

6. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

The following chapter is intended to inform the public and decision makers of the feasible alternatives that would avoid or substantially lessen any significant effects of the proposed Project.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The San Joaquin River Conservancy (Conservancy) is proposing to update the 1997 San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan to include refined goals, policies, objectives, design guidelines, and Best Management Practices (BMPs) in order to enhance wildlife habitat conservation, public access, and recreation opportunities. The Master Plan Update (proposed Project) would serve as a long-range and conceptual programmatic document to guide development and identify suitable locations for wildlife habitat, public access, and recreation. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines require the description and comparative analysis of a range of alternatives to the proposed Project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects. The CEQA Guidelines also require that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives, focusing on alternatives that would avoid or substantially lessen any significant effects of the proposed Project, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the Project objectives, or would be more costly (CEQA Guideline Section 15126.6(a), (b)).

6.1.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

“There is no ironclad rule governing the nature or scope of the alternatives to be discussed [in an EIR] other than the rule of reason” (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6(a)). Under the rule of reason, an EIR need discuss only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6(f)). As mentioned above, an EIR need only contain a “range of reasonable alternatives to the project” which would “feasibly attain most of the objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant [impacts] of the project” (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6(a)).

6.1.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As discussed in Chapter 3, Project Description, of this Draft EIR, the Conservancy has identified the following objectives for the proposed Project:

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- Set forth programmatic long-range goals, objectives, policies, and plans to accomplish wildlife habitat conservation and enhancement, public access and recreation, environmental education, and natural and cultural resource conservation and management within the San Joaquin River Parkway.
- Establish goals, policies, environmental commitments, and design standards to guide Parkway development and management.
- Identify and evaluate geographic, environmental, physical, and regulatory constraints and opportunities to implement the Parkway within the planning area.
- Consider implementation strategies and financing mechanisms for developing and supporting the on-going operations, maintenance, and management of the Parkway.
- Develop Parkway-wide strategies for cohesively generating environmental benefits and mitigating the impacts of Parkway development, rather than relying on project-specific, incremental mitigation.

6.2 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

CEQA requires that an EIR analyze a “no project” alternative (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6(e)). This alternative means a proposed project would not proceed; the discussion “[sh]ould compare the environmental effects which would occur if the project is approved” (Id. at (e)(3)(B)). CEQA Guidelines also require that the environmentally superior alternative be designated. If the alternative with the least environmental impact is the No Project Alternative, the EIR must designate the next most environmentally superior alternative.

Based on location, existing uses, and proposed objectives of the Project, it was determined that, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6(a), a reasonable range of alternatives includes only the two alternatives listed below. Other alternatives were considered, but as discussed below in Section 6.3, they were determined to be infeasible.

The alternatives considered are as follows:

- **No Project Alternative.** Consistent with Section 15126.6(e)(2) of the CEQA Guidelines, under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan (existing Plan) would continue to be implemented. Continued implementation of the existing Plan would result in additional trails and increased connectivity throughout the Parkway, however, without the updated guidance and conceptual planning provided within the proposed Project. Under this alternative, the additional goals, policies, design guidelines, and BMPs included under the proposed Project, many of which would result in increased protection of habitat and proper development and management of recreational opportunities, would not be implemented. However, the overall extent of future Parkway development and uses such as, hiking, biking, kayaking and boating, nature observation, fishing, picnicking, and camping would remain the same.
- **Increased Natural Reserves.** Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the proposed Project would continue to be implemented; however, the focus would shift to increasing natural reserves through land acquisitions and habitat enhancement and restoration, and not develop new or enhance the existing network of multi-use trails and facilities for low-impact recreation. Under this alternative, the overall amount of natural

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reserves would be increased and recreational amenities would remain similar to existing conditions; therefore, new trail connections and additions, parking areas, boat launches, and other visitor amenities would be minimal, and the overall visitation to the Parkway would likely be less under this alternative in that fewer facilities and trails would exist. Further opportunities for low-impact recreation would be greatly reduced compared to the proposed Project. Under this alternative the same goals and policies as included in the proposed Project would be applicable.

6.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED INFEASIBLE

The following alternatives were considered infeasible, and therefore were not further analyzed as alternatives.

