Highly varied scenic resources characterize the SDCWA service area. These include deserts, snow-capped peaks, rugged mountains, coastal foothills, pine forests, citrus and avocado orchards, and the Pacific Ocean, as well as historical and contemporary urban structures.

Table 3.11-1 presents a summary of potential impacts on the aesthetic resources in the subregions.

3.11.2 Regulatory Framework

3.11.2.1 State and Local Regulations and Standards

State Scenic Highway Program (*Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq.*). The purpose of this program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways.

TABLE 3.11-1
Summary of Aesthetics Impacts

Proposed Project: 300 KAFY All Conservation Measures	Alternative 1: No Project	Alternative 2: 130 KAFY On-farm Irrigation System Improvements Only	Alternative 3: 230 KAFY All Conservation Measures	Alternative 4: 300 KAFY Following Only
LOWER COLORADO RIVER				
No impact.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impact.	No impact.	No impact.
IID WATER SERVICE AREA AND AAC				
No impact.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impact.	No impact.	No impact.
SALTON SEA				
A-1: Impacts on aesthetics would occur from a drop in the level of the Salton Sea. Less than significant impact.	Drop in the level of the Salton Sea.	A2-A-1: Impacts on aesthetics from a drop in the level of the Salton Sea. Less than significant impact with mitigation.	A3-A-1: Impacts on aesthetics from a drop in the level of the Salton Sea. Less than significant impact with mitigation.	A4-A-1: Impacts on aesthetics from a drop in the level of the Salton Sea. Less than significant impact.
A-2: Impacts on aesthetics from odors. Less than significant impact.	Continuation of existing odors.	A2-A-2: Impacts on aesthetics from odors. Less than significant impact.	A3-A-2: Impacts on aesthetics from odors. Less than significant impact.	A4-A-2: Impacts on aesthetics from odors. Less than significant impact.
SDCWA SERVICE AREA				
No impact.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impact.	No impact.	No impact.

The County of Imperial General Plan, Conservation and Open Space Element 1997. The element contains the following standard for visual resources along scenic highways:

Appendix B: Standards for Scenic Highway Corridor Protection

“The value of the state’s Official Scenic Highways is recognized. The primary concern of this program is to reasonably control corridor appearance through land use regulations in the viewshed, so that the full scenic value of the area can be appreciated.”

3.11.3 Environmental Setting

3.11.3.1 Lower Colorado River

The LCR geographic subregion encompasses the southeastern corner of California, from Parker Dam south to Imperial Dam. Visual resources along the LCR include volcanic mountain ranges and hills, distinctive sand dunes, broad areas of the Joshua tree, alkali

scrub, and cholla communities, and elevated river terraces (DWR 1994). Views of the LCR occur at various locations along I-95. Picacho State Recreation Area also provides views of and access to the LCR.

3.11.3.2 IID Water Service Area and AAC

The IID water service area is characterized visually by substantial agricultural production. Approximately 20 percent of the nearly 3 million acres of Imperial County land is irrigated for this purpose (County of Imperial 1997b). Beyond the IID water service area, deserts, sand dunes, mountains, and the Salton Sea characterize the visual resources.

Regional deserts include the Yuha Desert, located in the southeastern portion of Imperial County. The Yuha Desert contains unique geologic features, including sand chimneys and painted gorge formations. These features contribute to the scenic quality of the region and provide a stark contrast to the region's foothills and mountains. Additional scenic deserts in the region include the East Mesa area, bordered on the east by the Algodones Sand Dunes; the Lower Borrego Valley, east of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in the vicinity of SR 78; the West Mesa area, east of the Fish Creek Mountains and west of Superstition Mountain; and Pilot Knob Mesa, south of I-8 near Sidewinder Road (County of Imperial 1997b). Figure 3.11-1 illustrates the locations of these scenic deserts. The Algodones Sand Dunes are located between East Mesa and Pilot Knob Mesa, covering an area of approximately 160 square miles. The shifting sands of the dunes extend in a northwest to southeast direction, stretching 40 miles wide, and are currently bisected by SR 78 between the towns of Brawley and Glamis, and by I-8 between El Centro and Yuma, Arizona. An important part of the early development of Imperial County, the dunes represent a unique visual resource within the county (County of Imperial 1997b).

