

2.14 Invasive Species

2.14.1 Regulatory Setting

On February 3, 1999, President William J. Clinton signed Executive Order (EO) 13112 requiring federal agencies to combat the introduction or spread of invasive species in the United States. The order defines invasive species as “any species, including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species, that is not native to that ecosystem whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.” Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance issued August 10, 1999 directs the use of the State’s invasive species list, maintained by the California Invasive Species Council, to define the invasive species that must be considered as part of the National Environmental Policy Act analysis for a proposed project.

2.14.2 Affected Environment

The information in this section is based on the *Natural Environment Study (Minimal Impacts)* (October 2018) prepared for the proposed project. The Biological Study Area (BSA) contains mostly developed infrastructure not limited to, but primarily businesses, residential streets, houses, a senior citizen community, parking lots, local streets, and Interstate 5.

The California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) maintains the California Invasive Plant Inventory. The inventory ranks each plant species as High, Moderate, or Limited based on its potential to negatively affect the ecology of California. Plants with a ranking of High have severe ecological impacts. Plants ranked as Moderate have a substantial, but not severe, ecological impact. Limited-ranked plants are invasive, but their ecological impacts are minor or unknown on a statewide level. Invasive plant species observed within the BSA and/or the project limits included, but are not limited to, field mustard (*Brassica rapa*) (Limited), iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*) (High), Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*) (Moderate), Peruvian pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) (Limited), and tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) (Moderate). Two invasive animal species were observed within the BSA. The house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Both of these birds were introduced to North America from Europe in the 19th century and are widespread throughout California. As introduced bird species, they are not protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or California Department of Fish and Wildlife Codes.

2.14.3 Environmental Consequences

2.14.3.1 Temporary Impacts

Build Alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 4 [including Design Option B])

Invasive plants have the potential to alter the natural ecology of an area by displacing native plants, blocking water conveyance channels, and increasing soil erosion, as well as changing the natural characteristics of streams and rivers.

During construction activities, grubbing and clearing of vegetation and soil may contain invasive plants or seeds. Equipment that comes in from other sites may also carry invasive plant material, which could spread onto the construction site and be spread into adjacent areas through wind, water, or animal dispersal.

With implementation of the measures in Section 2.14.4 below, the potential for the spread of invasive species within the project limits during construction would not be adverse.

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not result in any disturbances to biological resources and therefore would not result in any effects from invasive species.

2.14.3.2 Permanent Impacts

Build Alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 4 [including Design Option B])

There is potential for any of the Build Alternatives (including Design Option B) to inadvertently introduce additional invasive species into the corridor by seeds being transported by vehicles.

With implementation of the measures in section 2.14.4 below, potential permanent impacts of the Build Alternatives (including Design Option B) related to invasive species would not be adverse.

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not result in any disturbances to biological resources and therefore would not result in any adverse effects from invasive species.

2.14.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

BIO-5 Inspection and Clearing of Invasive Species. In compliance with the Executive Order on Invasive Species, EO 13112, and guidance from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the landscaping and erosion control included in the project will not use species listed as invasive. None of the species on the California list of invasive species will be used by the California Department of Transportation for erosion control or landscaping in revegetated areas. All equipment and materials will be inspected for the presence of invasive species and cleaned, if necessary. In areas of sensitivity, extra precautions will be taken if invasive species are found in or next to the construction areas. These include the inspection and cleaning of construction equipment and eradication strategies to be implemented should an invasion occur.

BIO-6 Invasive Species Control. Following the Executive Order and the OCTA NCCP/HCP agreement, invasive species will be removed from the project work area and contained during construction. The use of known invasive plant species (i.e., plant species listed in the California Invasive Plant Council [Cal-IPC] California Invasive Plant Inventory with a High or Moderate rating) will be prohibited for construction, revegetation and landscaping activities. Project measures will be included to ensure invasive plant material is not spread from the project site to other areas by disposal off site or by tracking seed on equipment, clothing, and shoes. Equipment/material imported from an area of invasive plants must be identified and measures implemented to prevent importation and spreading of nonnative plant material

within the project site. All construction equipment will be visually inspected and cleaned with water to remove dirt, seeds, vegetative material, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds of noxious weeds before entering and exiting the project site. Inspection and cleaning of construction equipment will be performed to minimize the importation of nonnative plant material. Eradication strategies (i.e., weed abatement programs) will be employed should an invasion occur during construction.

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