

3.10 Recreation

This section of the Final Environmental Impact Report presents a discussion of the recreational facilities within the proposed Eagle Mountain Pumped Storage Project (Project) vicinity and an assessment of potential environmental impacts on these facilities.

3.10.1 Regulatory Setting

The following federal, state, and local laws and policies apply to the recreational facilities or land uses. The proposed Project will be constructed and operated in conformance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards (LORS).

Portions of the Project site are located on private lands which are not subject to federal or state land management requirements. Other portions of the Project site are located on federal land managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and therefore subject to the recreational LORS of the agency. No state regulatory standards pertaining to recreational land uses apply to the proposed Project.

Federal Land Policy Management Act, 1976 (FLPMA) directs the management of the public lands of the United States. In Section 601, Congress required the preparation of a comprehensive long-range plan for the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). The purpose of this plan was to establish guidance for the management of public lands in the California desert, administered by the BLM.

California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan 1980, as amended. BLM lands in the Project area are classified as Multiple-Use Class M (Moderate Use) and Multiple-Use Class L (Limited Use). More information about these land classes is provided in Section 3.9, Land Use, Public Services, Planning, and Utilities.

Wilderness Act and California Desert Protection Act 1994. The Project area is not within a designated wilderness area. In accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA) of 1994, the nearest designated wilderness area is the Joshua Tree National Park (JTNP) and Wilderness Area. This area was designated as wilderness by Congress in 1994 with passage of the CDPA.

3.10.2 Existing Conditions

The Project is located within the Little San Bernardino Mountains and Colorado Desert of California. Though temperatures can be extreme in the summer months, recreational resources within the region provide for a variety of activities that attract visitors.

With the exception of the JTNP, few parks or developed recreational facilities exist within the Project area. The surrounding mountains and desert areas provide open space for a number of dispersed recreational activities. Activities within the region include hiking, camping,

backpacking, hunting, nature appreciation, rock hounding, rock climbing, mountain biking, horseback riding, jeep tours, and off-highway vehicles (OHVs).

3.10.2.1 Existing Recreational Resources and Use in the Central Project Area

Extensive past mining activities of the Central Project Area have made the Project unattractive for most recreational activities. In addition, no public access is currently allowed on the Project site. It is currently undeveloped and highly disturbed, is not designated for active recreational use, and is not used as a recreational area.

3.10.2.2 Existing Recreational Resources and Use in the Project Vicinity

Access to area recreation opportunities is provided primarily from I-10. Table 3.10-1 summarizes the various recreational resources and facilities located within the Project vicinity. Private recreation adjacent to I-10 includes the Patton Museum at Chiriaco Summit. This facility borders a large historic area known as Camp Young, which was established by Patton as a desert tank warfare practice area. This area is predominantly public land, managed by the BLM.

Other public lands in the vicinity adjacent to I-10 include Ford Dry Lake and Palen Dry Lake, which are OHV-use areas managed by the BLM. No developed facilities exist at these locations.

Alligator Rock ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) is a resource area located near I-10, south of Desert Center. ACECs are managed by the BLM, and are designated for the protection of wildlife and other resources. No developed facilities exist at this location.

The nearest BLM campground to the Project site is Corn Springs, located approximately 15 miles to the southeast. Overflow camping is also permitted by the BLM north of I-10 just outside the south entrance to the JTNP. There are no developed facilities at this location and camping is not permitted within 300 feet of the roadway.

Another nearby public land use open to day-use activity is the Desert Lily Sanctuary located adjacent to State Route 177, approximately 8 miles southeast of the Project area. This area encompasses over 2,000 acres and is managed by the BLM. No developed facilities exist at this site other than signage and a graveled parking lot.

Lake Tamarisk is a small private community located off Kaiser Road that includes a nine-hole golf course and swimming pool. The community was originally developed for executives of the Kaiser Mine enterprise.

Chuckwalla Valley Raceway is located on the eastern portion of the Desert Center Airport. This 400-acre raceway is a members-only road course racing facility that provides a clubhouse with a restaurant and overnight camping.

Hiking and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use are the primary dispersed recreational activities in the Project area (Figures 3.10-1 and 3.10-2). The BLM maintains an inventory of trails, which

indicates areas open or closed to OHV activity. The BLM also maintains several primitive campsites within the region, but keeps no records of visitor use. The BLM has noted as part of the review of the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management (NECO) Plan that this area receives little recreational or multiple use (USDI, FWS, Biological Opinion, 2004).