Various mountains and foothills within the region also add to the visual scenery in the Imperial Valley. The eastern foothills of the Peninsular Range, including the Jacumba, Coyote, Fish Creek, and Santa Rosa Mountains, are located to the west of the IID water service area. To the northeast, the Chocolate Mountains stretch in a northwest to southeast direction between Riverside County and the Colorado River. SR 78 traverses these rugged, undeveloped mountains between Glamis and the Palo Verde area. With an elevation of 2,700 feet, the Chocolate Mountains can be viewed from locations throughout the valley. Additional landmarks visible within the Imperial Valley include Superstition Mountain, with an elevation of 759 feet, and Mt. Signal, located west of the city of Calexico and north of the International Boundary with Mexico, on the eastern edge of the Yuha Desert (County of Imperial 1997b).

Several public highways within the IID water service area have been selected as eligible for state scenic highway designation. Views afforded by sections of I-8, SR 78, and SR 111 include rock and boulder scenery and plant life variations, the Chocolate Mountains, and the Salton Sea (County of Imperial 1997b).

3.11.3.3 Salton Sea

VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources in the area of the Salton Sea geographic subregion include various landforms, vegetation, man-made structures, and the Sea itself. The Salton Sea covers

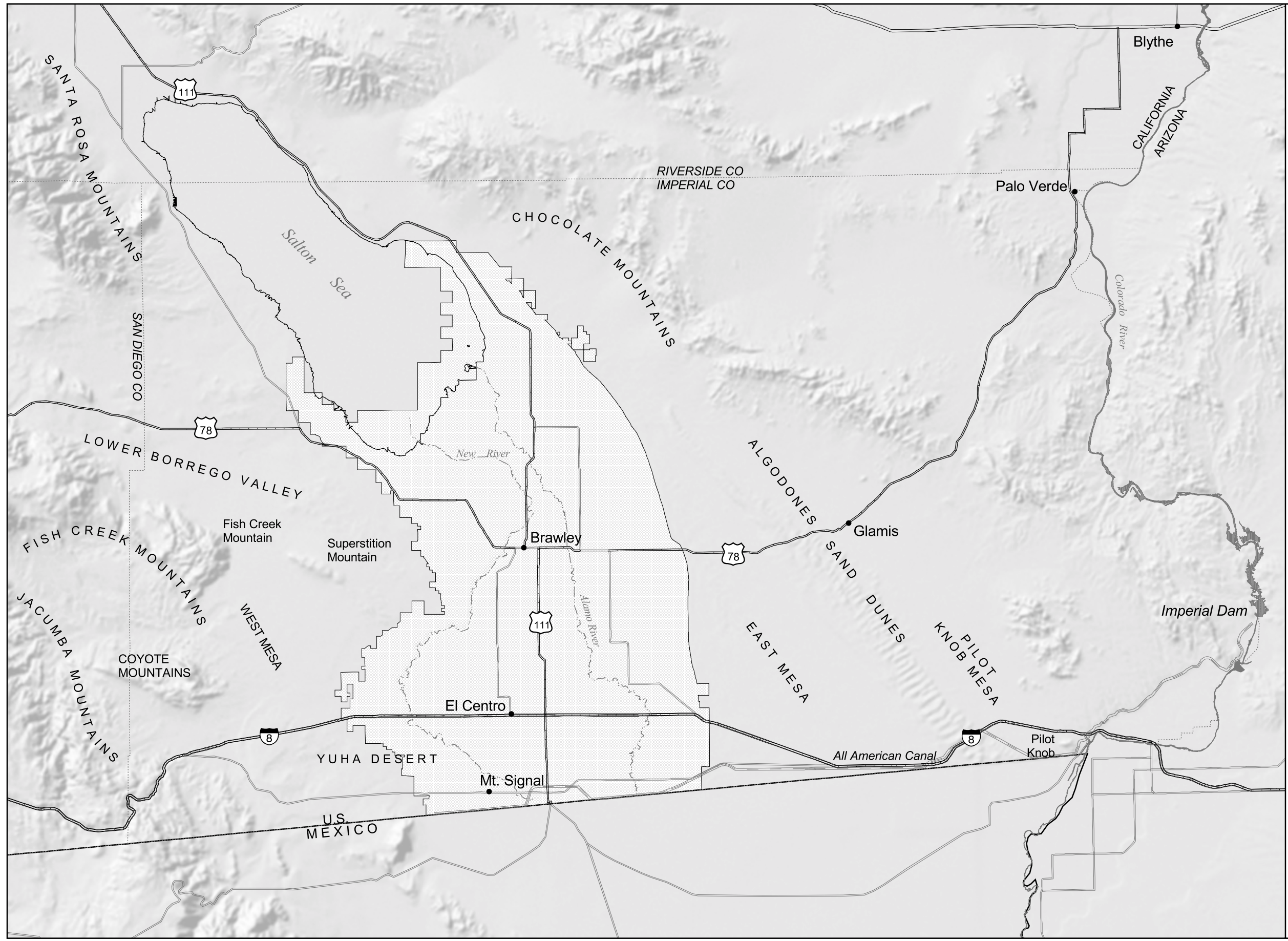
approximately 211,000 acres (330 square miles) and is immediately surrounded by a sparsely vegetated desert landscape, which gives way to rocky, sandy hills (SSA and Reclamation 2000). Primary views of the Salton Sea and surrounding landscape occur along SR 111 and SR 86, from nearby residential and commercial areas, including the communities of North Shore, Bombay Beach, Niland, Salton City, Salton Sea Beach, and Desert Shores, and from public parks and recreation areas, including the Salton Sea State Recreation Area developed along 20 miles of the northeastern shoreline by DPR, and the Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR at the southern end of the Sea. Recreation in the vicinity of the Salton Sea is discussed in Section 3.6, Recreation.









