4 OTHER NEPA CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

NEPA requires that impacts to resources from proposed federal actions include the perspectives of cumulative impacts, the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and long-term productivity, and irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources. While an attempt was made to incorporate those considerations in the discussion for each resource, they are summarized here in recognition of the emphasis they are given in NEPA and the CEQ regulations.

4.2 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

A cumulative impact is an impact that results from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor, but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7).

As discussed in Chapter 1, Reclamation has adopted the policy of transferring the title of projects to individual districts if the transfer could assure operational stability, protection of federal investments, and compliance with applicable laws, contracts and agreements. To date, a number of title transfers have been completed by Reclamation, and others are currently authorized or under consideration. This cumulative impact analysis does not attempt to examine the general cumulative effects that may be associated with the disposition of Reclamation lands not included in the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative considered in this DEIS. Although such disposition may result in a cumulative decrease in lands under federal ownership, the implementation of the title transfer program under the National Performance Review is not the subject of the current Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative, and therefore, cumulative impacts that may be associated with the program are beyond the scope of this document.

Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Proposed Action would not result in changes in operation of the Division facilities or changes in water consumption or quality of return flows from the District. As such, no cumulative impacts to Colorado River water resources, including water quality in the Yuma-Transboundary area, would occur.

Also, the future uses of the land proposed for transfer may result in cumulative land use impacts when considered in combination with the effects of development by others (existing and planned) within the project area. Up to 9,800 acres of currently unused, vacant transfer lands have been identified as candidate lands for residential, commercial, or enhanced agricultural development. Currently, proposed development of these parcels include a golf
course near the Town of Wellton, and the construction of the proposed Wellton-Mohawk Generating Facility, combined-cycle power plant near Ligurta in the western portion of the District. As discussed in Chapter 1, a separate NEPA review of the proposed power plant is currently underway. The issue rests on whether development of some transferred lands would be additive to development on the private and state lands available for development. The finding of the land use analysis in Section 3.2 is that the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative would not be expected to increase the amount or rate of development that is anticipated within the project area. Consequently, the Proposed Action would not be expected to contribute cumulatively to changes in land use within the project area.

Development within the county can also result in impacts to other resources in varying degrees. Yuma County is the primary land management agency that would have jurisdiction over lands that may be acquired by the District and subsequently developed by a private entity. In the 2010 Plan, the county has identified issues and included specific measures to address any potential concerns. The 2010 Plan discusses issues associated with water resources, air quality, noise pollution, solid waste disposal, hazardous wastes, renewable energy, agricultural resources, silviculture areas, cultural resources, environmental land use designations, geological resources and hazards, biological resources, and soils. The Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative would not affect the level of development anticipated in the 2010 Plan, and therefore no additional impacts would occur with implementation of the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative beyond those that would occur from development in the absence of the Proposed Action. The recent establishment of the District as a Yuma County Rural Planning Area is expected to strengthen the area's compliance with the Yuma County's 2010 Plan. No additional cumulative impacts have been identified.

4.3 SHORT-TERM USES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

NEPA requires consideration of the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and long-term productivity associated with a proposed action. The Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative is an administrative action that would not result in a direct physical change to the environment. The current uses of the irrigation, drainage, and flood control facilities of the Division would continue under the Proposed Action. Currently, lands owned by Reclamation within the District are either rights-of-way for irrigation facilities and the Gila River Flood Channel, or they are vacant lands within the District. Under the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative, the rights-of-way and Gila River Flood Channel lands would continue to be used as they are at present during both the short- and long-term.

The Proposed Action would likely result in as much as 1,400 acres of vacant land in scattered tracts in agricultural areas being made available to farmers with adjacent land as discussed in Section 3.2. This change in use would increase the efficiency of farming operations in the District and would have little impact on the general landscape inasmuch as
the lands are in or adjacent to established agricultural areas. In addition, as noted above, up
to 8,400 acres of transfer lands have been identified as candidate lands for residential or
commercial development, and may be made available to other parties for that purpose. Such
use of these lands would increase the long-term productivity of the lands, but would reduce
the development of lands in private and state ownership.

4.4 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

Irreversible commitments are decisions affecting renewable resources such as soils, wetlands
and waterfowl habitat. Such decisions are considered irreversible because their
implementation would affect a resource that has deteriorated to the point that renewal can
occur only over a long period of time or at great expense, or because they would cause the
resource to be destroyed or removed.

Irretrievable commitment of natural resources means loss of production or use of resources
as a result of a decision. It represents opportunities forgone for the period of time that a
resource cannot be used. Irretrievable refers to the permanent loss of a resource including
production, harvest, or use of natural resources. For example, production or loss of
agricultural lands can be irretrievable, while the action itself may not be irreversible.

The transfer of Division works, facilities, and lands from the federal government to the
District would not cause any direct physical impacts to existing biological, cultural, or
physical resources. Because the title transfer, in and of itself, would not result in any
operational changes or other physical impacts that would irreversibly or irretrievably
commit renewable resources, such as soils, wetlands, or habitat, there would be no direct
irreversible or irretrievable commitment of such resources from this federal action. Other
land use decisions occurring after the title transfer may follow. However, because these
decisions are vague, speculative, and will depend on a number of future political, planning,
zoning, and economic factors, they can not be solely attributed to this federal title transfer
action, but instead will result from the outcomes of these future, uncertain decisions and
processes.