

4.13 Recreation

This section describes effects on recreational resources that would be caused by implementation of the Proposed Project. The following discussion addresses existing environmental conditions in the affected area, and identifies and analyzes environmental impacts anticipated from the proposed quarry expansion and RPA. In addition, existing regulations relevant to recreation are described.

Existing recreational resources were identified through a variety of sources. Recently published maps, including Google Maps and Google Earth, were used to verify the location of recreational areas and resources. The County’s Parks and Recreation Element and applicable Area Plans were also consulted to describe resources associated with recreation. Additionally, an extensive internet search of agency (federal, State and local) websites was conducted to verify the location and specifics of existing recreational facilities.

Scoping Issues Addressed

No public or agency comments related to recreation were received during the Project’s NOP scoping period.

4.13.1 Existing Conditions

The Proposed Project is surrounded by Central Coast Mountain Range to the east, south and west, and the City of Atascadero to the north. It is located approximately three miles northeast of the community of Santa Margarita, along State Route 58 between U.S. Highway 101 and State Route 229. The incorporated cities in closest proximity to the Proposed Project include Atascadero to the northwest, and San Luis Obispo to the southwest. For the purposes of this analysis, recreational resources considered include those found within the physical boundaries of the Central Coast Mountain Range and the City of Atascadero, which is estimated to incorporate lands and recreational resources found within a seven-mile radius of the Proposed Project site.

A local community park and the proposed Salinas River Trail Corridor are the closest recreational resources to the Proposed Project site. In addition, several community and regional parks are in the vicinity of Project area. These resources are identified below in Table 3.13-1.

Table 4.13-1. Recreational Resources Within Seven Miles of the Proposed Project Site

Recreation Area	Jurisdiction/ Administration	Approximate Distance from the Project Proposed Site	Allowed Uses/Recreation Resources
Proposed Salinas River Trail Corridor	The Salinas Trail Master Plan is being prepared by the County’s Council of Governments (SLOCOG)	1.3 miles	Walking and biking trail
Santa Margarita Community Park (County of San Luis Obispo, 2002a)	San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation Department	1.8 miles	Senior Community Center, Margarita Meadows (includes gazebo and barbeque pit), play field, picnic tables, horseshoes
Paloma Greek Park (Atascadero, 2011)	City of Atascadero, Parks Division	3.5 miles	2 multi-purpose sports fields, 2 lighted softball fields, a little league field, and a new playground

Table 4.13-1. Recreational Resources Within Seven Miles of the Proposed Project Site

Recreation Area	Jurisdiction/ Administration	Approximate Distance from the Project Proposed Site	Allowed Uses/Recreation Resources
Los Padres National Forest (Forest Service, 2013)	USDA Forest Service, Santa Lucia Ranger District	Located east, west, and south of Project site; 3.5 miles from closest Project Site boundary	Hiking and backpacking, trail riding by horse, bicycle, off-highway vehicles, camping and picnicking, and fishing
Heilmann Regional Park (County of San Luis Obispo, 2002b)	San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation Department	4.3 miles	Three tennis courts, group picnic areas, and a disc golf course
Chalk Mountain Golf Course (County of San Luis Obispo, 2007)	San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation Department	4.5 miles	Public 18-hole golf course, driving range
Atascadero Lake Park (Atascadero, 2011)	City of Atascadero, Parks Division	5.5 miles	Walking path that follows the edge of the lake (biking allowed), playground, restrooms, large and small barbecue areas, horseshoe pits, sand volleyball court, the Faces of Freedom Veterans Memorial, and the Charles Paddock Zoo
Santa Margarita Lake and Natural Area (County of San Luis Obispo, 2013)	San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation Department	6.5 miles	Boating, fishing, picnic areas, public swimming pool; the Natural Area is managed for its natural resource values, passive recreational use, and environmental education opportunities; and is accessible to campers, hikers, bicyclists and equestrians

4.13.2 San Luis Obispo County Plans and Policies

Parks and Recreation Element, Chapter 3 – Recreation (Trails)

Policy 3.8 – To protect the interests of adjacent land uses (both public and private) and the environment, trail projects shall:

2. *Stay as far away as reasonable from production agriculture, commercial activities and residences.*

Policy 3.10 – Extensive trail systems, such as the California Coastal Trail, the Juan Bautista de Anza and the Salinas River Trails, will generally be developed in a series of shorter, but viable, segments. Such segments shall not be constructed until a viable link can be established connecting residential communities, parks, staging areas, or other public points of interest.

