

Chapter 3a: Community Profile

Native Lands

The Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) is home to many native and indigenous communities, with their natural and cultural resources enriching the community in which we do this work. There are four federally-recognized tribes within the ECV: the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians Tribe, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians Tribe, the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribe, and the Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians Tribe. South Coast AQMD recognizes the sovereignty of these tribes, and is committed to work in collaboration with these tribes on actions within the CERP that affect tribal land.

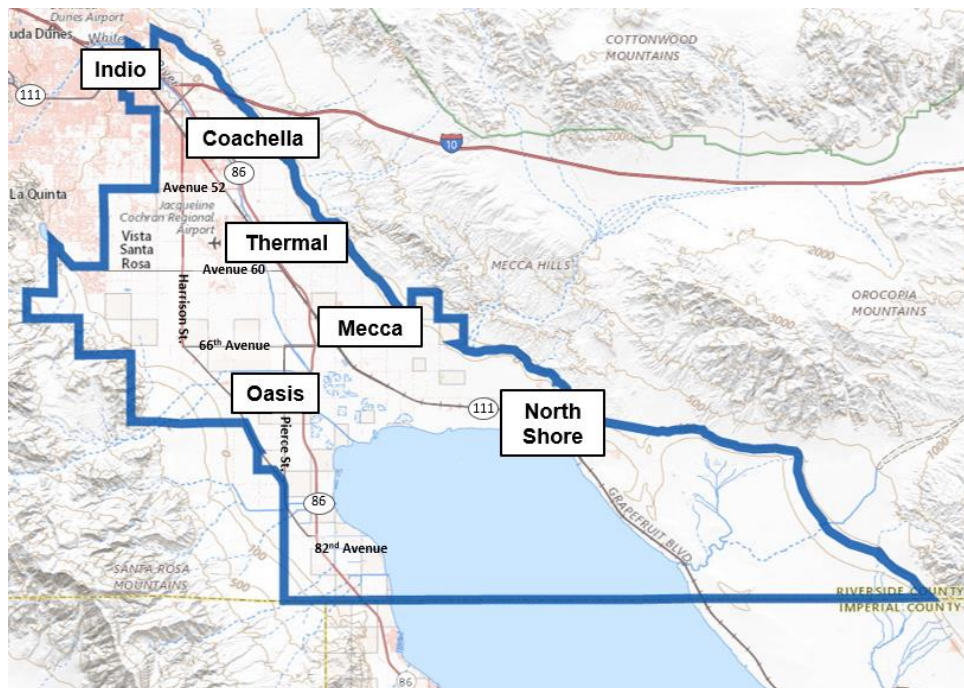
Introduction

The community profile describes the characteristics of ECV and the types of air pollution sources that impact the community. Understanding the characteristics of ECV and the air pollution sources affecting the community is crucial to addressing the air quality priorities outlined in Chapter 5. Additional community details (e.g., types of stationary sources and socioeconomic information) are available in Appendix 3a – Community Profile.

Community Boundary and Air Quality Priorities

The AB 617 community of ECV stretches from the City of Indio south to the Riverside County portion of the Salton Sea; it includes the City of Indio, the City of Coachella, a small portion of the City of La Quinta (southern part of the city), and the unincorporated areas of Thermal, Mecca, Oasis and North Shore (Figure 3a-1). This community is located within Riverside County and within the Salton Sea Air Basin and shares its southern border with the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District.

Figure 3a-1: ECV Community Boundary



During the development of the Discussion Draft CERP, the ECV CSC discussed the geographic areas and neighborhoods to include in the ECV community boundary under the AB 617 program. The CSC members focused on the most populated areas that are most burdened by environmental impacts.

The ECV CSC established one distinct geographic boundary to represent this community for the purpose of the CERP (Figure 3a-1). The “community boundary” focuses on places in the community where residents live, work, attend school, and spend most of their time, and also includes nearby air pollution sources (e.g., facilities and major truck routes), normally included in the “emissions study area.”