- **Riverside Trail Alternative:** Under the Riverside Trail Alternative, the multi-use trail envisioned to run the length of the Parkway Plan Area would be generally sited closer to the San Joaquin River, as opposed to the conceptual location, shown in Figure 3-3. This alternative was considered following the requests of several members of the public during the public scoping period of the EIR. The comments asked for the proposed multi-use trail to be located closer to the San Joaquin River in order to allow for greater connectivity to the river, and to limit the exposure of existing residences adjacent to some segments of the Parkway Plan Area to an increase in visitor and nuisance activity. While there are several miles of existing trails within the Parkway, trail connections and additional trails under the proposed Project would be sited out of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year flood zone and would allow for setback from the river to provide a connected riparian corridor to the extent possible. Locating the trail closer to the river would increase the potential for biological and wetland impacts as human activities would be closer to sensitive habitat. The San Joaquin River Conservancy Act¹ (SJRC Act) mandates that the development of the Parkway shall first protect natural resources, including habitat, wildlife, and flood conveyance, and that public access shall only be provided to the extent it is compatible with protection of the resources. Therefore, this alternative was determined to be contrary to State law and would not lessen potential impacts to biological resources. Therefore, this alternative was considered infeasible, and was not further considered for analysis.

- **Off-Site Alternative.** Under the Off-Site Alternative, construction of trails and recreational facilities, and land acquisitions for wildlife habitat conservation, would occur at other locations along the San Joaquin River. Although the San Joaquin River stretches far beyond the approximately 22-miles that are within the Parkway Plan Area, and could likely accommodate additional trails for recreation and contain land suitable for natural reserves and habitat conservation, the Parkway Plan Area under the proposed Project is defined in the SJRC Act to encompass only land along the specific reach of the San Joaquin River from Highway 99 to the face of Friant Dam. Additionally, the objectives of the proposed Project are to build from and enhance the facilities and existing trails within the Parkway Plan Area to provide increased opportunities for low-impact recreation and to provide additional public access, as well as enhance the connectivity of natural reserves and trails. The off-site alternative would not achieve the objectives or intent of the proposed Project or be consistent with the mandate under State law. The Off-Site Alternative was determined to be infeasible and was not further considered for analysis.

¹ San Joaquin River Conservancy Act, Public Resources Code 32500 et seq.

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6.4 ALTERNATIVES COMPARISON

Table 6-1 presents a comparative summary of the alternatives considered in this analysis. Each alternative is analyzed against the impact factors considered for the proposed Project, according to whether it would have a greater or lesser effect compared to the effects of the proposed Project. The basis for the determinations presented in the table is discussed in the next section of this chapter, where each of the topics is listed for each alternative.

TABLE 6-1 COMPARISON OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

Topic	Proposed Plan	No Project	Increased Natural Reserves
Aesthetics	LTS	LTS ↑	LTS ↓
Agricultural and Forestry Resources	SU	SU →	SU →
Air Quality	SU	SU →	SU ↓
Biological Resources	SBM	SBM ↑	SBM ↓
Cultural Resources	LTS	LTS ↑	LTS ↓
Geology and Soils	LTS	LTS →	LTS →
Greenhouse Gases	SU	SU ↑	SU ↓
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	LTS	LTS →	LTS →
Hydrology and Water Quality	SU	SU ↑	SU ↓
Land Use and Planning	LTS	LTS →	LTS →
Mineral Resources	LTS	LTS →	LTS →
Noise	LTS	LTS →	LTS ↓
Population and Housing	LTS	LTS →	LTS →
Public Services and Recreation	LTS	LTS ↑	LTS ↑
Transportation and Traffic	SBM	SBM ↑	SBM ↓
Utilities and Service Systems	LTS	LTS →	LTS ↓

Notes: LTS Less-Than-Significant Impact; SBM Significant but Mitigable Impact; SU Significant and Unavoidable Impact.

↑ Greater potential for impacts than the proposed Project

→ Similar level of impacts as the proposed Project

↓ Lesser potential for impacts than the proposed Project.

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6.5 NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

In this alternative, the Parkway would continue to be developed and implemented under the existing 1997 San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan.

6.5.1 AESTHETICS

Aesthetics within the Parkway generally include views of hiking and biking trails, sights typical of tent and RV campgrounds, restroom facilities, boat and canoe launches, parking lots, and open space areas for viewing plants and wildlife. Under the No Project Alternative, aesthetics would continue to evolve as the 1997 Parkway Master Plan is implemented and additional habitat conservation and low-impact recreation facilities are developed. However, under this alternative, the protective design standards of the proposed Project would not be comprehensively implemented. The aesthetics of the Parkway Plan Area would be altered by implementation of the 1997 Parkway Master Plan, but because the nature of the improvements are the same as under the proposed Plan the impacts would be considered less-than-significant. However, because the No Project Alternative includes fewer protective design standards, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.2 AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing Parkway Master Plan would continue to be implemented. Although implementation of the existing Parkway Plan includes goals to acquire ultimately 5,900 acres to carry out the stated objectives, the existing Parkway Plan has fewer policies to support protection and integration with agricultural use. However, implementation of this alternative would result in the conversion of agricultural uses, and similar to the proposed Project, significant and unavoidable impacts would occur. This alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.3 AIR QUALITY

The proposed Project includes new policies and mitigation measures proposed to reduce potential impacts to air quality. Although the proposed Project includes these requirements, significant unavoidable impacts could still result from implementation with impacts to be determined and mitigated on a project-by-project basis. Under the No Project Alternative, the 1997 Parkway Master Plan would continue to be implemented, but without the proposed policies, BMPs, or mitigation measures comprehensively required under the proposed Project. As a result, this alternative would have a similar or greater level of impact when compared to the proposed Project and would result in significant and unavoidable impacts as well.

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6.5.4 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The No Project Alternative would result in the implementation of the existing Parkway Master Plan. Although there are several known threatened, rare, and endangered plant and animal species, as discussed in Chapter 4.4 of this Draft EIR, the existing Parkway Plan does not include policies, design standards, BMPs, and mitigation requirements that would result from the proposed Project. Although potential impacts resulting from this alternative could be mitigated on a project-by-project basis to less-than-significant levels, when compared to the proposed Project, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts to biological resources.

6.5.5 CULTURAL RESOURCES

The No Project Alternative would result in continued implementation of the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan, which includes several policies to protect cultural resources throughout the Parkway as a result of development under the Plan. Additionally, compliance with local, State, and federal laws would further protect disturbance to cultural resources within the Parkway Plan Area would reduce potential impacts to less-than-significant levels. The proposed Project has added new policies and BMPs to further protect cultural resources in addition to keeping policies under the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan. However, under this alternative, fewer protective policies, design standards, and best management practices would be comprehensively implemented. As a result, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.6 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan would continue to be implemented, and additional facilities and structures could result from continued implementation, which could disturb sensitive soils and geologic areas. However, as discussed in Chapter 4.6 of this Draft EIR, the impacts to geology and soils are often site-specific. Specific projects would be required to comply local, State, and federal regulations with regard to geology and soils. In addition, the proposed Project includes one new best management practice to reduce potential impacts related to geology and soils, and requires no proposed mitigation measures. Because compliance would be required for site-specific projects as implementation of either the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan under this alternative, or under the proposed Project, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.7 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

The No Project Alternative would result in the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan to remain in effect. Implementation of the Parkway under the existing Plan would result in increased Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions attributed to construction activities associated with the development and operation of additional facilities, such as restrooms and concessionary stands, and increased vehicle trips associated with increased usage of the Parkway. The proposed Project includes new policies related to GHG, and one BMP and mitigation measures that would be unable reduce potential impacts to less-than-significant levels. Under this alternative, there

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would be fewer GHG reduction and climate change policies, design standards, and mitigation requirements than required by the proposed Project. Although on a project-by-project basis potential impacts of this alternative could be reduced through mitigation to less-than-significant, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.8 HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing Parkway Master Plan would continue to be implemented, and development of the Parkway would still occur and the focus would remain on balancing low-impact recreational activities and resource conservation. Risks associated with these uses are relatively manageable. The proposed Project would include new best management practices to reduce risks from hazards and hazardous materials to less than significant levels. This alternative could also reduce potential impacts project by project through site-specific mitigation. As a result, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.9 HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing Parkway Master Plan would remain in effect. Under both the proposed Project and this alternative, development and implementation of the Parkway would result in additional facilities, such as restrooms, drinking water fountains, campsites, additional multi-use trails, and picnic areas, which could introduce new and increased sources of pollution, and increase runoff pollution. Although the proposed Project includes several best management practices to reduce potential impacts to hydrology and water quality, due to the Parkway Plan Area's proximity to the Friant Dam, a significant and unavoidable impact could result from dam failure. With fewer best management practices to protect hydrology and water quality, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.10 LAND USE AND PLANNING