Policy 3.12.3 – Where public lands are not available or adequate to accommodate a public trail, a trail dedication in easement or fee across private property shall be considered and may be obtained only in the following instances:

1. *From a willing seller or donor.*
2. *As part of a New Town or Specific Plan that would create urban uses.*
3. *As a condition of a project approval, subject also to Policy 3.13:*
 - a. *For land designated Agriculture when:*

- i. a general plan amendment would change the land use category from Agriculture to another land use category; or
 - ii. a discretionary project that would convert agricultural land to uses¹⁰ not related to agriculture; or
 - iii. a cluster subdivision would create eight or more residential parcels.
- b. For land not designated Agriculture, but in production agriculture, when a discretionary project including a subdivision would convert land to uses¹¹ not related to production agriculture as determined by the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office.
 - c. For all other land not excluded under (a) and (b) above, for any discretionary project (parcel map, tract map, development plan, minor use permit, conditional use permit, etc.)

Policy 3.13 – When a trail dedication is required as a condition of a discretionary permit, the required trail dedication must:

1. Be proportional to the level of development being proposed;
2. Have an appropriate nexus to the effects of the permit;
3. Be shown on an adopted plan or be a New Town or Specific Plan development as noted in Policy 3.12 (2) above;
4. Result in no long term, unmitigable environmental impacts; and
5. Comply with all applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations.

Parks and Recreation Element, Chapter 4 – Special Places and Uses

Policy 4.3 – When addressing changes in natural areas:

1. Be consistent with an approved master plan. Within the master plan include items such as environmental education, passive recreation, and methods for resource protection and restoration.
2. Provide adequate buffers between the natural area and adjacent urban or rural uses.

4.13.3 Regulatory Setting

There are no federal or State regulations that are applicable to recreational resources within the Proposed Project area.

4.13.4 Environmental Impact Methodology

The significance criteria for recreation were derived from previous environmental impact assessments and from the State CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G, Environmental Checklist Form, Sections IX and XIV). The Proposed Project would have a significant impact if it would:

- Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment;
- Increase the use or demand for parks or other recreational opportunities, such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated;
- Affect access to trails, parks, or other recreational opportunities.

Approach to Impact Analysis

To determine potential impacts, the significance criteria identified above were applied to the activities associated with excavation and reclamation of the Proposed Project. Impacts are identified as being either short- or long-term in nature. They are numbered under each impact significance criterion, as are applicable mitigation measures.

Impacts are categorized per the significance classification system provided in EIR Section 4.1 (Environmental Analysis, Introduction, Impact Significance Classification Scheme).

4.13.5 Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact REC-1: Cause the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that would have an adverse impact on the environment
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Excavation

Excavation activities associated with the Proposed Project would consist of four overlapping phases of excavation that would span an estimated 59 years. All excavation activities would occur within the 193.1-acre site, which does not include any recreational facilities either on-site or in its immediate vicinity. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not include construction of recreational facilities, nor does it require the expansion of existing recreational facilities. As such, no adverse physical impacts on the environment would be generated by recreational facilities resulting from the Proposed Project. No impacts would occur (No Impact).

Reclamation

The immediate vicinity of the Proposed Project site is characterized by rural development and agricultural production. A goal of the Proposed RPA under the Proposed Project is to adapt the quarried areas to open space, and intended uses would include seasonal water storage, oak woodland habitat, riparian woodland habitat and chaparral vegetation. These elements of the Proposed RPA would not result in the establishment of recreational facilities or activities. No impacts would occur (No Impact).

Impact REC-2: Increase the use or demand for parks or other recreational opportunities, such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated

Excavation

An increase in the use of existing recreational facilities is frequently spurred by population growth, which could result in the physical deterioration of recreational facilities. However, as discussed in EIR Section 7.1 (Other CEQA Considerations, Growth Inducement), the Proposed Project would neither increase the existing quarry's employment base, nor involve the construction of new housing; therefore, the Proposed Project would not contribute to population growth. As such, there would be no increased need for recreational resources. No impacts would occur (No Impact).

Reclamation

Similar to proposed excavation activities, activities associated with the reclamation process would not result in population or employment growth. As such, there would be no increased need for recreational resources. No impacts would occur (No Impact).