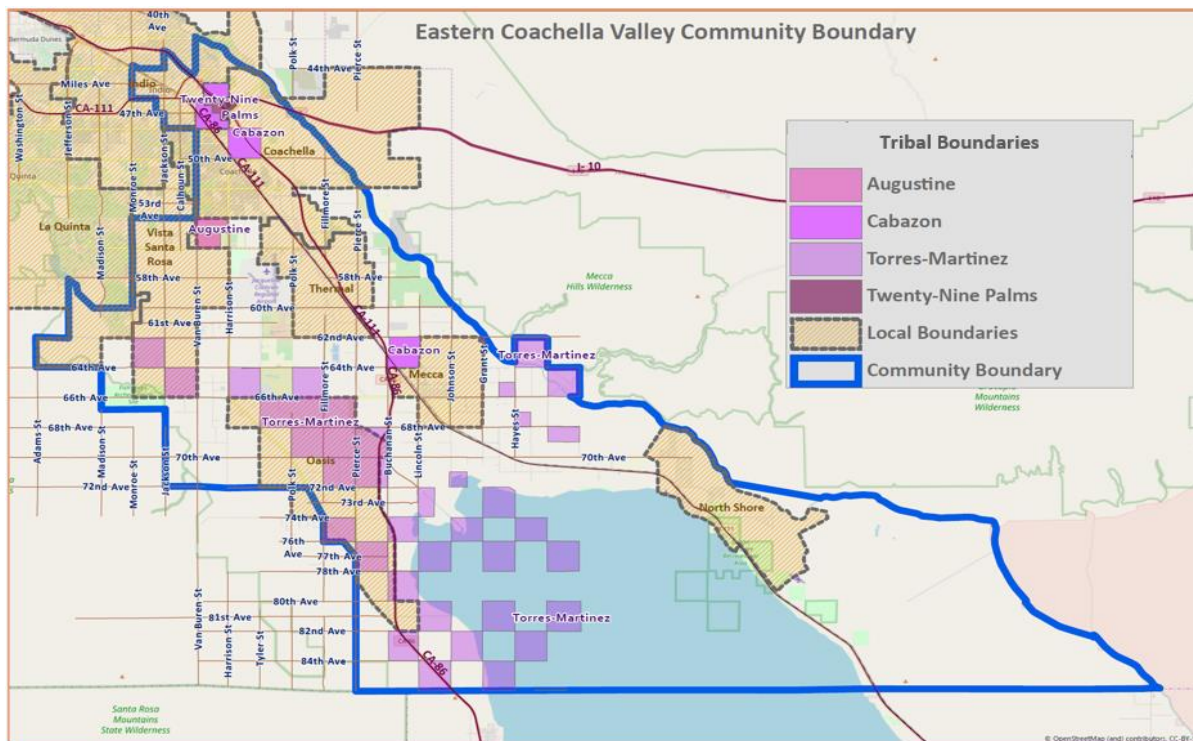
A member of Comité Civico del Valle described the community in the following way during the self-nomination process for AB 617 consideration in 2019:

“The Eastern Coachella Valley is subject to extreme heat, gusty winds, sandstorms, and reduced precipitations patterns that regularly occur in the region, increasing exposures to harmful dusts from fields, roads, and the receding shores of the Salton Sea. Its highly transited transport corridor connecting Los Angeles, Phoenix and Northern Mexico truck routes are among the largest contributors of regional air pollutions. Furthermore, ECV a heavily undeserved (sic: underserved) agricultural community lacks the most basic infrastructure and subjective to high levels of pollution burdens. Monitoring the air quality and developing emissions reductions program will give the community the opportunity to a better quality of life in the process transforming the entire regions characteristic.”

During the community selection process, it was widely recognized that the ECV has many unique air pollution issues (e.g., the Salton Sea, agricultural pollution, and particulate matter (PM10) in windblown dust) that are very different from those for the South Coast Air Basin. Local sources of air pollution in the ECV include fugitive dust from construction activities, vehicles on roadways (including unpaved roads), agricultural burning, and the increased exposure of the Salton Sea playa. Strong and sustained wind conditions transport particulates and contribute to high PM10 levels.

