

6.3.2 *Post-1941 Wildlife Habitats*

In the post-1941 period, there have been extended periods in which the four streams diverted by LADWP had little or no flow below the LADWP points of diversion. Relicted lakeshore habitats have changed in character, acreage, and quality. Island and islet habitats have experienced similar changes. The Draft EIR reports the net changes in acres for particular types of habitat between pre-1941 conditions and conditions examined as part of a 1991 wildlife habitat analysis. (SWRCB 7, Appendix D, Table D-5.) A summary of the changes in various types of habitat is provided below.

Changes in Lake Fringing Wetlands: By 1989, LADWP stream diversions and the lowering of Mono Lake resulted in the reliction of approximately 14,560 acres of former lakebed. Nearly 6,000 acres of the relict lakebed (playa) exists as unvegetated alkali flats of very low wildlife value. However, the playa is potential habitat for the snowy plover, a candidate species for listing as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. Snowy plovers are discussed in Section 6.3.6. Current lakeshore areas are dominated by alkali flats, dry and alkali meadows, and tall and short emergent marshes. (SWRCB 7, Vol. 2, p. 3F-32.)

Alkali and dry meadows currently occupy nearly 4,000 acres of Mono Lake shoreline. This represents a significant increase over prediversion acreages. These habitats provide some cover and foraging opportunities, but have little general wildlife value and use. (SWRCB 7, Vol. 2, p. 3F-33; RT VI, 134:10-134:13.) DFG Biologist Ron Thomas testified that the habitat quality of these "new" wetlands is very much diminished from what used to exist. (RT XXI, p. 53:2-53:11.) The lake fringing wetlands existing today lack freshwater and brackish water open-ponded areas. (RT VI, 208:5-208:24.) The existing alkali flats and alkali meadow have very little habitat value for migratory waterfowl. (RT VI, 135:3-135:22.)