The Salton Sea viewshed, the general area from which the Sea is visible, contains several distinct sub-areas or visual units that are described briefly below. Figure 3.11-2 shows the generalized viewshed within a 5-mile radius of the Sea's shoreline. Four visual units are also delineated on this figure. Viewpoint locations are shown in Figure 3.11-3, and photographs depicting representative views are included as Figures 3.11-4a through 3.11-4h.

Eight key viewpoints (KVPs) have also been identified for purposes of documenting currently existing visual conditions at the Salton Sea. Table 3.11-2 summarizes the existing visual characteristics at the KVPs in terms of landscape features, current viewing distance to the Sea's shoreline, and primary potentially affected viewer groups. Figures 3.11-4a through 3.11-4h include photographs taken from each of the KVPs.

North Shore. The area bordering the Salton Sea's north shore is a gently sloping alluvial plain dominated by intensive, high-value agriculture. The area is characterized by small plots of land containing crops of differing color, height, texture, and spacing, such as date palms and vineyards. The Orocopia Mountains are northeast of the Sea (SSA and Reclamation 2000). The three highways approaching from the north—SR 86, SR 195, and SR 111—provide the primary public views of the Sea in this area. In places where the Sea is visible from the roadway, the viewing distance varies between 1 and 2 miles (photos 2 and 4, Figure 3.11-4a). Other roads approaching from Mecca, north of the Sea, do not provide access to the shoreline (photo 1, Figure 3.11-4a). However, in the agricultural area in the northwest corner of the Sea, some local roads connecting to SR 86 provide shoreline access (photo 3, Figure 3.11-4a). No recreation facilities are at this location.