This is an area that includes several cities and rural communities within Riverside County. There are multiple sources of pollution in the region that are associated with agricultural activities, goods movement, industrial facilities and hazardous waste facilities. ECV is home to four Tribal Reservations (Figure 3a-2). These include the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians Tribe, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians Tribe, the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribe, and the Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians Tribe. These Tribal reservations include off-reservation trust land areas recognized by the federal and state government. Another characteristic that makes this community unique is that it is highly impacted by the declining Salton Sea levels.

Figure 3a-2: Eastern Coachella Valley Community Boundary with Local Boundaries and Tribal Reservation Boundaries



Indio

The City of Indio is located in the northern most portion of the community boundary, northwest of Coachella and approximately 23 miles east of Palm Springs, CA.

Coachella

The City of Coachella is located southeast of Indio, and approximately 40 miles east of Palm Springs, California - east of Jackson Street, between Avenues 44 and Airport Boulevard with two main highways that intersect: Highway 111 and CA-86.

Thermal

Thermal is an unincorporated community located south of the City of Coachella. Its rough boundaries are Harrison Street and CA-86; Airport Boulevard and Avenue 66, about halfway between the City of Coachella and the Salton Sea. Some residents in this community are not connected to a public water or sewer system and rely on groundwater from wells for their water.

Oasis

Oasis is an unincorporated community located south of Thermal from Avenues 66 to 82 and between Harrison Street and CA-86. It also edges up to the northwestern part of the Salton Sea.

Mecca

Mecca is an unincorporated community located east of Thermal. Its boundaries are CA-86 and Johnson Street, and Avenues 64 and 66, about halfway between Thermal and the Salton Sea. Mecca is the most developed and clustered community out of the four unincorporated communities in the ECV. Mecca is surrounded by agricultural fields and is located right next to Grapefruit Boulevard (Highway 111) and about one mile from CA-86. This community also houses an industrial facility adjacent to housing projects named Greenleaf Desert View Power Plant. In addition, tribal lands near the Mecca community have been hotspots for illegal dumping from outside sources and produce odors to neighboring residents and passersby.

North Shore

North Shore is an unincorporated community located east of Oasis and southeast of Mecca edging up to the northeastern part of the Salton Sea. This community is about 20 miles from the City of Coachella and comprised of three different clusters of homes.

Community Characteristics

In the ECV, residents work primarily in agriculture, contributing to one of the most vital agricultural regions in both the state and country. Coachella Valley's agricultural industry is the second largest contributor to the local economy. ECV residents are also the backbone of the hospitality and tourism industries in the western Coachella Valley.

The ECV is an area where the population is increasing relatively quickly. Its location is of great importance due to the proximity to the California/Mexico Border, in which most immigrants tend to settle in search of year-round or seasonal work. Those communities within the ECV community boundary are home to underserved, low-income, immigrant communities of color, Tribes, and other indigenous populations, reflecting rich, vibrant and resilient cultures that have allowed cross-cultural interaction between community members. Parts of the east side of the community lack access to the most basic and fundamental services such as potable drinking water, sewer systems, reliable transportation, and other amenities that residents need daily.

After finalizing the community boundary, the CSC discussed their air quality concerns and identified a set of air quality priorities (the full list can be found here: <http://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/ab-617-ab-134/steering-committees/eastern-coachella-valley/aq-priority-list.pdf?sfvrsn=8>) through an air quality prioritization activity. The results of the air quality prioritization activity (ranked list can be found here: <http://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/ab-617-ab-134/steering-committees/eastern-coachella-valley/priorities-june25-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=8>) was used to determine the top air quality priorities and the actions necessary to address them. The top air quality priorities for the ECV community are:

- Salton Sea
- Pesticides
- Open Burning and Illegal Dumping
- Fugitive Road Dust and Off-Roading
- Diesel Mobile Sources
- Greenleaf Desert View Power Plant

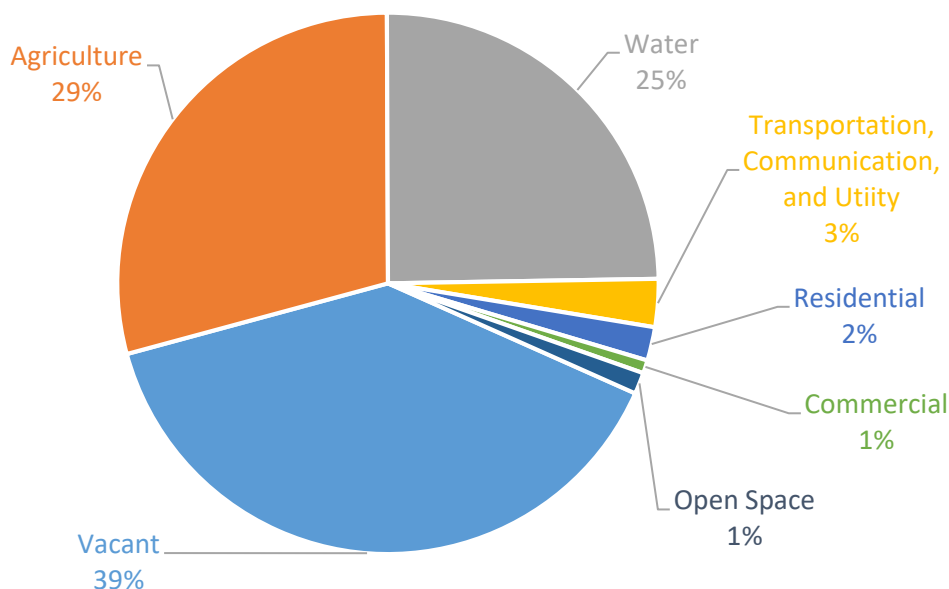
The actions to address each air quality priority are described in Chapter 5.

Community Land Use Profile and Related Data

The ECV community is shown in Figure 3a-1. The community boundary includes a land area of approximately 288 square miles. About 2% of this land area is used for residential living, 1% is zoned for commercial uses, 1% is zoned for industrial uses, 3% is used for freeways, roadways, and utilities and communications services, 29% is used for agriculture which is land that is used primarily for the production of food, fiber, and livestock, 39% is used for vacant land which is land that had not been built-up with man-made structures, and 25% is water which includes open water bodies which are greater than 2.5 acres in size. (Figure 3a-3).ⁱ

ⁱ Land use refers to how certain areas of land are classified for development and use. Land use data is often used for city or county planning, such as the placement of housing developments and transportation hubs. Land use data is derived from the 2016 Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Regional Transportation Plan/ Sustainable Communities Strategy, which is based on 2012 data.

Figure 3a-3: Land use profile in ECV



Appendix 3a presents data based on previous cumulative impact studiesⁱⁱ to describe the impacts of toxic air pollutants in this community, as well as other environmental pollution, public health factors, and social and economic factors that make people more sensitive or vulnerable to the health effects of pollution.¹ The Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study IV (MATES IV) and CalEnviroScreen 3.0 are two tools used to evaluate the characteristics that describe this community. The South Coast AQMD conducts the MATES study, which used air toxics monitoring, emissions inventories, modeling, and health risk assessment techniques to calculate the cancer risk due to toxic air pollutants (“air toxics cancer risk”). CalEnviroScreen3.0 is a screening tool developed by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) that is used to identify communities that are most affected by various sources of pollution, and where people are especially vulnerable to the effects of pollution.

References

1. Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. CalEnviroScreen 3.0. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-30>, Accessed September 10, 2020.

ⁱⁱ More information regarding MATES IV and the final report can be found on South Coast AQMD’s website at: <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/air-quality/air-quality-studies/health-studies/matesiv>.