3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following sections describe the affected environment for each primary natural and human resource component, and the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and the alternatives being considered in detail in this EIS. In some instances, mitigation measures are recommended to reduce or avoid identified impacts. For purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the Wanapa Energy Center applicants would apply for, and receive state and federal approvals that require submittal of certain applications and associated environmental protection plans. A list of these approvals is presented in Tables 1.5-1 and 1.5-2. Some of the mitigation measures included in this EIS provide guidance on needed information, or applicant commitments in applications to various agencies.

3.1 No Action Alternative

If the Wanapa Energy Center were not constructed and operated, the predicted effects on natural and human resources would not occur. It is likely that another electrical generating project would be constructed in the region in the near future, based on expected future regional demand for electricity. However, the location and effects of such a project cannot be accurately estimated at this time. The effects of the No Action alternative (no new project) in relation to existing conditions and trends are described briefly below.

Geology and Soils. No new surface disturbance would occur in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir, and consequently, no changes in existing wind and water soil erosion rates would occur, subject to seasonal fluctuations in precipitation and winds.

Water Resources. No new project water demands from the Columbia River would occur at the McNary Dam, and therefore, the flow regime in this reach of the River would remain the same, subject to climatic variations and existing approved water withdrawals. No new water would discharge to Cold Springs Reservoir, and therefore, the water quality and quantity in this reservoir would be maintained under existing storage and irrigation supply agreements.

Vegetation. No new surface disturbance would occur in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir, and therefore, native vegetation communities would continue to dominate in areas where they have not already been converted to agricultural

uses. It is anticipated that invasive weeds would continue to spread into native vegetation communities over time. Ongoing efforts to restore upland native vegetation on the Wanaket Wildlife Area may expand the area and quality of shrub scrub and grassland communities.

Fisheries. No new project water demands from the Columbia River, or water discharges to Cold Springs Reservoir would occur. Therefore, no fish habitat changes in the Columbia River, or Cold Springs Reservoir would occur.

Wildlife. No new surface disturbance would occur in proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir, and therefore, the wildlife habitat support capacities within native vegetation communities and roadside weedy communities would not change for big game, non-game, and wetland (amphibians, waterfowl, and shorebirds) species.

Special Status Species. No new surface disturbance would occur in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir, and no new water withdrawals from the Columbia River would occur. Therefore, there would be no changes in habitat carrying capacities for special status terrestrial and aquatic species.

Air Quality. No new project natural gas-fired air pollutant emission sources in the eastern Columbia River Basin would be constructed. Therefore, existing power generation emissions, and emissions from other sources (gas and diesel engine vehicles, fugitive dust, agricultural field burning) would continue at current rates.

Transportation. There would be no new requirements for transporting construction equipment, construction materials, and construction personnel along Interstate Highways, State Highway 730, and county roads that would provide access to the proposed construction areas for the proposed plant site and ancillary facilities.

Visual Resources. No new above-ground facilities would be constructed, and therefore, there would be no landscape changes apparent to residents and recreational users on the Columbia River near McNary Dam, or to drivers along State Highway 730.

Noise. No new noise-generating facilities would be constructed, and therefore, the existing rural background noise environment would remain the same.

Cultural Resources. ***No new surface disturbance would occur in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir, and therefore, there would be no new impacts to cultural resources.***

Land Use. ***No new above-ground or underground facilities would be constructed in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir. As a consequence, there would be no changes in current land uses, or effects on adjacent land uses.***

Recreation. ***No new above-ground or underground facilities would be constructed in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir. As a consequence, there would be no changes in access to developed or dispersed recreation sites, or changes in the character of these types of recreational sites.***

Socioeconomics. ***No new above-ground or underground facilities would be constructed in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir. As a consequence, there would be no short-term costs or benefits from the construction work force on local economics, no long-term benefits to the CTUIR from tribal taxes on the power plant, to local economies in the form of taxes paid directly by project facilities located on private and state lands, or indirectly to CTUIR from purchases of goods and services from the local economy.***

Public Safety. ***No new above-ground or underground facilities would be constructed in the proposed project locations between the Columbia River and Cold Springs Reservoir. As a consequence, there would be no change in the existing public safety risks.***