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan would continue to be implemented and the Parkway would continue to be developed. The existing policies would remain in place to guide Parkway development. The changes in land use would be similar when comparing this alternative with the proposed Project, and both would result in less-than-significant impacts. As a result, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.11 MINERAL RESOURCES

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 Master Plan policies would continue to guide Parkway development. Policies of the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan ensure that Parkway development does not interfere with sand and gravel mining operations, therefore, mineral resource extraction and operations in the

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vicinity of or adjacent to the Parkway would continue to operate per their existing land use entitlements and permits. Under the proposed Project, the same policies as under the existing Plan would remain in place. Therefore, under this alternative, impacts to mineral resources would be considered less than significant, and this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.12 NOISE

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan would remain in effect, and development of recreational facilities would continue similar to the proposed Project. The proposed Project does not require mitigation to reduce noise impacts, and this alternative would not require any additional mitigation to reduce impacts. Therefore, under this alternative, impacts to noise would be considered less than significant, and this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.13 POPULATION AND HOUSING

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan would remain in place and continue to be implemented. The existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan does not have a residential component and, therefore, has no impact to population, with the exception of increased visitors to the Parkway of which any population growth would be temporary as a result of daily use of the Parkway or tent and RV camping. Although the Plan Area population could increase as a result of visitors to the Parkway, such impacts are considered recreational, intermittent and temporary, and, therefore, are not considered as impacts to the overall permanent population. Because the implementation of the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan under this alternative does not include the construction of residential housing units, there would be no impacts to housing. In addition, the existing residential units within the Parkway Plan Area would not be displaced as a result of the proposed Project, unless the owners willingly sold their respective properties. As a result, this alternative would result in less-than-significant impacts to population and housing, and this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.14 PUBLIC SERVICES AND RECREATION

The No Project Alternative would result in the existing Parkway Master Plan to remain in effect. This alternative does not include the new best management practices and policies and design standards to support recreation services and reduce recreational impacts that are included in the proposed Project. Although impacts can be reduced project by project to less-than-significant levels on a site-specific basis, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

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6.5.15 TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

The No Project Alternative would result in the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan to remain in effect, and enhancements to the multi-use trail network would occur, and transportation and traffic impacts would occur as future projects are constructed. When compared to the proposed Project, the No Project Alternative would not include a mitigation measure to reduce potential impacts related to traffic. As a result, although the impacts could be mitigated on a project by project basis, this alternative has greater potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.5.16 UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

Under the No Project Alternative, the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan would remain in place and continue to be implemented. Restroom facilities, drinking water fountains, safety lighting, and trash receptacles would be necessary; however, as discussed in detail in Chapter 4.16 of this Draft EIR, most of the restrooms operate on self-contained vault toilet systems or septic leach field systems, which, as a result, do not impact local utilities. Further, the drinking water demand to be provided at drinking fountains is minimal and only to be provided where feasible.

The proposed Project would also introduce new structures and facilities along the Parkway which could include, but are not limited to, additional restrooms, drinking water fountains, and campsites, all of which could impact utilities and service systems. However, under the proposed Project, such facilities (e.g. restrooms) would connect to local utilities where feasible, and if not feasible, would operate on the vault, septic, or leach field system, and thereby, would not impact local utility providers. Because operating conditions, uses, and structures of the existing Parkway Master Plan and the proposed Project would, in general, be similar, this alternative would result in less-than-significant impacts to utilities and service systems, and it would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6 INCREASED NATURAL RESERVES

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the proposed Plan would be adopted; however, the focus would be on increasing natural reserves through land acquisitions, and habitat enhancement and restoration, and not further developing the multi-use network of trails and low-impact recreational facilities.

6.6.1 AESTHETICS

Aesthetics within the Parkway Plan Area generally include views of hiking and biking trails, sights typical of tent and RV campgrounds, restroom facilities, boat and canoe launches, parking lots, and open space areas for viewing plants and wildlife. Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the aesthetic characteristics of the Parkway would include more open space for conservation. Land acquisitions and implementation of natural reserves would alter the visual characteristics of the Parkway Plan Area, but would result in less-than-significant impacts. However,

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because the focus would no longer be on enhancement and addition of multi-use trails, recreational facilities and other visitor accommodating areas, this alternative would have less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.2 AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

Under the Increased Natural Reserve alternative, land acquisitions throughout the Parkway Plan Area for the purpose of providing for natural reserves would occur. Although land acquisitions would occur, this alternative would result in less potential for conflict between recreational uses and adjacent agricultural uses. However, similar to the proposed Project, this alternative would result in conversion of agriculture to non-agricultural use and significant and unavoidable impacts would result. As a result, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.3 AIR QUALITY

The proposed Project includes new policies and mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts to air quality. Although the proposed Project includes these requirements, significant unavoidable impacts would still occur, with impacts to be determined and mitigated on a project-by-project basis. Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, there would be less emissions from infrastructure construction and less emissions resulting from visitor and operational vehicle miles traveled. Since the emissions potentially generated cannot be determined without project-specific analysis, this alternative would result in significant and unavoidable impacts; however, this alternative would have less potential for impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.4 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the quantity of natural reserves would be increased in comparison to the proposed Project. This alternative would focus on increasing the overall land area, network and connectivity of natural reserves throughout the Parkway Plan Area, thereby, increasing the amount of habitat and protection for animals and plant species found in the Parkway Plan Area. Additionally, this alternative would not increase the overall network of multi-use trails and other recreational facilities, therefore, the potential for human impacts on biological resources and potentially disturbing plant and animal species would be reduced. This alternative would include policies, design standards, best management practices, and mitigation requirements that are included in the proposed Project to reduce impacts to less than significant levels. As a result, this alternative would have less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.5 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, land acquisitions, habitat enhancement and restoration would result in increased natural reserves, while enhancement of the existing network of multi-use trails and low-impact

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recreation facilities would not occur. Under this alternative, there would be less construction of facilities to support recreational activities than under the proposed Project; there would continue to be the potential for ground-disturbance due to restoration work. Because the same goals and policies protecting cultural resources would be applicable under this alternative and the proposed Project, as well as the requirement of separate project-level CEQA review and compliance with other local and federal laws, which would identify potential cultural resources on a site-by-site basis, this alternative would have a less than significant impact, and because there would be less infrastructure, less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.6 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the potential disturbance to geology and soils would be limited due to the acquisition and conservation of land and habitat restoration. Construction of recreational facilities would not occur under this alternative. Although potential geological and soils impacts could be reduced under this alternative as compared to the proposed Project, impacts to geology and soils is often site-specific. The proposed Project as well as this alternative would be subject to the same proposed policies and the same federal, State, and local laws to protect geological and soil resources. Therefore, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project, less than significant.

6.6.7 GREENHOUSE GASES

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the generation of greenhouse gases would likely be less than under the proposed Project and reforestation and carbon sequestration would be greater, as this alternative would seek to acquire land for the purpose of conservation and would restore habitat, and would not provide increased or enhanced opportunities for recreation. Although low-impact recreation does not necessarily produce GHG emissions on its own, the potential increase in vehicle traffic attributed to visitors to and from Parkway facilities could increase GHG emissions in the area under the proposed Project. The potential impact of the proposed Project on GHG emissions was found to be significant and unavoidable. Under this alternative, there would be the same GHG reduction and climate change policies, design standards, and mitigation requirements as included in the proposed Project and potential impacts would be less than significant. Further, with less intensive development and through reforestation and sequestration of GHG emissions, this alternative has less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.8 HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the potential for hazards and hazardous materials to be introduced to the Parkway Plan Area would be less due to the acquisition and improvement of land for natural reserves and not for infrastructure development and uses related to recreational activities. Although there could be a risk of wildland fires, potential impacts could be reduced through proposed policies and site-specific mitigation. As a result, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

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6.6.9 HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

The Increased Natural Reserves alternative would result in additional natural reserves; therefore, long-term impacts to hydrology and water quality would be minimal. Under this alternative, there would be less potential for human-induced impacts to hydrology and water quality associated with low-impact recreational infrastructure development and uses such as biking, hiking, camping, and picnicking. In addition, there would be less impacts resulting from construction and post-construction runoff pollution. Although the proposed Project includes several best management practices to reduce potential impacts to hydrology and water quality, due to the Parkway Plan Area's proximity to the Friant Dam, a significant and unavoidable impact could result from dam failure. Due to the less intensive development occurring under this alternative, this alternative has less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.10 LAND USE AND PLANNING

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, conservation and open space land use would increase, and further Parkway development would not focus on recreational development and use. Although the overall facilities, network of trails, and structures that serve Parkway visitors would be reduced as a result of this alternative, the impacts resulting from land use changes would be similar when comparing this alternative with the proposed Project, and both would result in less-than-significant impacts. As a result, this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.11 MINERAL RESOURCES