3.10.2.3 Joshua Tree National Park and Wilderness Area

The JTNP and Wilderness Area is the principal recreation attraction in the area (Figure 3.10-1). The JTNP encompasses unique geology, flora, and fauna as a result of two ecosystems – the higher elevation Mojave Desert and the lower elevation and dryer Colorado Desert – meeting in a relatively short distance.

Access to the JTNP is from I-10 to the south and from California State Highway 62 to the north. The JTNP includes a variety of dispersed recreational activities and camping. Because of its unique geology and rock formations, the area is internationally known as a prime rock climbing destination. The JTNP is a popular destination for both local and non-local residents, and visitation has increased steadily over the past several years, such that it is now considered a year-round destination. Throughout the fall, winter, and spring, it is not uncommon for all of JTNP's campsites to be filled to capacity. In 2006, JTNP had over 1.2 million recreation visitors (USDI, JTNP, 2006).

Developed recreational facilities, including trails, camping, picnic, and day-use facilities, are more prevalent in the northwestern portion of JTNP, far from the proposed project site. Recreational activities nearest to the project area include a few back country roads and trails, which is consistent with the management prescriptions of the Wilderness Area designation. Cottonwood Visitors Center greets visitors at the southern access to JTNP, while the northern portion is accessible from the Oasis Visitor Center near Twenty-nine Palms, and the West Entrance Station south of the town of Joshua Tree. All but one of the nine campgrounds within JTNP are located in high desert in the western half of JTNP.

Backcountry hiking and camping are popular in JTNP. Trails and facilities are more limited in the eastern half of JTNP near the Project site due to the larger areas of designated Wilderness, which restricts certain uses and access. Specific trail-head use records were not available from JTNP staff, but 2006 records indicated 5,491 backcountry stays and 189,724 campground stays (USDI, JTNP, 2006).

3.10.2.3.1 *Recreational Use of the Eastern JTNP*

The NPS has no use data for dispersed or primitive campsites within its boundaries in the vicinity of the Project site and no backcountry trail-head boards for registration data in the Eagle Mountain area. Consequently, no data exist on the number of hikers that may access the ridge tops around the Project site (K. Messaros, personal communication, email to Rick Suttle, September 8, 2009). An approximation of the numbers of visitors and potential Project effects on those visitors was made based on information received from the NPS.

Prior to its inclusion into JTNP and Wilderness Area system, the east side lands relied on 4-wheel drive access to many locations (USDI, JTNP, 2006). Four-wheel drive/ATV use is now prohibited within the Wilderness areas. Black Eagle Mine Road traverses a non-wilderness corridor in this eastern section of JTNP and Wilderness Area, and continues off JTNP property to the Eagle Mountain Mine and proposed Project site. This road is very rugged and further limited by JTNP's restriction on ATVs. JTNP allows only road-licensed 4-wheel vehicles and keeps no day-use records; therefore, the actual numbers of users or vehicles on the road are not known. However, staff has estimated, based on their experience that the road may see about 1,000 day-use visits in a season (K. Messaros, personal communication, email to Rick Suttle, September 8, 2009). Written summaries on websites by users rate the driving difficulty as moderate to difficult, and attest that it is very rough and not for the inexperienced. Approximately 3 miles east of the JTNP boundary, a large boulder has been placed across the road, effectively stopping vehicle passage (Figure 3.10-2).

The JTNP's *Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan* notes that only about 0.5 percent of visitors to the JTNP spend the night in the backcountry (USDI, JTNP, 2006). According to Park Service personnel, miscellaneous backcountry use over the past 5 years has ranged between 3,900 to 5,900 user-nights annually. About 500 user-nights of this backcountry annual use are estimated to be attributed to the eastern region of JTNP (K. Messaros, email communication to Rick Suttle, September 8, 2009). However, this usage rate is only an estimate since JTNP has no backcountry registration boards in this region, which encompasses over 633 square miles (i.e., less than one backcountry user per square mile per year).

