C.1 Introduction to Environmental Analysis

C.1.1 Section Content and Organization

Section C of this EIR/EIS examines the environmental consequences associated with the proposed Project and alternatives to the proposed Project, including the No Project/Action alternative. Section C includes analyses of the 14 environmental issue areas listed below:

- Air Quality
- Cultural Resources
- Public Health and Safety
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Socioeconomics
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Biological Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Paleontology
- Forest Management Activities
- Land Use and Public Recreation
- Public Services
- Traffic and Transportation
- Visual Resources

Analysis within each issue area includes consideration of the proposed Project and alternatives, which are described fully in Section B of this EIR/EIS. The basic methodology used in this environmental analysis is described below.

Within each of the environmental issue areas listed above, discussion of project impacts is organized according the following major subheadings:

- Affected Environment
- Regulatory Framework (federal, State, local)
- Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Each environmental impact identified is associated with a specific significance criterion, which is used to evaluate the severity, or significance, of the impact. Potential mitigation measures are proposed for adverse impacts, where feasible. Cumulative impacts are discussed at the end of each issue area section and are summarized in Section E of this EIR/EIS. Growth-inducing impacts of the proposed Project are also discussed in Section E.

The purpose of identifying the potential environmental impacts and the associated mitigation measures is to provide information about the Project's environmental effects to decision makers and the public that can be used in deliberations about whether or not to approve the proposed Project or one of the alternatives. The information contained in this EIR/EIS will also be used by regulatory agencies that would need to issue to permits for the construction of the Project if approved by the Lead Agency decision makers.

C.1.2 Environmental Analysis Methodology

For the purpose of this EIR/EIS document, and pursuant to CEQA Guidelines (Section 15125[a]), the environmental setting used to determine the impacts associated with the proposed Project and alternatives is based on the environmental conditions that existed in the Project area in June 2005, at the time the Notice of Preparation was distributed and the Notice of Intent was published (see Section A.1). NEPA requires that the EIS shall succinctly describe the environment of the area(s) to be affected or created by the alternatives under consideration (40 CFR 1502.15). However, NEPA has no direct guidance regarding when the establishment of

a baseline for determining the significance of an impact when preparing an EIS should occur. Therefore, this document will use the CEQA environmental setting baseline identified above. The Applicant's proposed Project and alternatives to the proposed Project traverse areas with an assortment of land uses, including areas of the Angeles National Forest, undeveloped rural areas, agricultural areas, and suburban residential development in northern Los Angeles County.

This EIR/EIS evaluates the environmental consequences and potential impacts that would be caused by the proposed Project and the alternatives if approved and implemented. The impacts identified were compared with significance criteria and, based on these criteria, the impacts have been classified according to significance categories described in Section C.1.3, below. A comparative analysis of the impacts of the proposed Project and the alternatives is provided in Section D of this EIR/EIS.

The cumulative impacts of the proposed Project and alternatives were assessed by considering similar impacts of other projects in the vicinity that would have the potential to combine with the impacts of the proposed Project. The purpose of the cumulative impact analyses is to identify those Project impacts that might not be significant when considered alone, but contribute to a significant impact when viewed in conjunction with existing or potential future projects.

Mitigation is only required for significant impacts under CEQA; however, NEPA encourages mitigation for all of the impacts of a project. For this reason, some mitigation measures described in this document are wholly appropriate under NEPA, although the impacts they address may not be considered significant under CEQA. Mitigation measures have been identified that would reduce or avoid the adverse impacts identified. Where feasible, mitigation measures have been identified that would reduce significant impacts to a less-than-significant level. These mitigation measures are presented for consideration by decision makers as possible conditions of Project approval.

The Applicant has incorporated design features, measures, and procedures into the description of its proposed Project to avoid or reduce impacts from Project construction and operation. These measures are referred to as Applicant-Proposed Measures (APMs) in this EIR/EIS and are considered in the analysis of impacts and the determinations of impact significance. In the assessment of identified impacts, APMs have been assumed to be part of the proposed Project and, therefore, are not included as mitigation measures. The APMs are considered a commitment by the Applicant and implementation of each APM will be monitored by the Lead Agencies if the proposed Project or an alternative is approved. The APMs that are considered necessary to reduce potential impacts are listed in the each environmental issue area discussion (Sections C.2 through C.15).

C.1.3 Significance Categories

The significance criteria used in this document are in the context of EIR/EIS requirements rather than criteria used in the determination of a Negative Declaration (CEQA) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (NEPA).

In order to provide for a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of potential environmental impacts to the issue area categories, a classification system was applied to the impacts of the proposed Project and alternatives. These classifications indicate whether an identified impact is significant and whether mitigation measures can reduce the severity of the impact to a level that is not significant. The following classifications were uniformly applied to each identified impact:

- **Class I: Significant impact; cannot be mitigated to a level that is not significant.** Class I impacts are significant adverse effects that cannot be mitigated below a level of significance through the application of feasible mitigation measures. Class I impacts are significant and unavoidable.

- **Class II: Significant impact; can be mitigated to a level that is not significant.** A Class II impact is a significant adverse effect that can be reduced to a less than significant level through the application of feasible mitigation measures presented in this EIR/EIS.
- **Class III: Adverse; less than significant.** A Class III impact is a minor change or effect on the environment that does not meet or exceed the criteria established to gauge significance.
- **Class IV: Beneficial impact.** Class IV impacts represent beneficial effects that would result from project implementation.

In cases where there is a potential for a certain type of impact, but no such impact would occur for the proposed Project or an alternative, the reasons for no occurrence of an impact are described and no impact classification is assigned.

A significant impact is defined by CEQA as "a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project" (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15382). In comparison, NEPA states that "'Significantly' as used in NEPA requires considerations of both context and intensity…" (40 CFR 1508.27). Significance criteria serve as a benchmark for determining if a project action will result in a significant adverse environmental impact when evaluated against the baseline. Although guidance provided by CEQA and NEPA are used to help determine the significance of impacts, the determination of impact significance is based on the independent judgment of the Lead Agencies which, for this proposed Project, are the California Public Utilities Commission (State) and the USDA Forest Service (federal). The establishment of any criteria used to evaluate the significance of impacts is also the responsibility of the Lead Agencies. Criteria used to determine the significance of the proposed Project's impacts are presented in the sections addressing individual environmental issue areas (Sections C.2 through C.15). Some impact categories in this document lend themselves to scientific or mathematical analysis and, therefore, to quantification, while others are more qualitative, and resources such as Air Quality have significance thresholds that are established by regulatory agencies.

Pursuant to NEPA, the intent of the environmental impact analysis is to provide a scientific and analytic basis for comparing the alternatives. The analysis also identifies any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the project be implemented and presents mitigation measures to minimize adverse environmental impacts (40 CFR 1502.16). Environmental effects will include direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts.