

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The California State Lands Commission (CSLC) Proposed Sale of School Lands in Imperial County (Project) would authorize the CSLC to sell two parcels within a 640-acre parcel of State School Lands. The parcels are located approximately 2 miles east-northeast of Niland, Imperial County. Niland is a small community on the southeast side of the Salton Sea, approximately 80 miles southeast of Palm Springs and 19 miles north of Brawley. The School Lands parcel (Assessor's Parcel Number [APN] 003-240-005) is accessed via Beal Road, a paved road that heads east from Niland's Main Street and traverses the property in a southwest-northeast direction. The Project area is located on the U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' Iris Wash and Iris quadrangle maps (Figure 2-1). Current features within the 640-acre School Lands parcel include Slab City, Salvation Mountain, and the artist colony called "East Jesus" (Figures 2-2 and 2-3).

2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Project area is located in the central basin of the Colorado Desert within the Salton Trough (Salton Sink), a northwestern landward continuation of the rift that extends 140 miles northwest from the head of the Gulf of California. The Trough ranges in width from a few miles at its northwest point to 70 miles at the U.S.-Mexico border and is surrounded by mountains, except at the south side where a barrier formed by the Colorado River Delta separates the Salton Trough from the Gulf of California (Waters 1981). The Trough is traversed by the San Andreas Fault and bordered on the east by the Chocolate Mountains, which stretch more than 60 miles in a northwest to southeast direction and rise to an elevation of 2,475 feet above sea level (asl). The Trough was formed by a gradual sinking of the land concurrent with uplift of the surrounding mountains during the Miocene, Pliocene, and Pleistocene eras (Dibble 1954). Much of the Salton Trough lies below sea level. At its lowest elevation lies the Salton Sea, located about 6 miles to the east of the Project area.

The Colorado Desert is a hot, dry desert region that consists of low valleys surrounded by high mountains. The average annual rainfall and temperature vary with elevation. In much of the lower region rainfall ranges from 2.5 centimeters (cm) to 5 cm per year; while other areas receive as much as 20 to 25 cm of precipitation per year. The marked elevation changes in the area also reflect variations in temperature. In most of the Colorado Desert, summer temperatures range between 100° and 120° Fahrenheit (F), while in the mountainous regions, summer temperatures tend to hover around 90° F. The winters are windier and more variable in temperature than in the summer, but rarely reach below freezing (University of California, Santa Barbara 2015; Warren 1984).

Figure 2-1. Project Site Location

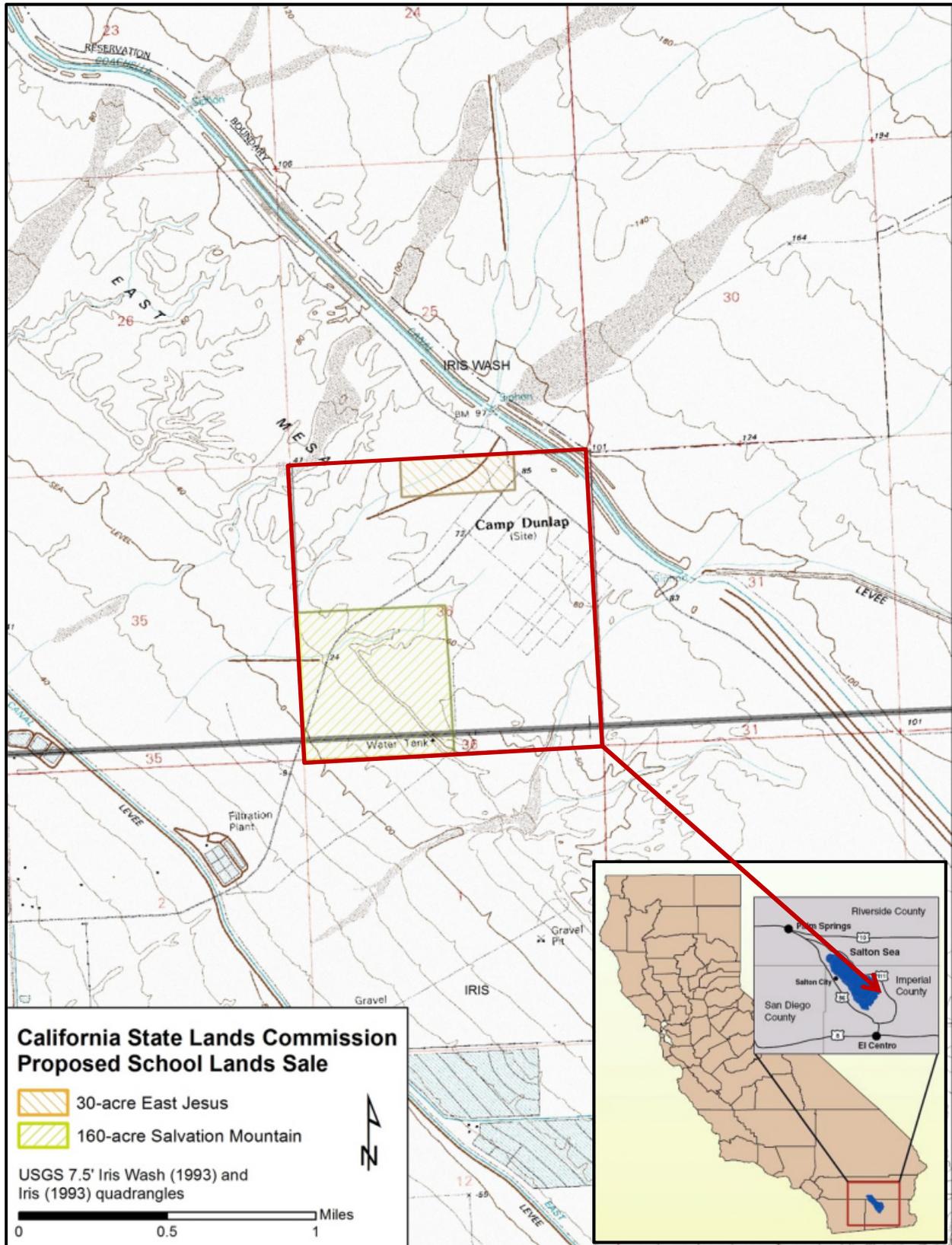


Figure 2-2. Map of Salvation Mountain and East Jesus Parcels

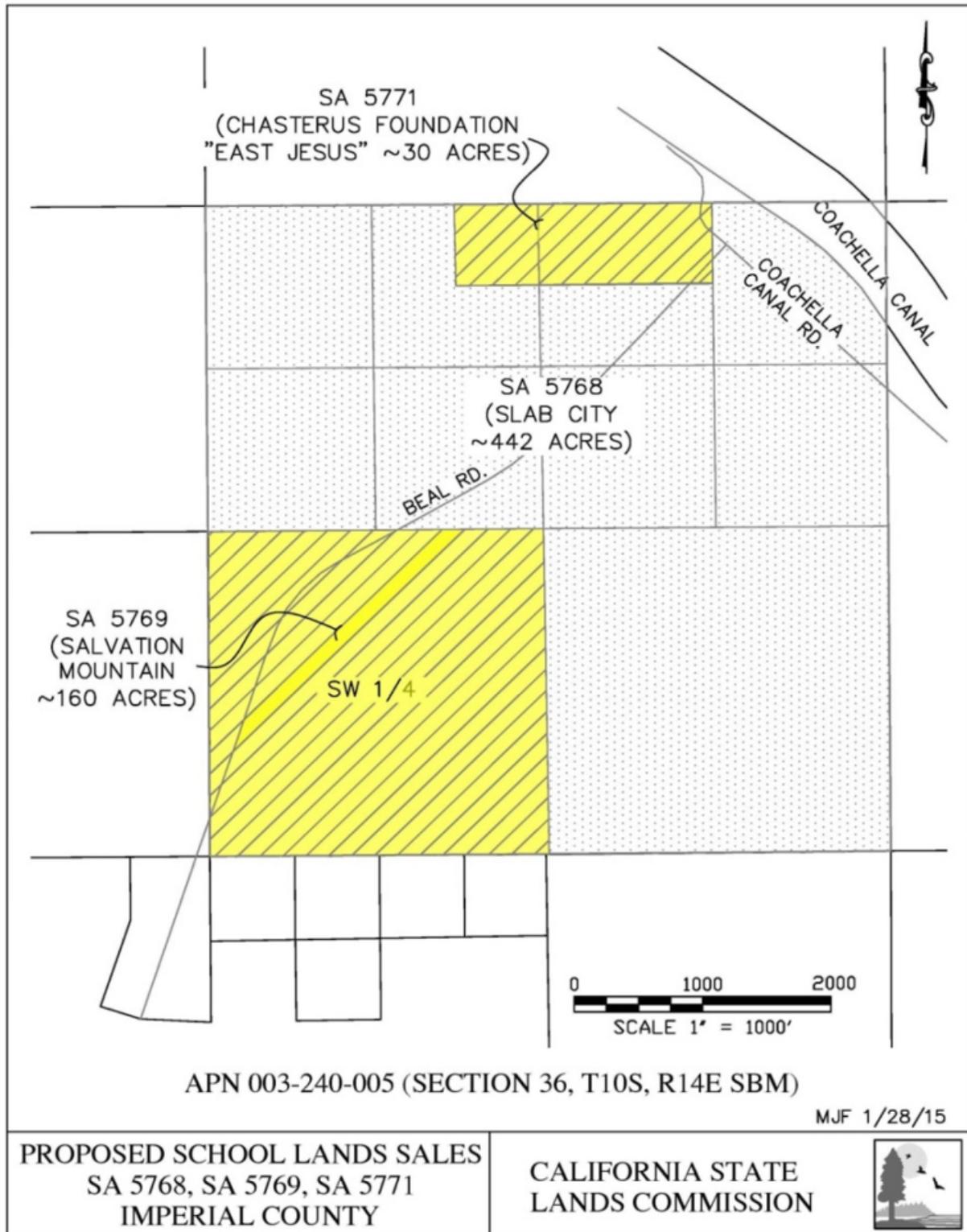


Figure 2-3. Pictures of Salvation Mountain and East Jesus



CSLC staff photographs (August 2015)

1 2.3 AREA BACKGROUND/HISTORY

2 2.3.1 Camp Dunlap

3 During World War II (1939-1945), the Project area included Camp Dunlap, a U.S.
4 Marine Corps (USMC) base activated in 1942 as a training base for the 10th, 12th and
5 13th Marines, the artillery regiment of the 3rd Marine Division. The camp was named
6 after Brigadier General Robert H. Dunlap, who is referred to as the "Father of Marine
7 Corps Artillery." Under the command of Colonel John B. Wilson, the USMC conducted
8 extensive artillery training at Camp Dunlap before deploying in 1943. The base also
9 provided training areas for Army troops under General Patton, a bombing range for
10 planes from a nearby Marine Air Station, and a staging area for smaller Marine groups.

11 Camp Dunlap was 631 acres in size with the main part of the camp located on higher
12 ground in the northeast quarter of Section 36. The base, which served 185,000 troops
13 for 3 years before it was deactivated in 1945, consisted of 65 buildings, a water
14 treatment system, electrical and water distribution system, sewage collection and
15 treatment system, more than 8.2 miles of paved streets, recreational areas including a
16 swimming pool and a movie theater, and concrete fuel tanks (California Military
17 Department 2015; Marine Corps Chevron 1946). In 1946, the U.S. Government
18 approved the dismantling and removal of buildings from Camp Dunlap.

19 *The lumber was stripped of nails and hardware. The roofs, covered with roofing*
20 *paper and several coats of tar, had no value and were left at the site. The lumber*
21 *was hauled to Westmorland, where two motels were constructed.... Lumber was*
22 *also used locally. A church was built in Niland; three homes were built on 4th*
23 *Street, barns, chicken houses and fences (Anglin 1997).*

24 A skeleton crew remained to dismantle the buildings until 1949. Materials and
25 equipment were loaded onto trucks and sent to Camp Pendleton or salvaged by a local
26 company. When the land containing Camp Dunlap was quitclaimed back to the State of
27 California, only the concrete slab foundations from the former buildings remained
28 (Anglin 1997). (Table 3.5-1 in Section 3.5, Cultural and Paleontological Resources,
29 identifies cultural areas associated with Camp Dunlap.)

30 2.3.2 Slab City

31 In the mid-1960s, a few individuals began to establish residences on the cement
32 foundations that remained from Camp Dunlap, a 631-acre U.S. Marine Corps base
33 occupied in the area during World War II. Homes included buildings constructed of
34 plywood, discarded lumber, and other materials that remained from the dismantling of
35 Camp Dunlap, as well as mobile homes and recreational vehicles. A small community
36 was formed that became known as Slab City. Slab City continues to attract occupants
37 and visitors.

1 **2.3.3 Salvation Mountain and East Jesus**

2 Located near Slab City are Salvation Mountain and the art installation called East
3 Jesus. Salvation Mountain is a 50-foot-tall structure built into a hillside in the early
4 1980s using concrete, adobe, and paint. In 1990, the original structure collapsed, and
5 construction began on a new structure. Salvation Mountain Inc. currently maintains this
6 structure. A history of Slab City and Salvation Mountain is provided by Anglin (1997).

7 East Jesus is an art installation located less than a mile north of Salvation Mountain.
8 The site initially consisted of sculptures and art cars, and later grew to include dozens of
9 art works made from discarded materials and a compound housing a few occupants.
10 The Chasterus Foundation currently manages the art installation.

11 **2.4 PROPOSED PROJECT**

12 The CSLC is proposing to partition the 640-acre School Lands parcel to facilitate the
13 sale of three smaller parcels. Prospective buyers are: (1) Slab City Community Group, a
14 nonprofit group comprised of a number of residents of Slab City; (2) Salvation Mountain
15 Inc., a nonprofit organization formed in 2011 to support Salvation Mountain located in
16 the southwest quarter of the 640-acre parcel; and (3) Chasterus Foundation, a nonprofit
17 organization that operates an art installation at the north end of the East Jesus parcel.
18 Information on each parcel is provided in Table 1-1 (see also Figure 2-2). This Negative
19 Declaration (ND) analyzes only the sale of the East Jesus and Salvation Mountain
20 parcels. The potential sale by the CSLC of the Slab City parcel will be subject to a
21 separate environmental analysis in the future.

22 The proposed purchasers of the Salvation Mountain and East Jesus parcels have
23 stated they plan to continue the existing uses associated with the respective parcels.
24 Current activities within the parcels are therefore identified as baseline conditions. Any
25 other uses and potential impacts are too speculative for evaluation.

26 Upon review of potential renewable energy resources in the area, CSLC staff is
27 evaluating retaining an easement, north of Beal Road along the west edge of Section 36
28 and partially within the Salvation Mountain parcel, for access to and surface rights for
29 future renewable energy exploration and development. The potential easement area is
30 within the West Chocolate Mountain Renewable Energy Evaluation Area that the U.S.
31 Bureau of Land Management believes has geothermal and solar energy potential.

32 The entire Project area is included on a list enumerated under Government Code
33 section 65962.5 (“Cortese List”), listed pursuant to Health and Safety Code section
34 25356 for hazardous materials and areas for potential unexploded ordinance (UXO)
35 (DTSC 2015). Any future access roads or development would require a UXO survey,
36 coordination with other regulatory agencies, and additional environmental review.