West Shore. The west shore area includes SR 86 and the shoreline from south of Salton City to north of Desert Shores. The area includes most of the residential development around the Sea. Topography of this portion of the shore is a gradually sloping alluvial fan between the Sea and the boundary to Anza-Borrego State Park. Undeveloped residential lots appear on many maps, but are identified on the ground only by the roads and utilities servicing them. Views of the Chocolate Mountains across the Sea and the Santa Rosa Mountains to the west provide a dramatic landscape backdrop (SSA and Reclamation 2000). The communities of Salton City, Salton Sea Beach, and Desert Shores provide foreground views of the Salton Sea from marinas and other private recreational facilities along the western shore of the Sea (photos 6-10, Figure 3.11-4b-c). Commercial and residential development surrounding the



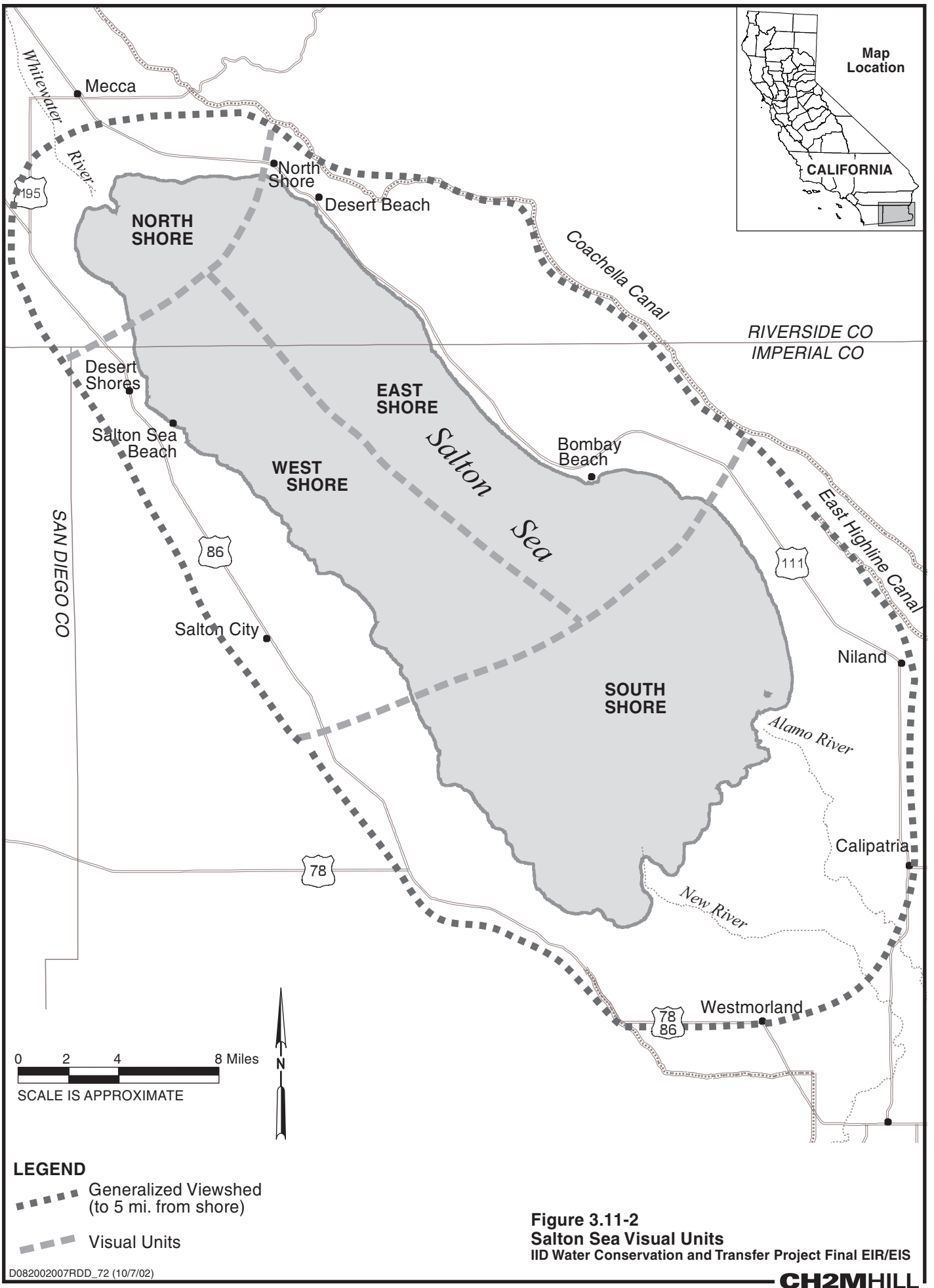
-  IID WATER SERVICE AREA
-  HIGHWAY ELIGIBLE FOR STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY DESIGNATION
-  INTERSTATE HIGHWAY
-  REGIONAL HIGHWAY
-  INTERNATIONAL BORDER
-  RIVER
-  COUNTY LINE
-  CITIES

