# 3.11 RECREATION

This section addresses the impacts of the Desert Claim Wind Power Project on existing recreation opportunities and facilities in the project area and vicinity. The proposed project would be wholly contained on private land. Recreational activities presently can occur on project-area lands only with permission of the landowners. These permitted recreation activities would, for the most part, be able to continue. Public access via County roads to recreational opportunities on surrounding lands would not be affected on a long-term basis. Recreational users active on surrounding lands would experience some indirect effects from the proposed project, primarily through views of project facilities.

## 3.11.1 Affected Environment

### 3.11.1.1 Desert Claim Project Area

The proposed wind power project would be developed on 5,237 acres in Kittitas County, Washington. With the exception of one parcel in the northern part of the project area, on which the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) owns mineral rights, all of the land is entirely owned by eight private local landowners. There is no public access to any of the proposed project lands, and there are no recreational facilities within the project area.

Outdoor recreation can occur within the project boundary only with specific permission from an individual landowner. Recreational activities that have occurred in the past within the project area have included hunting, horseback riding, and snowmobile and off-road recreational vehicle (ORV) use. Most private landowners in the area have posted no hunting signs.

### 3.11.1.2 Surrounding Area

Outdoor recreational opportunities in the vicinity of the proposed project (within approximately 10 miles) include a number of recreational opportunities on federal, state, city, and private land. Developed recreational facilities in the vicinity of the project are limited.

**Federal Lands**

The primary, publicly available, outdoor recreation resource in the project vicinity is the Wenatchee National Forest (WNF), managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The southern boundary of the WNF is approximately one-half mile from the northernmost parcel within the project area. Most visitors to WNF lands in the project vicinity access recreational destinations from U.S. 97. The national forest is also accessed thought the project area along Reecer Creek Road, or east of the project area via Wilson Creek Road.

Recreational activities on WNF lands include camping, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobile and ORV use, cross-country skiing and hunting (USFS 1990a). Reecer Creek Road (designated as USFS Road 35 within the national forest) crosses through the western portion of the project area. The Reecer Creek Sno-Park is located approximately 0.5 miles from the nearest project area boundary, along the east side of the road at a prominent curve at the north edge of Section 8 and the end of the paved County road. This facility consists of a small parking area that is plowed in the winter (when necessary) to provide access for winter recreationists. The road continues for 12 miles past the project, accessing the higher elevations of Table Mountain. The 4-unit Lion Rock Campground is located near the end of the road (USFS 1990b). Road 35 accesses a network of multiple spur roads that are used for ORV

riding in the summer and snowmobiling in the winter. There are also several trails that are accessed from roads near Lion Rock. Parking along Reecer Creek road is also common, primarily in the winter (USFS 1990a), as winter recreationists park at varying locations along Road 35 depending upon the location of the snow level.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers a relatively small land base in Kittitas County. The BLM lands include parcels in the Yakima River Canyon south of Ellensburg, which are popular for several types of river recreation. The BLM maintains several access sites along the river. The access sites provide parking and restroom facilities for boaters, anglers and other users. Informal overnight camping also occurs at these sites.

The Bureau of Reclamation operates the Yakima Reclamation Project, which includes or regulates many of the most significant water features in the basin. Yakima Project features include the Keechelus, Kachess, and Cle Elum Reservoirs. Recreational facilities have been developed at all thee of these reservoirs, although the faculties are maintained by the USFS. The USFS also has responsibility for managing the surface and shoreline areas of the reservoirs.

**State of Washington Resources**

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (WSPRC) manages the state park system in Washington. Three units of the state park system are located in the project vicinity. They are Lake Easton State Park (west of the community of Easton), Iron Horse State Park and Olmstead Place State Park (southeast of the project area, between Ellensburg and Kittitas). Iron Horse State Park is a long, linear park occupying the former right-of-way of the Milwaukee Railroad from Snoqualmie Pass to the Columbia River. The multi-use John Wayne Memorial Trail is located within Iron Horse State Park. In addition to the state parks, the WSPRC also operates Sno-park facilities at 10 locations in the region (Kittitas County 1999).

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) manages several access sites intended primarily to allow angler access to lakes or streams. Four of the sites are located on the Yakima River, which is a popular trout fishery, in the reach between Easton and the Yakima Canyon (Kittitas County, 1999). Three sites are on small lakes that are stocked for fishing, including Lavender Lake near Easton and two sites south of Ellensburg. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) does not maintain any developed recreation facilities in the project vicinity. However, state-owned lands administered by WDNR are generally open to dispersed (informal) public recreational use.

**Local Government**

The City of Ellensburg provides several municipal parks. One of these, Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park, is a relatively large, regional-scale park located on the Yakima River southwest of the city. Other Ellensburg recreation resources include Kiwanis, Memorial, Reed, Whitney, Mountain View and West Ellensburg Parks. Kittitas County operates one developed recreational facility, a public boat ramp and water access site on the Columbia River at Vantage. Kittitas County also operates the county fairgrounds, which has both outdoor and indoor facilities available to the public.

**Private Sector**

There are 13 developed recreation sites in the general vicinity of the proposed project, principally located along the I-90 corridor between Easton and Ellensburg. These sites include eight commercial campgrounds, three golf courses and a winter sports site (Kittitas County 1999). Private landowners in the vicinity of the proposed project may use their lands for a variety of on-site recreational activities or may allow others to use their lands for such activities, as is the case for the lands within the proposed project area.

### 3.11.1.3 Wild Horse (Alternative 1) Site

Discussion of Kittitas County recreation resources presented in **Sections 3.11.1.1** and **3.11.1.2** also applies to the Wild Horse site. Existing recreation conditions on the Wild Horse site and surrounding lands are similar to those described for the Desert Claim project area, in that there are no recreational facilities and no general public access to the site. Most of the site is privately owned, although WDNR administers approximately 1,920 acres of the site. Because there are no public roads accessing the site, recreational use can only occur with the permission of the private landowner that controls the site. At least in the recent past, hunting has traditionally been allowed to occur on the private lands within the Wild Horse site.

The Schaake and Quilomene Wildlife areas, administered by the WDFW, are adjacent to the Wild Horse site and are managed to accommodate both hunting and non-consumptive wildlife use. They are part of a complex of lands that are managed to provide habitat for the Colockum elk herd and other wildlife, and support big-game hunting during the fall season. Annual hunting use of the WDFW lands is estimated at approximately 1,000 hunters.

The nearest developed recreation facilities to the Wild Horse site are at Gingko Petrified Forest State Park, administered by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. The Natural Area unit of the park, located 2 miles west of Vantage on the Vantage Highway (approximately 7 miles southeast of the Wild Horse site), includes a trail system with an interpretive trail. An interpretive center and picnic area are located in the Heritage Area of the park, just north of Vantage on the Columbia River. Kittitas County also maintains a public boat launch facility at Vantage.

### 3.11.1.4 Springwood Ranch (Alternative 2) Site

The Springwood Ranch is a privately-owned property that is not and has not been open to the public for recreational use. Any such use of the property itself in the past has presumably been incidental use by the owners and invited guests, and perhaps occasional hunting by permission of the owners. The property does have natural and cultural attributes that would provide opportunities for recreation, however. The primary feature of potential recreation interest would likely be the Yakima River, including the adjacent riparian corridor and bluffs. In addition, the Iron Horse State Park/John Wayne Trail passes through the ranch for approximately 6 miles, and represents potential access for a variety of trail-based uses.

There are few regional recreation resources near the Springwood Ranch other than the river and Iron Horse State Park. One of the four Iron Horse trailheads is located at Thorp, providing parking space for a small number of vehicles. (As of October 1998, the park right-of-way at the Taneum Road crossing near Thorp was posted as closed to recreational use because of safety hazards.) An old grist mill in Thorp is primarily an historical-interest site, although current and planned recreational improvements will support some types of day-use activities. One WDFW access site is located about 5 miles upstream from the

northern end of the property, and another is approximately 3 miles downstream from the southeastern corner of the ranch. This reach of the Yakima River receives some recreational boating use, including boat fishing, kayaking/canoeing and rafting. Given the access to or near the river provided by the Thorp Highway and SR 10, there is also likely to be bank fishing use of the Yakima River in the vicinity of the Springwood Ranch.

## 3.11.2 Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

### 3.11.2.1 Construction

Overall, direct impacts to recreation resources and opportunities during construction of the Desert Claim project would be very low or negligible. Current recreation activity within the project area, which consists of (at most) limited informal use with landowner permission, would be curtailed during construction. After construction was completed, most recreational activities that are currently possible would be able to resume at current levels.

There are a limited number of potential indirect impacts from construction of the proposed project on recreational opportunities in the surrounding area. Noise during construction might be audible intermittently on recreational lands near the project area, or to private landowners using their properties for recreation. If project construction activities occurred during the winter, they would likely be evident at the Reecer Creek Sno-Park, for example. Similarly, visitors at Reecer Creek or on nearby public lands might experience views of project construction sites (see **Section 3.10 Aesthetics** for additional discussion). Recreational visitors traveling along U.S. 97 and the County roads within the project area might experience occasional congestion and delays from trucks hauling turbine components and construction equipment or materials, or from construction of project access road connections to County roads. Both of these types of impacts would be localized and small in magnitude, would occur on an intermittent basis, and would be temporary in duration. Neither type of impact would prevent current uses or cause a large disruption to use of the existing recreational opportunities in the project vicinity. Therefore, recreation impacts during project construction would be insignificant. If project construction occurred in phases, the effect on the level of recreation impacts would be to extend the total duration of temporary disturbance from project construction, but to reduce the intensity or magnitude of impacts for any individual phase. Construction–related recreation impacts would still be temporary, localized and low in magnitude, and overall project impacts during construction would remain insignificant in a phased-construction scenario.

### 3.11.2.2 Operation

With one possible exception, all recreational activities previously allowed by permission of project-area landowners would be allowed to continue during the operational phase of the proposed project. The exception would be hunting. Currently, the project area is all private land, open to hunting only with the owners' permission; it is expected that the current level of hunting within the project area would continue with the landowners' permission. This might, however, be reduced or eliminated within the project boundary to avoid possible damage to turbines or other project facilities. (WDFW has expressed reservations over a prospective hunting closure within the project area, based on concerns over possible property damage from big-game animals, and recommended use of management options other than a complete closure. Resolution of this question would likely occur through development of habitat and wildlife mitigation plans for the project.) Because project-area lands are not managed for public recreation, the possible loss of this limited opportunity would not be a significant recreation impact.

No USFS, BLM, DNR, State Parks, WDFW or private-sector recreational facilities would experience direct impacts from the project. Potential indirect impacts of the proposed project on existing recreation opportunities on nearby federal, state, and private lands and facilities would be very low. Such indirect impacts would primarily be limited to views of the project facilities (principally the turbines) from selected areas used for recreation; see **Section 3.10 Aesthetics** for discussion of the visibility of project facilities.

Based primarily on public comments during scoping or review of the Draft EIS, other possible indirect effects on recreation would include potential exposure to noise, mechanical hazards or shadow flicker. People recreating on private lands in the near vicinity of the project boundary might be able to detect audible noise from operating wind turbines under some conditions; as discussed in detail in **Section 3.9**, project operation noise increases above background sound levels would generally be minor and would be noticeable only within approximately one-quarter mile or less of a turbine. Given the safety-zone setbacks incorporated in the modified project configuration (e.g., 487 feet from the project boundary, adjoining property lines, public roads, existing utility corridors, and the KRD canal), people on properties or rights-of-way near the project would be protected from potential mechanical hazards and would not need to adjust current recreational activities in response to such hazards. As discussed in more detail in **Section 3.8**, recreational users within approximately 2,000 feet of an operating turbine might at times experience shadow flicker. These occurrences would be confined to rare and very specific conditions (lack of cloud cover, sufficient wind for turbine operation, low sun angles at the beginning or end of the day, specific viewing angle, etc.), would be limited to short durations when they did occur (typically on the order of one-half hour or less per occurrence), and would occur for a limited total duration (a maximum of about 50 hours per year, based on the analysis results for residential receptors). Because the maximum potential modeled exposure is based on a stationary residential receptor, for a person engaged in outdoor activity, exposure to shadow flicker would likely be a transitory experience that amounted to an annoyance or distraction; a person in motion would typically move into and out of the relatively narrow band of the turbine shadow in a brief time.

Operation of the project would not change the existing access conditions along public roads that are currently used to reach recreational opportunities on the Wenatchee National Forest or elsewhere in the vicinity, so the ability of recreational users to access public lands for recreation would not be affected by the project. Visitor use levels for recreational opportunities in the project vicinity are not expected to change as a result of the project.

The project would be expected to provide an uncertain degree of attraction for tourists who would otherwise not visit the project area. Some tourists traveling through Kittitas County on I-90 might see the turbines in the distance and be prompted to make a side trip to get a closer view of the project. Other visitors might respond to publicity about wind farms in general or the Desert Claim project in particular by planning a visit to the project area as part of a trip itinerary. To accommodate such prospective visitors, the applicant would maintain a small visitor information facility at a publicly-accessible site in or near the project area. The facility would likely include a roadside pullout or parking area, a kiosk with information displays, and appropriate roadside signage with directions for visitors. The additional visitors might cause a small increase in the volume of traffic on roads near the project, but it is unlikely that the number of project visitors would be large enough to have a noticeable effect on the ability to access recreational opportunities in the surrounding area.

Some review comments on the Draft EIS stated or implied that adverse impacts associated with the Desert Claim project and/or other proposed wind energy projects would result in significantly reduced recreation and tourism visitation in Kittitas County, presumably in response (at least primarily) to the visibility of

wind turbines. While it is generally accepted that many recreational and tourist visitors to Kittitas County value the relatively unspoiled scenery, it does not logically follow that a significant number of these visitors would avoid the County if wind turbines were developed and were visible from substantial portions of the County. Visual impacts of wind farms are most evident within the foreground and middleground distance zones (see **Section 3.10.1**). The area within approximately 3 miles of the Desert Claim project has minimal recreational facilities and accounts for an extremely small proportion of total recreation and tourism use in the County; as discussed above, recreation impacts within this area would be insignificant.