Table 3.10-1. Summary of Recreational Facilities in Project Vicinity

#	Site	Jurisdiction	Acreage	Facilities	Use	Distance From Project
1	Joshua Tree National Park & Wilderness Area	NPS	794,000	Campgrounds, Visitor Centers, Trails, Picnic Areas	1.26 million annual visits*	1-2 miles
2	Patton Museum	Private		Museum	unknown	22 miles
3	Desert Lily Preserve	BLM		Undeveloped	unknown	9 miles
4	Alligator Rock ACEC	BLM	7,726	Undeveloped	unknown	11 miles
5	Chuckwalla Valley Dune Thicket ACEC	BLM	2,273	Undeveloped	unknown	35 miles
6	Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness Area	BLM	84,614	Undeveloped	unknown	12 miles
7	Orocopia Mountains Wilderness Area	BLM	45,927	Undeveloped	unknown	20 miles
8	Corn Springs ACEC & Campground	BLM		Primitive Campsites,	unknown	18 miles
9	Palen/McCoy Wilderness Area	BLM		Undeveloped	unknown	17 miles

#	Site	Jurisdiction	Acreage	Facilities	Use	Distance From Project
10	Palen Dry Lake ACEC	BLM		Undeveloped	unknown	21 miles
11	Ford Dry Lake OHV Use Area	BLM		Undeveloped	unknown	26 miles
12	Lake Tamarisk Community	Private		Golf course, Community Center	unknown	8 miles
13	Chuckwalla Valley Raceway	Private	400	Member-only raceway, clubhouse and restaurant	Vehicle / motorcycle raceway	10 miles
*	2006 Park Data					

3.10.3 Potential Environmental Impacts

3.10.3.1 Methodology

Preparation of this section included a literature review and site visit. The area was reviewed to identify any designated recreational facilities that would be affected by the proposed Project.

3.10.3.2 Thresholds of Significance

The State Water Resources Control Board concludes that the Project may have significant impacts on recreational facilities if it does any of the following:

- (a) Increases the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated and/or
- (b) Includes recreational facilities or require construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment

3.10.3.3 Environmental Impact Assessment

3.10.3.3.1 *Recreation*

No developed recreation sites occur within the Project boundary or in the immediate vicinity. The entire Kaiser Eagle Mountain Iron Mine site is and will continue to be fenced and inaccessible to the general public. The highly disturbed property is unsuitable for public recreation. If the proposed landfill is developed, there would be safety and health concerns if the public were allowed access to the site. Therefore, the proposed Project does not propose to open the site for any recreational purposes.

No recreation issues or concerns were identified during the Project's scoping meeting. However, during informal consultation, the BLM suggested that an overlook/interpretive facility might be desirable. Because of the highly disturbed nature of the site, concerns about public safety with the

adjacent landfill project, and concerns regarding intrusion into the JTNP and Wilderness Area, it was determined that no recreational facilities would be developed at the site.

The highly fluctuating water levels of the proposed pumped storage hydroelectric facility would not be suitable or safe for public recreation. Additionally, the existing disturbed, mined setting is not attractive for recreational use with the possible exception of OHV activity. However, OHV use would not be consistent with the proposed landfill project, and would raise concerns regarding wildlife resources and potential intrusion to off-site JTNP and Wilderness Areas.

One four-wheel drive/backcountry trail providing access to/from JTNP is located west of the proposed Project boundary. This route is very rugged and only utilized by the most adventurous visitor and is not a through road. Access to this trail is controlled by its location through the Kaiser property, which limits OHV activity. JTNP staff have indicated a desire to maintain the remote nature of this portion of JTNP and a desire not to provide new public access to JTNP through the Project area (K. Messaros, National Park Service [NPS], January 2009, email personal communication to Rick Suttle, RTA).

The number of JTNP and Wilderness Area visitors potentially affected by the Project would be very small. Two designated trails within JTNP boundaries that are closest to the Project include the Black Eagle Mine Road and the Big Wash Hiking Corridor (Figure 3.10-2). The road and trail are both located in the lower elevations of JTNP and are over 8 miles from the nearest Project feature (the Upper Reservoir Dam) and are not visible to the Project (Figure 3.10-3).

Backcountry hikers who traverse the Black Eagle Mine Road past JTNP boundaries and into BLM and private lands could eventually view Project features. Hikers would require a considerable part of a day to hike the round trip from the boulder blocking the Black Eagle Mine Road to the nearest Project feature over 6 miles away. This assumes that the hikers have already driven the rough road section within JTNP boundaries, which is over 9 miles away.

