

Chapter 7

Significant Irreversible Changes

7.1 Introduction

Pursuant to Section 15126.2(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must consider any significant irreversible environmental changes that would be caused by a proposed project should it be implemented. Section 15126.2(c) states:

Uses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely. Primary impacts, and, particularly, secondary impacts (such as highway improvement which provides access to a previously inaccessible area) generally commit future generations to similar uses. Also, irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project. Irrecoverable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified.

Furthermore, 40 CFR Part 1502.16 of NEPA states that the environmental consequences discussion in an EIS shall include:

...any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposal should it be implemented.

7.2 Analysis of Irreversible Changes

Resources that are committed irreversibly and irretrievably are those that would be used by a project on a long-term or permanent basis. Construction of the Proposed Project would require the use of non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels and some types of construction materials such as iron, concrete, and rock.

Fossil fuels and other forms of energy would be consumed during operation of the Proposed Project. Ocean-going vessel fuels, diesel, and gasoline would continue to be used for ships, tugboats, terminal operations, and on-road vehicles (trucks and employee automobiles). Electrical energy and natural gas would be consumed during construction and operation.

Non-recoverable materials and energy would be used during construction and operation, but the amounts needed would be accommodated by existing supplies. Although the increase in the amount of materials and energy used would be limited, they would nevertheless be unavailable for other uses. The minimal irreversible changes likely would be justified by the economic growth in trade and import/export of goods, as well as the increased efficiency in cargo handling at the Port, which the Proposed Project would provide. The irreversible changes associated with the Proposed Project and alternatives are considered less than significant under both CEQA and NEPA.