

4.5 INVASIVE AND NOXIOUS WEEDS

4.5.1 Proposed Project

4.5.1.1 Affected Environment

The fiber optic cable is located directly under existing dirt roads. Replacement activities would occur only within existing roads and within the rights-of-way (ROW). Laydown areas outside the ROW would also be utilized to support construction activities; these areas are generally devoid of vegetation.

Known populations of invasive and noxious weeds only occur within ruderal areas in the Proposed Project ROW. These ruderal areas exhibit varying degrees of past surface disturbance. The observed plant species that occur in these ruderal areas include Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), Mediterranean grass (*Schismus barbatus*), rubber rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*) and red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*).

On the east side of Interstate 15 along Segment 1, noxious weeds such as Sahara mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*) are present. The California Invasive Plant Council (2005) has declared this plant (which they call "African mustard") highly invasive. It appears as a List A-2 species, which are designated as Most Invasive Wildland Pest Plants; Regional, in 1999. For a more detailed description of known noxious weeds present in the Proposed Project Area, refer to Appendix D - Noxious Weed Management Plan.

4.5.1.2 Significance Criteria

Impacts to noxious weed management would be considered significant if the Proposed Project:

- increases the likelihood of noxious weed species being introduced into a relatively weed-free area at moderate or high ecological risk, or
- results in an expansion of noxious weed infestation(s) within and outside the Proposed Project site into relatively weed-free areas at moderate or high ecological risk.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), consideration of a significant impact on the human environment is conducted in accordance with Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27 (specified in Section 1.2.1 Relationship to NEPA Guidelines). Following the public comment period, a finding regarding significant impact would be prepared in accordance with this provision.

Executive Order 13112 requires each federal agency whose actions may affect the status of invasive species to identify such actions; prevent the introduction of invasive species; detect and respond to and control populations of such species in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner; monitor invasive species populations accurately and reliably; provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded; and not authorize, fund, or carry out actions that it believes are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive weed species.

4.5.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation

Activities associated with construction of the Proposed Project, such the mobilization of construction vehicles and equipment, may facilitate the spread of invasive and noxious weeds by inadvertently transporting the seeds or loose plant remnants on tires or the underside of equipment. In order to minimize the spread of invasive or noxious weeds, AT&T Corp. (AT&T) has prepared a Noxious Weed Control Plan (Appendix D - Noxious Weed Management Plan). The weed control plan specifies the location of existing weed populations; measures to control introduction and spread of noxious weeds in the Proposed Project corridor; worker training, specifications, and inspection procedures for construction materials and equipment used in the Proposed Project corridor; post-construction monitoring for noxious weeds; and eradication and control methods. In addition, should the Proposed Project be approved, the

following mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce potential impacts to a less-than-significant level:

- MM-NOX-01: All areas within the Proposed Project footprint shall be monitored annually for invasive infestations by a qualified personal approved by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of the Proposed Project.
- MM-NOX-02: Annual monitoring reports detailing the annual surveys shall be submitted to the BLM and California State Lands Commission.
- MM-NOX-03: All wash stations shall be located at least 100 feet away from natural drainages and be surrounded by weed-free hay bales to catch runoff seed, which shall be properly disposed.
- MM-NOX-04: Plastic sheeting or other materials, at least 10 feet in height, shall enclose all blowdown stations to reduce wind-blown seed dispersal.
- MM-NOX-05: The environmental awareness training shall include a section on the importance of preventing the spread of invasive and noxious weeds, including impacts to wildlife, native vegetation, and the spread of wildfire.
- MM-NOX-06: AT&T shall provide the species list, application rate, and spacing for the restoration seed mix to the BLM for approval.

The Contractor would adhere to the BLM management guidelines and the Noxious Weed Control Plan measures for reducing the potential for the introduction of noxious weeds and invasive, non-native plant species, including preconstruction surveys, noxious weed avoidance, wash stations, and the use of certified weed-free materials. Refer to Appendix D - Noxious Weed Management Plan for a complete list of construction and restoration techniques and measures to be implemented in order to reduce the spread of noxious and invasive weeds. With the incorporation of the applicant-proposed plan and above-listed mitigation measures, the potential for introduction of invasive, nonnative species from Proposed Project implementation would be minimal. Therefore, a less-than-significant impact would occur.

4.5.2 No Action Alternative

Selection of the No Action Alternative, as described in Section 2.5.1 No Action Alternative, would not result in construction of the Proposed Project and potential effects from invasive and noxious weeds described in Section 4.5.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation would not occur.