identified sites, except possibly six, are considered to be single-component occupations containing a limited quantity and variety of artifacts. The majority of the prehistoric sites appear to represent surface scatters created by limited, short-term occupation episodes. Tentatively, six larger sites are classified as residential bases and/or larger field camps.

The study area may have been visited as part of a pattern of movement between mountain communities, transitional areas, and the desert. Settlement within the study area reflects an emphasis along the 40-foot contour with smaller, more transitory sites at lower elevations.

The entire study area is contained in the site boundaries for 4-IMP-115 (C-180). The generalized boundary for this site takes in all of the cultural resources recorded in the study and extends outside of the current project. Any consideration for National Register eligibility should take into account the relationship among the various site areas identified during the BLM Class III survey and the extended boundaries for 4-IMP-115. If proposed, a National Register district would have contributing and non-contributing properties. Three of the relocated sites were considered eligible for National Register nomination in 1984. Site testing has been conducted on three sites in the study. The research value of the remaining sites has not been exhausted at the survey level. The determination of eligibility is based on surface indications and on the relationship of these sites with the relict Lake Cahuilla and with one another.

Overall the identified archaeological resources in the study area exhibit integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The landscape in which the sites are located retains many of the characteristics of prehistoric times. Although individual site integrity varies, as a whole the recorded sites are reflective of occupation during periodic infilling and desiccation of Lake Cahuilla between A.D. 700 and A.D. 1720. As the lake receded, alternative residential locations were sought, and temporary camps were established on recessional shorelines to exploit the dwindling resource base. Evaluation of the sites identified in the proposed transmission line could aid in the understanding of shifting land use patterns associated with the various lake stands.

3.7 Visual Resources

3.7.1 Visual Setting

The proposed project site is located on flat terrain approximately 10-12 miles west of the city of Calexico, California. The proposed alignment stretches directly south from the Imperial Valley Substation for a distance of about six miles to the U.S./Mexico international border. It traverses State Highway 98 (SR 98), paralleling an existing 230 kV transmission line operated by SDG&E.

The large undisturbed areas to the north, south and west of the proposed project are relatively featureless areas of desert scrub, with some views of distant mountains beyond. To the east, a low-level tree line marks the Westside Main Canal where agricultural fields begin. The most prominent visual features in the immediate project vicinity are the SDG&E transmission line and other transmission lines converging on the IV Substation, and SR-98 running east and west across the center of the proposed route.

3.7.2 Visual Analysis

The Visual Resource Management (VRM) system developed by the BLM provides a way in which to identify and evaluate the scenic values of a particular site or area. It relates the visual appeal of a tract of land to the level of public concern, taking into account scenic quality of the landscape, sensitivity of viewers, and the distance from sensitive viewpoints. Using those factors to determine the relative value of scenic resources, a VRM Class with specific management objectives is determined.

Four management classes are established by the VRM system to define management objectives. The four classes are defined as:

- **Class I.** A special management designation typically applied to protected areas (e.g., existing wilderness). The existing character of the landscape should be preserved. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention.

- **Class II.** Contrasts to the basic elements of a landscape (form, line, color, texture) caused by a management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. A contrast, while seen, should not attract attention.

- **Class III.** The existing character of the landscape should be partially retained. This class establishes that the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Contrasts to the basic elements caused by a management activity may be evident and begin to attract attention. However, the changes should remain subordinate within views of the existing characteristic landscape.

- **Class IV.** The objective of this class is to provide for management activities which require major modification to the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high to the point where contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature of the landscape in terms of scale. Attempts should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through care in location, minimal disturbance and the repetition of the basic elements inherent in the characteristic landscape. Less aggressive measures are needed to mitigate impacts.

For the project area, no previous visual studies have been conducted and no VRM class is established. For purposes of this EA, using the three critical factors of scenic quality of the landscape, sensitivity of viewers, and the distance from sensitive viewpoints, an interim VRM class will be assigned.

Scenic Quality

All landscapes are assumed to have some inherent scenic value but can be classified according to the level of interest of their various elements. Generally, the greater the diversity of form, line, texture, and color in a landscape unit or area, the greater the potential for high scenic value. In the VRM system, scenic value is indicated by an A, B, or C rating (Class A: distinctive, Class B: common, Class C: minimal scenic qualities).

The proposed project area is mainly characterized by vast open expanses of desert scrub and exhibits generally flat topography with few landscape features. Vegetation present consists of predominantly low level scrub with little variety of texture and color. The most noticeable vegetation feature is a tree line generally following the western edge of the irrigated agricultural areas about a mile east of the proposed alignment. The most notable topographic features are the mountains on the horizon to the south and west.

The proposed project area is essentially indistinct from the surrounding areas since the specific types of landforms present on site—flat, open areas of desert scrub—are common, covering vast areas of the surrounding lands to the north, south and west. The adjacent scenery, while mostly similar in topography, color and texture, does moderately enhance the proposed project area through its sheer expansiveness, and ultimately adds to the overall visual quality of the area.

None of the landscape features present within the proposed project area could be considered unique or rare within the region and on a wider scale. The landscape features within the proposed project area remain common. The only cultural modifications readily apparent, other than the tree line to the east, are electrical transmission facilities that do not add visual variety or any interesting visual features to the surrounding area.

Based on the above considerations, the scenic quality value assigned to the proposed project alignment and surrounding areas is "B," indicating the area is of common scenic value.

Viewer Sensitivity

Sensitivity levels are a measure of public concern for the preservation of the scenic qualities of a particular area. Public lands, upon analysis of the various indicators of public concern, are assigned high, medium, or low levels of sensitivity. Factors considered when assigning sensitivity ratings include: types of user, the amount of use,

public concern regarding change to the landscape, adjacent land uses, and considerations regarding certain "special areas" such as wilderness.

The project area is relatively isolated, with few residents nearby, and a relatively low level of recreational use. Surrounding uses include electrical transmission facilities, agriculture, transportation, and limited recreation. While the visual quality of the area is of high importance to certain land uses and a small number of viewers, given the overall moderate level of use of the area, sensitive viewers are not deemed to represent a significant proportion of the viewers. The proposed project area does not contain visual features that are unique or special that would tend to become a focus of public interest, and were therefore deemed of little concern to the vast majority of users. Using the BLM Sensitivity Rating Sheet, the proposed project area was considered to fall within the Low Visual Sensitivity classification.

Distance from Viewers

Generally, changes in form, line, color, and texture within the landscape become less perceptible with increasing distance. Figure 3.7.1 shows the distance zones mapped for the proposed project area. The project site is perceptible with a sense of clarity only in the foreground-middleground distance zones, due in part to low, sparse, and fairly uniform vegetation, relatively featureless topography, and prevalence of ground haze or heat shimmer. This viewing zone is limited to the area near SR-98.

Visual Resource Inventory Class

The analysis of this area and the visual resources present resulted in a scenic quality determination of "B," a low sensitivity rating, limited foreground-middleground distance zones, and a lack of significant background zones. Given the above determinations, all currently managed BLM lands within the area of the proposed project are to be classified with an interim Visual Resource Inventory Class III.

3.8 Paleontological Resources

Paleontological resources consist of the fossilized remains of ancient flora and fauna. These fossils are most often preserved in sedimentary deposits, although they may also occur where volcanic ash deposits or molten rock flows entomb animal or plant remains. Fossils may be exposed due to weathering; in the California desert area, this generally occurs in areas of some relief, such as the flanks of hills or mountains, where fossil remains have been exposed by natural processes of erosion.