
CHAPTER 10.0 IRREVERSIBLE OR IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

Section 15126(f) of the CEQA Guidelines specifies that an EIR should address any significant irreversible or irretrievable environmental changes that would result from a proposed action if it were implemented.

As discussed in Chapter 9 (Short-Term Uses vs. Long-Term Productivity), dredged material represents a valuable resource having a variety of potential beneficial uses. The practice of disposing of dredged material as a waste at unconfined aquatic disposal sites effectively constitutes an irretrievable loss of the potential use of the material as a resource. All of the action alternatives evaluated in this EIS/EIR include an overall long-term increase in the volume of dredged material being reused for beneficial purposes. In this regard, all of the action alternatives are improvements over the No-Action alternative from the standpoint of reducing the irretrievable commitment of resources.

The action alternatives evaluated in this EIS/EIR (see Chapter 6) involve the use of both natural and socioeconomic (industrial) resources. General industrial resources that would be associated with the implementation of an action alternative include capital resources, labor resources, fuels, and other construction-related materials. Natural resources utilized or changed under any of the action alternatives would include biotic resources, water resources, and existing land uses. In general terms, the use and/or associated changes of natural and industrial resources would be considered irretrievable under any of the action alternatives. There may be an exception to this for water resources which, on a regional scale and over time, may in fact be retrievable.

Dredging activities remove the benthic organisms at a dredging site, including those that have recolonized a previously dredged area. Continued maintenance dredging would disrupt or inhibit subsequent recolonization of the benthic community at these locations. However, disposal at ocean or in-Bay sites would not result in irreversible impacts because the overall habitat type would remain the same and recolonization of the site by benthic organisms would rapidly progress once disposal operations ceased.

Placement of dredged material in the upland/wetland reuse environment would likely result in changes in land use. Exceptions to this would be the reuse of dredged materials at landfills, on levees, or for construction fill. These activities are not solely dependent on the availability of dredged material. However, the construction of new rehandling facilities and the reuse of dredged materials at new habitat restoration sites would result in irreversible land use changes. For rehandling facility sites, existing land uses and/or habitat functions would be modified, creating an industrial use area. In the case of habitat restoration sites, existing habitat functions at a site would be modified. In many cases, seasonal wetlands would be replaced when tidal wetlands are restored at a site. However, many of the habitat functions that seasonal wetlands provide would be augmented by the creation of new habitat, such as tidal wetlands. Similar to dredged material reuse at landfills and levee maintenance sites, habitat restoration activities do not necessarily depend on the availability of dredged material. However, the implementation of any of the action alternatives would make material more available for such uses. The availability of such material may make such beneficial/reuse activities more likely to occur.

