
SECTION 3 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The site is located in unincorporated land in the south-central portion of the County of Imperial (County), which comprises the southeastern corner of the State of California (State). Imperial County extends over 4,597 square miles, bordering on Mexico to the south, Riverside County to the north, San Diego County on the west, and the State of Arizona on the east. Imperial County is roughly superimposed over the Imperial Valley, which has a relatively level floor surrounded by the Chocolate Mountains to the east and the Laguna Mountains to the west. The international border with Mexico is located approximately 13 miles south of the site. The region experiences an arid desert climate, with temperatures ranging from lows in the mid 30's in January to highs of over 100 degrees in July and August, with little moisture (average annual rainfall: 2.92 inches). Suitable soil and an extensive canal irrigation system make agriculture the largest industry in the region, accounting for 48 percent of all employment within the County.

Within the County are three main urban areas: the incorporated cities of El Centro, Brawley, and Calexico. The project site is adjacent to the incorporated boundaries of the City of El Centro (City), which is the largest of these three in terms of population and area, at approximately 40,000 residents and approximately 10.75 square miles. The City is surrounded by thousands of acres of farmland, reflecting the historic importance of agricultural to its economy. The United States Navy has a military installation west of the City. There are two international border crossings nearby for commercial and noncommercial vehicles. The project site abuts the southern incorporated boundary of the City and is within the City's adopted Sphere of Influence boundaries.

As shown in Figure 3-1, the project site is a near-rectangular parcel of approximately 213 acres. It is comprised of flat agriculture land. On-site elevations range from approximately 67 to 72 feet above mean sea level (excluding the bottom of the Lotus Drain, which runs to approximately 59 feet above mean sea level). Agricultural production on the land currently consists of broccoli and alfalfa.

Two east-west dirt paths traverse the project site along the would-be alignments of Wake Avenue and Danenberg Drive. As shown in Figure 3-2, one rural, single-family residence and several associated structures, all of which are related to the past agricultural operations on the site, are located near the site's eastern boundary and north of the northern dirt road (Wake Avenue). These structures are within the project boundaries and are to be demolished as part of the project. Two additional rural, single-family residences are located along the site's eastern boundary and south of the southern dirt road (Dananberg Drive). These two residences are on separate parcels from the project site, are not a part of the project site, and are not planned for demolition as part of the project. The northern of these two residences is surrounded by several structures related to agricultural operations. Two such structures located west of the residence are within the project boundaries and would be demolished as part of the project.

The site is bordered by I-8 to the north, the Lotus Canal and Lotus Drain to the west, the Dahlia Canal and La Brucherie Road to the east, and active agricultural land to the south. The future extension of Horne Avenue (to be built as part of the project) provides the site's southern boundary.

The nearest I-8 on- and off-ramps are approximately 0.5 miles east of the site at Imperial Avenue. Land uses surrounding the site include Southwest High School and single-family residences to the north across I-8, agricultural land to the west across the operational Lotus Canal and Drain, existing single-family residences and agricultural land to the east across La Brucherie Road, and an active hay storage and feed lot area to the south. The agricultural land located east of the site is intended for eventual residential development. Surrounding land is also flat, although I-8 and the adjacent canals sit on higher elevations with engineered embankments.

Land immediately north of the site across I-8 is variably within and outside the incorporated limits of the City. The western border of Southwest High School represents the present western City boundary, and the existing single-family residential neighborhood west of the school (bound by Ross Road in the north, I-8 in the south, Southwest High School and residential development in the east, and Road 8017 in the west) is within unincorporated County land. Land further west of that neighborhood is in the early stages of planning for a single-family residential development known as "Miller Burson"; it is anticipated that this area will be annexed into the City upon approval of that project. Some residents of the existing unincorporated single-family residential development between Southwest High School and the Miller Burson property have expressed reservations about being annexed into the City, and this area will likely remain as unincorporated County land.

