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

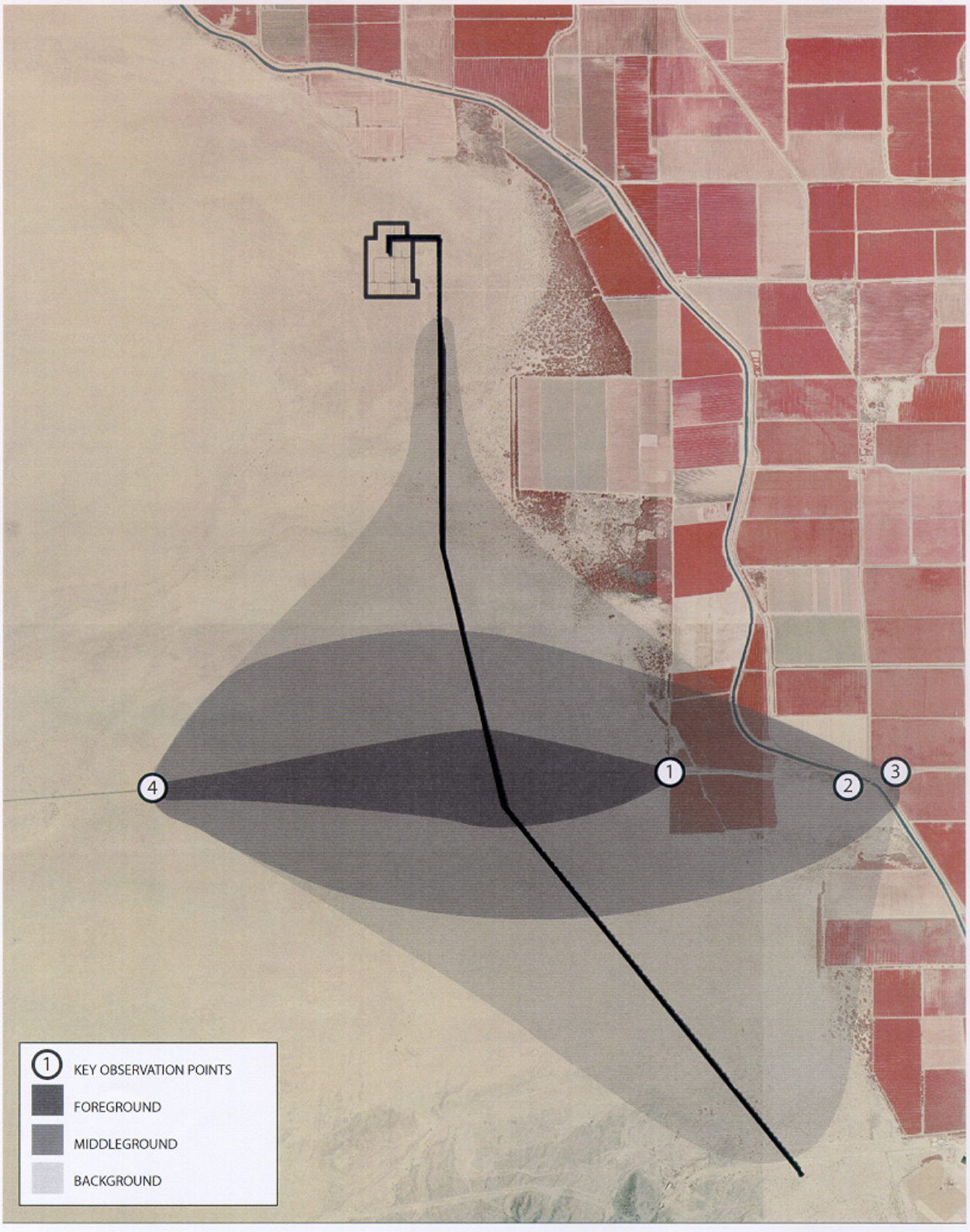
Generally, changes in form, line, color, and texture within the landscape become less perceptible with increasing distance. Figure 3.7.1 shows the distance zones mapped for the proposed project area. The project site is perceptible with a sense of clarity only in the foreground-middleground distance 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.



RECON

Map Source: Intergen, 2001

FIGURE 3.7.1
Distance Zone Map

M:\jobs\3366\graphics\fig3-7-1 (distance zone).ai 07/25/01

Generally, it is not possible to tell, based on surface investigations, whether significant fossils are present in underlying formations or sediments. Slope wash and weathering of surface strata make the prospect of finding intact fossils on the surface very small.

In general, the surface deposits in the project area consist of alluvial deposits of Quaternary age (less than 10,000 years old). Some of these are lacustrine deposits associated with ancient Lake Cahuilla. Because they are relatively recent in origin, these deposits would not be expected to contain significant fossils. Especially in the southern part of the proposed route, however, older Quaternary alluvial deposits intrude from the west. Significant fossils may be more likely to be present in these deposits.

3.9 Socioeconomics

Demographic and economic data incorporated below were obtained from literature searches, statistical reports from the U.S. Department of the Census, the State of California Department of Finance, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the State of California Employment Development Department (EDD), and from personal communication with state and local government staff. Additional personal communication was conducted with the engineering companies associated with the construction of the proposed project, VFL Energy Technologies, Inc. and Cableados Industriales, S.A. de C.V.

Portions of the following discussion are based heavily upon data derived from the U.S. Census. When the following text was written, the 1990 Census was the most recent set of fully comparable data. As of July 2001, only partial results from Census 2000 have been released. Although the new census data would provide a more accurate picture of the demographic and socioeconomic setting of the project site and surrounding area, the existing relevant economic statistics are sufficient for the purposes of this evaluation, especially given the sparse population of the study area.

3.9.1 Population

According to recently released Census 2000 data, the population of Imperial County numbered 142,361 persons. Since 1990, the population of the county has increased from 109,303 persons, a gain of 33,058 persons or 30.2 percent. This equates to an annual increase of 3.02 percent over the period. This figure is more than double the growth in neighboring San Diego County, where the population increased by 12.6 percent between 1990 and 2000. Imperial County's growth rate also eclipsed that of California's, which was 13.81 percent over the same period.

As of 2000, the city of Calexico had a population of 27,109 persons, an increase of 8,476 persons since 1990 or 45.4 percent. This amounts to an annual increase of 4.54 percent. The city of El Centro had a population numbering 37,835 persons as of 2000, an increase