For the few hikers that reach surrounding ridge top peaks, views of Project features and activities may be possible. Views of Project features from ridge tops however, would either be from adjacent ridges that are no longer within JTNP boundaries, or on higher ridge tops that are over 4 miles away. A viewshed analysis of the proposed Project's Upper Reservoir dams indicates that potential views from ridge tops and slopes within JTNP are few (Figure 3.10-3). At these distances, few Project features would be indiscernible from the existing disturbed visual character resulting from past mining activities.

3.10.3.3.2 *Wilderness*

Noise and visual effects on recreational uses could occur. Project construction noise and lighting may be detectable at nearest designated wilderness lands. Upon completion of construction activities, Project facilities including the reservoirs and transmission line will be visible from limited higher elevations within the surrounding wilderness portions of JTNP (Figure 3.10-3). Access to these higher elevation ridge tops is difficult and most activity follows the lower

elevations and existing trails. For the few that do traverse the distant ridge tops, the views from the wilderness may be affected. However, the existing mine site is already disturbed such that the incremental change with addition of the proposed facilities will be inconsequential.

Joshua Tree National Park representatives have expressed concern regarding light pollution during Project operation (C. Sauer, JTNP, letter to Kimberly D. Bose, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, August 11, 2009). This issue is addressed in Section 3.7, Aesthetic Resources.

Environmental Impact Assessment Summary:

- (a) *Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?* No. The unincorporated community of Desert Center is the closest community to the Project. Desert Center is approximately 10 miles west of the Project and has no community parks. There are no regional parks or open spaces operated by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District in the Chuckwalla Valley. There are no California State public parks within the Chuckwalla Valley. The Project would not increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities resulting in a substantial physical deterioration or accelerate the deterioration of the facility. The few recreational users of the Project area would be dispersed over a large area. Therefore, this potential impact is less than significant and no mitigation measures are required.
- (b) *Does the project include recreational facilities or require construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?* No. The Project consists of a pumped storage hydroelectric facility. No new recreation activities or facilities are proposed. As such, the Project does not involve any recreational components nor is it intended to serve as one. Therefore, this potential impact is less than significant and no mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.10-1 Recreational Use. This impact is *less than significant*. The proposed transmission line and water pipeline corridors cross lands, in part, managed by the BLM, which are available for dispersed recreational use. Access to some OHV tracks may be impeded temporarily during construction of the linear facilities.

Access to the JTNP and recreational destinations will not be altered by Project construction or operation. The major southern access to the JTNP is from I-10 at the Cottonwood Road exit located several miles to the west of the Eagle Mountain and Desert Center exits, which will be used for Project access. Traffic will increase along Kaiser Road and Eagle Mountain Road during construction. Additional traffic should not hinder access to recreational areas, or noticeably affect dispersed recreational activities, which is of relatively low intensity (USDI, FWS, Biological Opinion, January 8, 2004).

Impact 3.10-2 Wilderness Area. This impact is *less than significant*. The Project would not directly or indirectly disrupt activities in an established federal, state, or local recreation and/or wilderness area. The Project area is not located in a designated federal wilderness area.

Project construction and operation will not restrict recreation use in the nearby JTNP and Wilderness Area. The Project site is currently an open pit mine, and many Project features are planned to be underground. Therefore, proposed Project impacts to the visual character of the Project site will be insignificant. In addition, the proposed Project will be visible from very few locations from within the Wilderness Area.