Sources:
University of Redlands 1999; DOI 1999;
and Reclamation 1999



5 0 5 Miles
SCALE IS APPROXIMATE

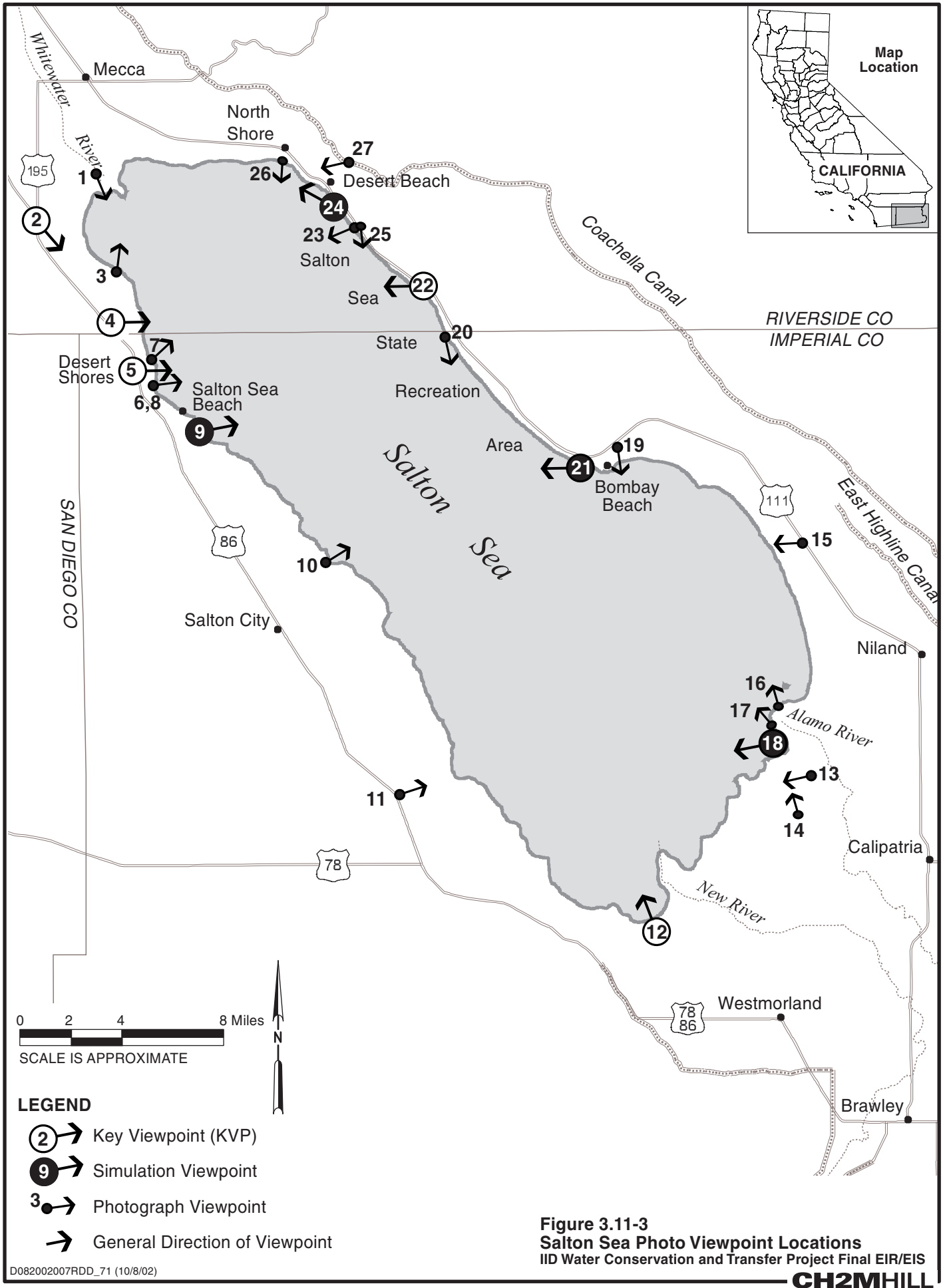
Figure 3.11-1
Scenic Deserts and Mountains
of Imperial County
IID Water Conservation and
Transfer Project Final EIR/EIS



