

5.4 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The Agency Alternative's and Proposed Action's measures will each continue to commit the lands and waters previously developed by the UARP and an additional 283 acres for the Iowa Hill Development to energy production, water supply, recreation, and other developmental benefits. Although the measures include changes to baseline conditions, the measures do not irreversibly or irretrievably commit resources.

For example, both the Agency Alternative's and the Proposed Action's measures commit additional water to aquatic and riparian habitat enhancements and recreation instead of energy production. Over the short term, this loss of water for energy production may be considered irretrievable because in many instances water released from UARP dams is not recaptured in lower reservoirs (e.g., Rubicon Dam). However, such changes in reservoir releases are reversible over the longer term, since stream flows are a renewable resource and flow requirements could be changed in a future license proceeding.

In addition, both the Agency Alternative and the Proposed Action measures commit lands for recreational enhancements (e.g., development of current informal campgrounds and parking areas). However, in many cases, recreation traffic will continue to occur and even increase in the UARP Project Area regardless of whether the Agency Alternative or the Proposed Action is approved. Recreation use related to the UARP can be modified through the same procedures described above to modify the UARP. Thus neither the Agency Alternative nor the Proposed Action recreational measures irreversibly or irretrievably commit resources.

Similarly, although unlikely given the substantial costs, it is theoretically possible to remove Iowa Hill and return the area to baseline conditions.

5.5 Relationship Between Short-Term Uses and Long-Term Productivity

Compared to baseline conditions, the Proposed Action is expected to result in a reduction in average annual energy generation of about 2.2 percent (1,794 MWh vs. 1,835 MWh). In comparison, the Agency Alternative will result in a reduction of about 9.3 percent in average annual energy generation and associated ancillary services. This long-term energy loss will extend at least as long as the duration of the new license.

Compared to baseline, both the Proposed Action and Agency Alternative provide for enhanced environmental and recreation conditions in the SFAR watershed, and protection and mitigation for construction of the Iowa Hill Development. However, the Proposed Action offers greater enhancements of aquatic resources and generation while adequately protecting recreation opportunities and other resources, including power generation. The detailed balancing between this long-term productivity and short-term uses is described throughout this SPDEA.