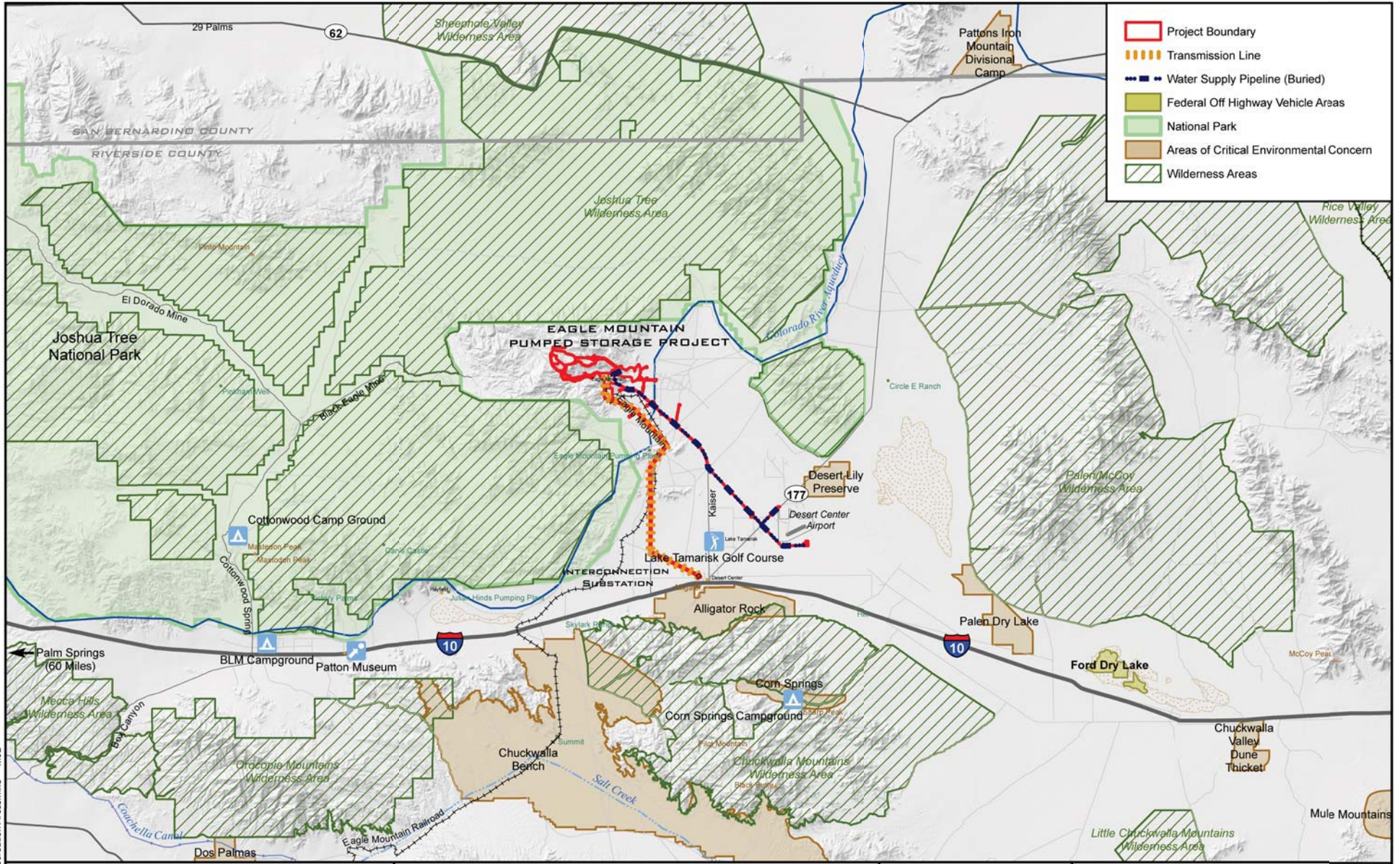
3.10.4 Mitigation Program

Similar to existing conditions, public access, including OHV use, will be restricted during and after Project construction, as it is currently. There are no identified potential impacts to recreational facilities, and no mitigation is required.

3.10.5 Level of Significance after Implementation of the Mitigation Program

There are no identified potential impacts to recreational facilities, and no mitigation is required.

No residual impacts to recreation would occur with implementation of the Project.



- Project Boundary
- Transmission Line
- Water Supply Pipeline (Buried)
- Federal Off Highway Vehicle Areas
- National Park
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Wilderness Areas