Recreational/tourist visitors elsewhere in Kittitas County would at most be exposed to background views of wind turbines at long distances. A large share of the recreational visitors to Kittitas County use the forested areas in the upper county and would typically not come within viewing range of wind turbines. Some anglers and boaters using the Yakima River might be exposed to distant views of Desert Claim wind turbines on the way to their recreational destination, but it is doubtful that many of these users would choose to recreate elsewhere in response to these views. Similarly, it is highly unlikely that many visitors coming to Ellensburg for cultural attractions (such as visiting museums or galleries, festivals, or the fair and rodeo) would choose not to visit in response to transitory, long-distance views of wind turbines from I-90. In summary, the Desert Claim project is not located in an area of intensive recreational use, the primary recreation attractions in Kittitas County are located at some distance from the Desert Claim project site (and the locations for the other proposed wind projects), and development of the wind energy project is not likely to have a significant effect on the baseline level of recreational and tourism use in the County.

## 3.11.3 Impacts of the Alternatives

### 3.11.3.1 Alternative 1: Wild Horse Site

Construction activities for Alternative 1 would not directly affect any existing recreation facilities, as there are no such facilities in or adjacent to the project area. Recreational visitors using the nearby WDFW wildlife areas or the Ginkgo State Park facilities might notice construction activities on the site or project-related construction traffic, including transportation of turbine components, and might be subject to occasional traffic delays or detours. Existing recreational use of the project area, which is limited to hunting with the specific permission of the current landowner, would presumably be displaced to the extent that the construction period coincided with hunting seasons. Project decommissioning would have essentially the same effects on recreation as described for project construction.

Because limited access to the project site for hunting has been permitted in the past and the site is adjacent to WDFW wildlife lands that are used for hunting and wildlife habitat, it is conceivable that some hunting activity would be allowed during the operating period. In fact, the Zilkha proposal for operation of the Wild Horse project would allow some hunting to continue, with specific permission. Under this scenario, the long-term impacts on recreational use of the site would be negligible. If hunting were determined to be incompatible with operation of a wind energy project, access for hunting would not be allowed and the existing hunting use would be displaced. Based on the existing level of use for the WDFW lands, which are likely to attract considerably more activity than the Wild Horse site, if hunting use on the site were displaced it would constitute a minor loss of recreational opportunity.

### 3.11.3.2 Alternative 2: Springwood Ranch Site

Impacts of Alternative 2 on recreation would be of the same type as those described for the proposed action and Alternative 1, primarily involving temporary displacement of any existing recreational activities during the construction period and probable limitations on selected types of recreation during long-term operation of the project. As discussed in **Section 3.11.1.4**, the Alternative 2 site is privately owned and is not known to be generally available for recreational activities. Some informal recreational use may occur with permission of the landowner.

The primary distinction between Alternative 2 and the other action alternatives concerns recreational activities that occur adjacent to the Springwood Ranch. The Iron Horse State Park/John Wayne Trail passes along much of the northern and eastern edge of the site, as does the Yakima River. Recreational users of the park and the river would experience noise, views of construction equipment and activities, and possibly blowing dust during the construction period. Following construction, users of these resources would be exposed to views of wind turbines and other project facilities at some specific locations. These impacts are discussed in **Section 3.10**.

### 3.11.3.3 No Action Alternative

Under the no-action alternative the proposed Desert Claim Wind Power Project would not be built. No turbines would be sited and no construction activities would occur. There would be no impacts on the current recreational opportunities within or adjacent to the project area. On-site recreational activities would continue to be allowed, by permission of landowners only, as they are now. Off-site recreational opportunities and resources would also presumably continue, as they exist currently. Tourist traffic would not increase due to potential interest in the wind power turbines.

## 3.11.4 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts for all elements of the environment are addressed in **Chapter 4**.

## 3.11.5 Mitigation

The impact analysis did not identify significant adverse impacts on recreation resources and no mitigation measures are required or identified for consideration.

## 3.11.6 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The construction or operation of the proposed project is not expected to create any significant adverse impacts to recreation. The expected effects of the Desert Claim Wind Power Project on recreational activities and opportunities would be limited to possible ambient noise and congestion in some locations during construction, the potential elimination of the possible opportunity for permission-only hunting on project-area lands, possible minor distraction or annoyance effects on recreational users of adjacent lands, and the creation of a possible point of interest for tourists visiting the area. The possible increase in traffic due to the proposed project is discussed in more detail in **Section 3.12** (**Transportation**) of this document. While these impacts would be unavoidable, as discussed in **Section 3.11.2** they would not be significant and/or would not be adverse.