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, mineral resource extraction and operations in the vicinity of or adjacent to the Parkway would continue to operate per their existing entitlements, with the same policies in the proposed Plan to ensure that Parkway development does not interfere with sand and gravel mining operations. Therefore, under this alternative, impacts to mineral resources would be considered less than significant, and this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.12 NOISE

The Increased Natural Reserves alternative would seek to increase natural reserves and restore habitat as the main focus of Parkway development. With fewer opportunities for recreational activities along the Parkway, as well as fewer points of access throughout the Parkway, this alternative would result in less noise attributed to Parkway visitors and operations in and around the Parkway Plan Area. Therefore, noise would be generated existing areas already accessible to the public, and not in new areas or resulting from new facilities. As a result, under this alternative, impacts to noise would be considered less than significant, as with the proposed Project, and this alternative would have less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

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6.6.13 POPULATION AND HOUSING

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the policies of the proposed Plan would be adopted and implementation would focus on the development and enhancement of natural reserves. The proposed Plan does not have a residential component and, therefore, would have no impact on population. Because the implementation of this alternative does not include the construction of residential housing units, there would be no impacts to housing. In addition, the existing residential units within the Parkway Plan Area would not be displaced as a result of the Project, unless the owners willingly sold their respective properties. As a result, this alternative would result in less-than-significant impacts to population and housing, and this alternative would have a similar level of impact when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.14 PUBLIC SERVICES AND RECREATION

The Increased Natural Reserves alternative would result in increased natural reserves as the main focus, and not enhancement to recreational facilities or multi-use trails. Under this alternative, impacts to public services, include police and fire services, would be minimal because there would be less recreational facilities and less public use, and impacts on these services would be reduced when compared to the proposed Project. Because this alternative would result in less recreational development, it has greater potential to result in impacts on public recreation when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.15 TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, the focus would be to acquire and improve habitat on land for the purpose of increasing the overall amount, quality, and connectivity of natural reserves in the Parkway. Enhancements to the multi-use trail network would not occur as would occur under the proposed Project, which would reduce the opportunity for pedestrian and bicycle travel in lieu of vehicle use. This alternative could potentially reduce other transportation and traffic impacts as compared to the proposed Project by not developing new access staging areas. Additionally, this alternative would result in less visitor traffic and less development of infrastructure. As a result, this alternative would result in less-than-significant impacts to transportation and traffic, and would have less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

6.6.16 UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

Under the Increased Natural Reserves alternative, connection to existing utilities services would be minimal as a result of natural reserves not requiring electricity, sewer connections, and/or trash service. This alternative would result in less new demand for utilities and less construction of new infrastructure when compared to the proposed Project. As a result, this alternative would result in less-than-significant impacts and would have less potential to result in impacts when compared to the proposed Project.

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6.7 ABILITY TO MEET PLAN OBJECTIVES

This section describes how each alternative would meet Project objectives, described in Chapter 3, of this Draft EIR, and repeated above in Section 6.1.2.

6.7.1 NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would continue to implement the existing 1997 Parkway Master Plan and would generally meet the project objectives, with the exception of the objective of cohesively generating environmental benefits and mitigating the impacts of Parkway development, rather than relying to a much greater extent on project-specific, incremental mitigation. This alternative would not comprehensively implement the updated policies of the Master Plan Update, nor would it implement the mitigation requirements identified in this EIR.

6.7.2 INCREASED NATURAL RESERVES

This alternative would not meet the project objectives, the statutory mission of the San Joaquin Conservancy, the mandate of the San Joaquin River Conservancy Act, nor achieve the purposes of the San Joaquin River Parkway, as it would not provide for low impact public recreation.

6.8 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

In addition to the discussion and comparison of impacts of the Project and the alternatives, Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an “environmentally superior” alternative be selected and the reasons for such a selection be disclosed. In general, the environmentally superior alternative is the alternative that would be expected to generate the least environmental impact. Identification of the environmentally superior alternative is an informational procedure and the alternative selected may not be the alternative that best meets Project objectives.

As shown in Table 6-1, the proposed Project and the two alternatives would all result in less than significant impacts, with the exception of significant unavoidable potential impacts for all three on Air Quality and Agriculture. The Increased Natural Reserve Alternative would have the lowest potential for environmental impacts when compared to the proposed Project and the No Project Alternative, and would therefore be considered the environmentally superior alternative.