04-Jun-2010 Figure 3.10-2 Recreation Areas.mxd MJD

SOURCE:
Open Space- BLM



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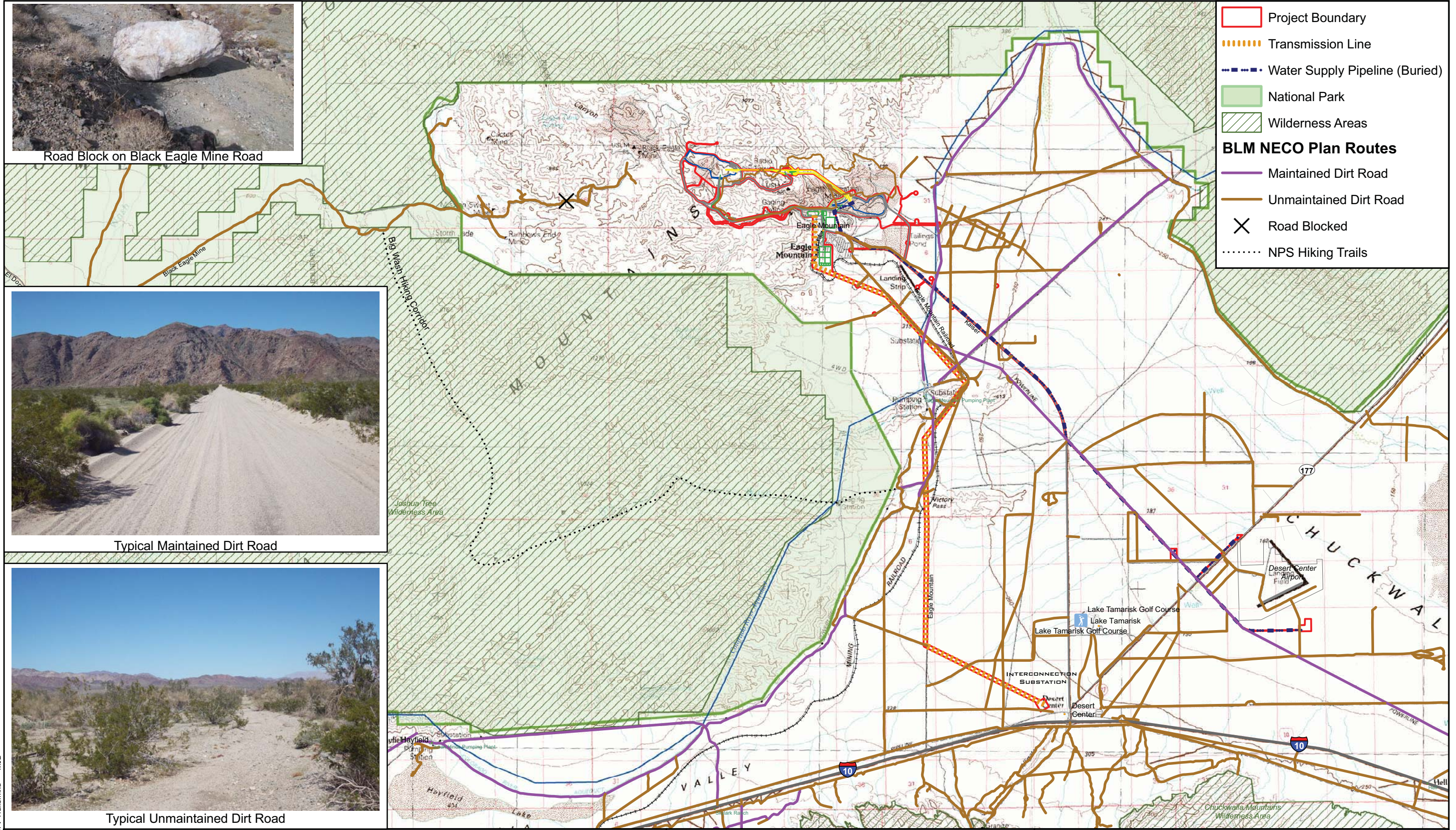
Eastern Riverside County, California



REGIONAL LAND USE

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Figure 3.10-1



- Project Boundary
- Transmission Line
- Water Supply Pipeline (Buried)
- National Park
- Wilderness Areas
- BLM NECO Plan Routes**
- Maintained Dirt Road
- Unmaintained Dirt Road
- X Road Blocked
- NPS Hiking Trails