Impact REC-3: Reduce, disrupt or preclude access and visitation to local recreational areas or trails

Excavation

All excavation activities would occur within the 193.1-acre site, which does not include recreational facilities either on-site or in the immediate Project vicinity. As shown in Table 4.13-1, the closest recreational resource is the proposed Salinas River Trail. A branch of the Salinas River is adjacent to the Proposed Project site; the closest segment of the proposed trail would be located approximately 1.3 miles west of the site. Additionally, the Santa Margarita Community Park is located approximately 1.8 miles west of the Proposed Project site. Both the Salinas River Trail and the community park are located along off-site access roads that lead to the quarry. However, as agricultural activities and improvements related to agricultural operations are allowed uses under the County's land use designation for the Project site (Rural Lands and Agriculture), it is possible that these future uses may pose a conflict with the development of the Salinas River Trail and/or may be incompatible with the recreational uses along this proposed trail. Therefore, the inclusion of a new trail easement is addressed in this EIR since a discretionary action is required for the quarry and the County may include the offer of a trail easement as a condition of approval, in accordance with Policy 3.12.3.c of the Parks and Recreation Element, as outlined in EIR Section 14.3.2, above. County policies also require that extensive trail systems such as the Salinas River Trail shall not be constructed on individual properties until a viable link can be established to create a larger trail. Development of a trail corridor by the County must meet required findings including sufficient funds for ongoing maintenance and liability. Planning for trail development is a long-term process and there is not currently a viable planned segment that includes the Project site. For this reason, only a very general description of a future trail on the Project property can be considered at this time.

Since the Salinas River is the unifying feature and most aesthetic focus for the regional trail system, it is reasonable to expect that the future trail will be located generally along the river itself, as opposed to a location along ridgelines or slopes in the area. Such a location would be well removed from the proposed quarry (by over 1,000 feet), but would occur in the general vicinity of existing grazing and agricultural operations associated with the property. For this reason, any future trail design would have to be developed with the property owner's input, and would have to include appropriate fencing for the safety of trail users and the security of the property owner. The land near the river on the property is relatively flat, and consists mainly of a mixture of non-native grasses underneath oak trees. It is likely that a trail could be designed that would require minimum ground disturbance and drainage control, and would preserve all or most of the oak trees present. A more detailed evaluation of the potential environmental effects of such a future trail would have to be prepared by the County at the time a specific trail segment is proposed.

Other recreational opportunities that could be impacted by Project-related heavy truck traffic would be recreational bicyclists traveling along State Route 58. Commuter bicyclists may also be impacted by the contribution of heavy truck traffic associated with the Proposed Project. Commuter bicyclists would not be expected in large number along the haul routes during operational hours of the quarry (Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.), and are not typical in rural locations such as the Proposed Project area. Recreational bicyclists are more likely to use State Route 58 on the weekends when the quarry is not typically operating.

Recognizing the above referenced use differences, when Project-related heavy vehicles and bicyclists interact along State Route 58, the contribution of Project-related heavy vehicles would likely result in the perception of a decreased Bicycle Level of Service (BLOS) or a lessening of their perceived

experience cycling on the roadway. This perception could result in a disincentive for bicyclists to use State Route 58 during operational hours of the quarry. Please refer to EIR Section 4.14.5, Impact TR-6, for additional discussion regarding BLOS.

The Project's contribution to future pavement damage and wear along some segments of State Route 58 would require mitigation in the form of either a fair share contribution mitigation fee or monitoring program as detailed in EIR Section 4.14.5 under Impact TR-3 (Mitigation Measure TR-3). Improvements resulting from the mitigation associated with impacts to State Route 58 would include review of required Project improvements and repairs in consultation with Caltrans. This review would involve an analysis to determine the appropriateness of providing road improvements to ensure all travelers, including bicyclists, can be accommodated on the State highway system. With implementation of Mitigation Measures REC-1 and TR-3, impacts related to reductions, disruptions or preclusions of access and visitation to local recreational areas or trails would be less than significant (Class II).

Mitigation Measure for Impact RE-3

REC-1 Access to Future Salinas River Trail. Prior to issuance of a Notice to Proceed, the property owner shall offer a trail easement for dedication to the County, along the Salinas River Trail corridor, subject to conditions and County policies to coordinate trail development and to protect public safety and property owner rights. The offer of dedication shall be a minimum of 25 feet in width and be located adjacent to the Salinas River (outside of the creek corridor). The final location of the offer of dedication shall be determined in consultation with the San Luis Obispo County Parks Department.

TR-3 Reduce Project contribution to deterioration of State Route 58 structural conditions

Reclamation

The activities associated with the Proposed RPA would occur within the Proposed Project site. Therefore, on-going and final reclamation activities would neither cause disruptions nor preclude access to the nearby recreation areas. Impacts would be less than significant (Class III)

In regard to bicycle safety along State Route 58, reclamation activities would not generate daily trips on study area roadways beyond that associated with existing quarry operational trips. Therefore, impacts to bicyclists would not increase as a result of the Proposed Project. Impacts to bicyclists would be less than significant (Class III).