0 2 4 8 Miles
SCALE IS APPROXIMATE

LEGEND
 - - - - - Generalized Viewshed (to 5 mi. from shore)
 - - - - - Visual Units

Figure 3.11-2
Salton Sea Visual Units
 IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project Final EIR/EIS

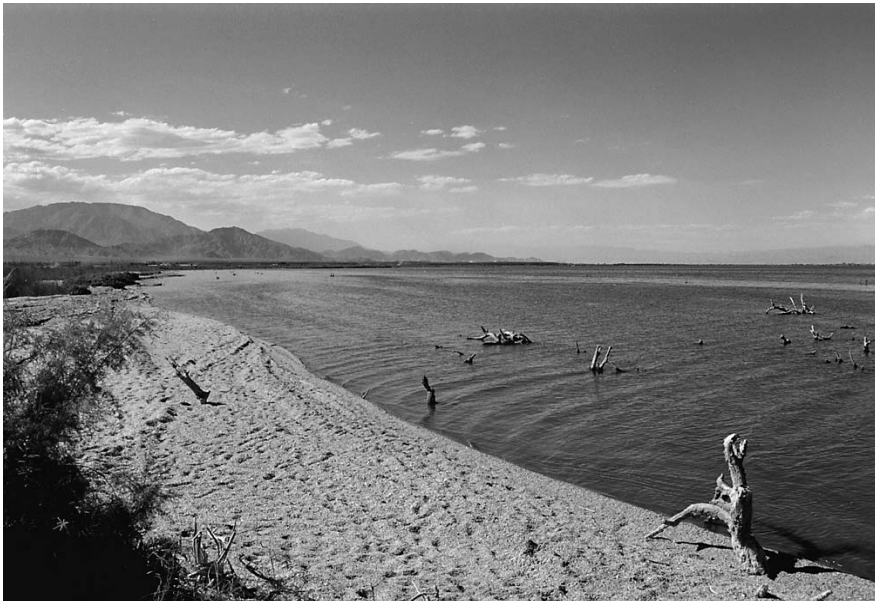




1. Lincoln Street looking south (private road).



2. SR 86 and 195 looking southeast. (KVP 1)



3. Johnson and 81st Street at shore looking north.



4. SR 86 looking east. (KVP 2)

Figure 3.11-4a
Visual Character Photos
IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project Final EIR/EIS
CH2MHILL



5. SR 86 at Desert Shores looking east. (KVP 3)



6. Desert Shores.



7. Rancho Marina at Desert Shores.



8. Rancho Marino boat launch.

Figure 3.11-4b
Visual Character Photos
IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project Final EIR/EIS
CH2MHILL