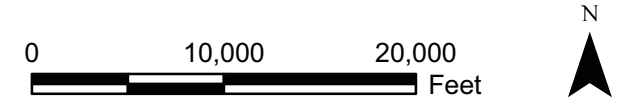
Road Block on Black Eagle Mine Road



Typical Maintained Dirt Road



Typical Unmaintained Dirt Road



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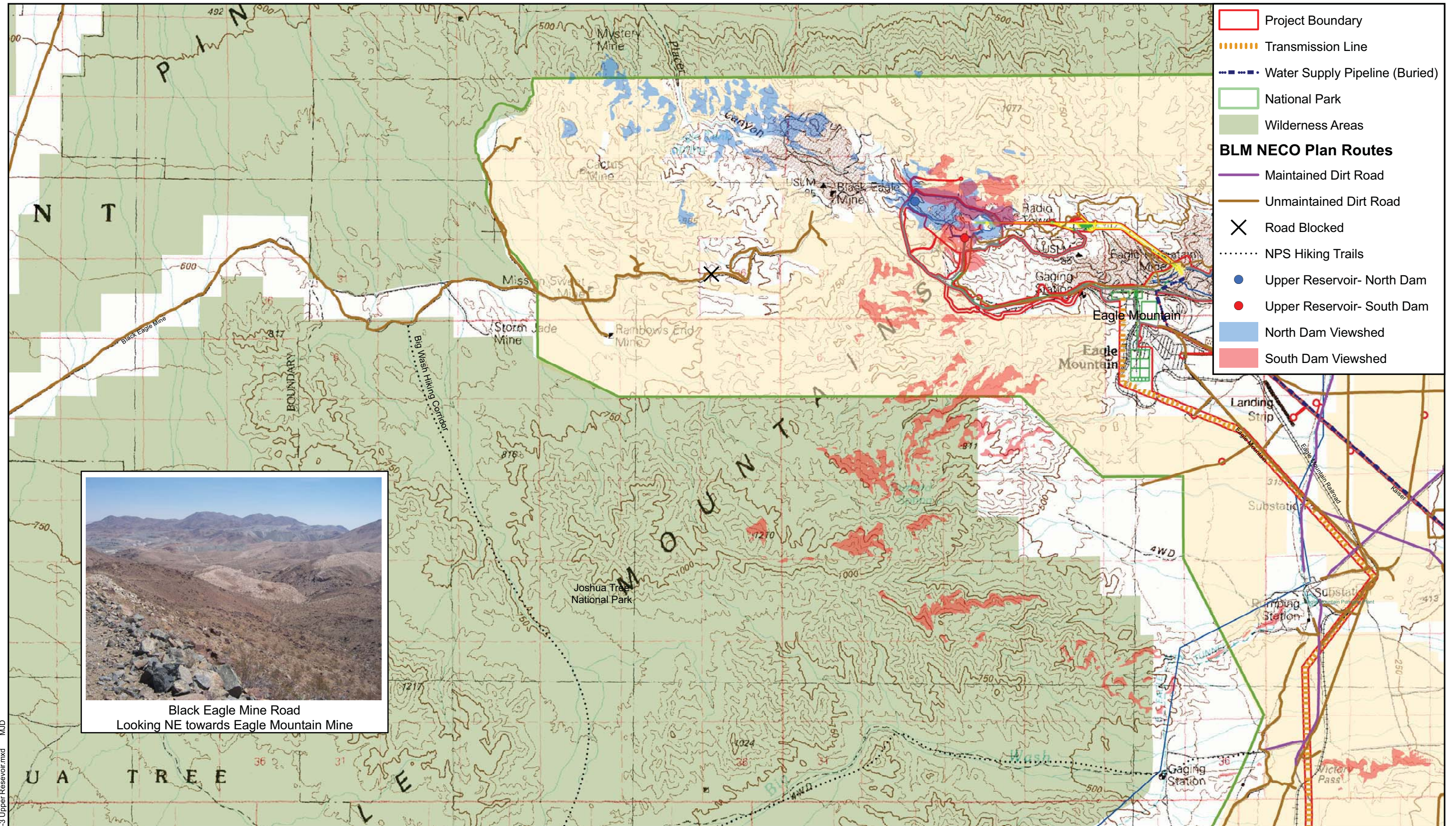
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HIKING & ATV TRAILS IN
 THE PROJECT VICINITY

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Figure 3.10-2



Black Eagle Mine Road
Looking NE towards Eagle Mountain Mine

03-Jun-2010 Figure 3.10-3 Upper Reservoir.mxd MJD



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PROJECT VISIBILITY
FROM DESIGNATED TRAILS

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Figure 3.10-3