

Attachment 3

#5-1 The Existing Conditions section of the General Plan will be revised to include a recognition of the presence of SDG&E and Imperial Irrigation utility easements and existing transmission systems. Additionally, the existing major transmission lines and easements will be placed on the Preferred Alternative in the final General Plan. It should be noted that Figure 6.6 contains a disclaimer that not all privately held ownerships or easements are shown. This is primarily due to the small scale of the map.



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August 27, 2004

Environmental Coordinator
Southern Service Center
California Department of Parks and Recreation
8885 Rio San Diego Drive, Suite 270
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Re: Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR

Sir/Madame:

This letter is in response to the July 15, 2004 Notice of Availability for the joint Preliminary General Plan (General Plan)/Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) for the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (Park).

San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), which provides electric power to the greater San Diego region, has two electric transmission line easements that traverse different areas of the Park. The first transmission easement is an approximately 17 mile, 100-foot wide transmission corridor that contains a 69 kilovolt line predating the creation of the Park. This electric transmission line provides service to the Borrego Springs community and the Park's facilities and serves as a backup feed to the Imperial Irrigation District electrical system. The second is an approximately 17 mile transmission easement of varying widths (up to 125 feet) generally from Narrows to Scissors Crossing in the Park authorized for a 69 kV line but does not yet contain those authorized electric facilities. In addition to these transmission line easements, SDG&E has several lower voltage electric distribution line easements and facilities currently providing power to Park improvements. Neither SDG&E's existing electric transmission facilities nor the currently unused transmission easement nor the distribution easement and facilities are identified in Section 2.0, "Existing Conditions" within the General Plan/DEIR. Also, the General Plan/DEIR does not mention any potential future electric facilities traversing the Park. SDG&E requests that the Final General Plan/Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) acknowledge and give appropriate treatment to SDG&E's existing facilities and property rights within the Park boundaries based on the following.

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#5-2 The vacant SDG & E easement crosses existing Wilderness, and therefore, in that instance, there is no change with the implementation of the General Plan. The Plan section of the General Plan will be revised to specifically exclude existing SDG&E transmission lines from proposed Wilderness designations and specifically allow existing transmission systems (those predating approval of the General Plan) within the Backcountry zone. While the built transmission corridors are existing uses, the vacant corridors would be subject to all appropriate federal and state environmental review, compliance, and permitting should SDG & E seek to utilize their easement. The Preliminary General Plan's delineation of Wilderness depicts our department's intentions to preserve the visitor's natural experience in large tracts of land and unbroken vistas within the park. CSP recognizes SDG&E's legal rights along existing easements and will work cooperatively with SDG&E to relocate existing easements (and appurtenant facilities) to locations less obtrusive and outside our proposed Wilderness areas (such as immediately adjacent to existing highways).

#5-3 Should any transmission facilities be proposed in the SDG&E Renewable Resource Plans and submitted to the Public Utilities Commission for review, it is imperative, given the trustee agency status of CSP, that coordination or at least a copy of any proposals be sent to California State Parks early in the planning stages on land owned by CSP. While CSP is very supportive of the use of renewable energy resources, CSP does not agree that such actions can only be accomplished by bisecting state park lands with additional utility corridors. SDG&E should consider the use of expanding facilities within relocated easements (see Response #5-2) or investigate other routes away from state park property.

The placement of new utility corridors is inconsistent with the statutes that dictate the purposes for State Parks.

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Both the Planning Handbook for General Plan, Guidelines to Existing Conditions and Issues and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) identify what information should be included in California State Park planning documents. These frameworks require an accurate description of existing conditions to establish the existing environmental baseline conditions for purposes of accurately describing the potential environmental impacts of the proposed General Plan and conducting an adequate environmental review under CEQA. (Planning Handbook, Feb. 2002, p. 49; CEQA Guidelines § 15125.) In particular, the Planning Handbook suggests that utilities—and specifically power lines—be identified as existing facilities and included as an element of the planning process because existing facilities set much of the environmental baseline context for the General Plan. (Planning Handbook, pp. 47, 49-50)

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Even though Anza-Borrego Desert State Park already enjoys the distinction of being one of the largest areas of state wilderness in California, the General Plan/DEIR propose substantial increases in the “Wilderness” management zone designations within the Park. Of particular concern to SDG&E is the potential designation of a Wilderness Management or Backcountry zone over or adjacent to SDG&E’s easements and existing 69 kV transmission facilities in the Park, as depicted on Figures 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 of the General Plan. In California, Wilderness is defined in part as relatively undeveloped land *without permanent improvements*, or structures that existed at the time of classification of the area as state wilderness and that the State Park and Recreation Commission has determined may be maintained and used in a manner compatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment. (See, Pub. Res. Code § 5019.68.) The General Plan describes the Backcountry zone as a “predominantly natural environment with moderate evidence of human existence” that will “primarily stay unmodified” to provide park users an opportunity to “experience the primitive open space and natural elements of the desert.”

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The General Plan acknowledges that the boundaries of proposed Wilderness areas were drawn in part to “prevent bisecting natural areas and vistas so important to the public’s enjoyment of ABDSP with man-made features such as utility corridors.” (Plan, p. 3-15) SDG&E’s transmission corridor predated the creation of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, and yet the very definition of Wilderness prohibits any man-made structures and the purpose of the Backcountry zone is retention of a primitive environment (or at least requires the Commission to make individual, narrow compatibility determinations in either zone). The Department should not only acknowledge the presence of SDG&E’s facilities and property rights in the Final General Plan/EIR, but also identify a more appropriate zoning designation when facilities and easements are either within or adjacent to the proposed zones in those locations. In essence, the General Plan/DEIR denies, prohibits or substantially constrains the existence of SDG&E facilities and rights within the Park. It cannot be good planning to apply a management zone that inherently conflicts with current and future uses. This is particularly critical because the approximately 56-mile eastern boundary of the Park occupies all but about 2.25 miles of the entire eastern border of San Diego County. SDG&E’s 2004 Renewable Resource Plan submitted to the California Public Utilities Commission includes future transmission that may traverse the Park in order to access renewable energy resources that may be developed east of the Park. Pursuing renewable

#5-4 California State Parks respectfully disagrees. The management zones are intended to guide future park managers in a way that is compatible with the Park vision statement and the natural, aesthetic, cultural, and recreational resources of the Park. Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is unique and internationally known for its desert resources. The management zones are an integral part of preserving the Park for future generations.

#5-5 See Response #5-4. However, the ABDSP Final General Plan/EIR will incorporate an additional goal under infrastructure that specifically addresses roads and utilities operated by other entities within the Park and include language allowing for some flexibility for utilities in the Management Zone Matrix for the Backcountry Zone. It will be stated as: Goal – Operations 4: Roads or utilities operated by other agencies, including Caltrans and utility companies, serve both the Park and users outside the Park yet may adversely affect Park resources through their construction and operation. Coordination with these agencies could allow for the relocation of existing corridors into less sensitive areas or along existing roads.

#5-6 The expansion of the designated wilderness is intended to provide many things including enhanced protection of natural and cultural resources, enhancement of the wilderness recreational experience, and the protection of the vistas and other geologic features for which the Park is renowned.

#5-7 The Focused Use Zone is primarily identified as areas where park use will include facility development. This use would not be appropriate along the existing corridor currently containing electric facilities. There is Backcountry Zone along this corridor as shown in Figure 6-6. Please see Response #5-5. The currently unused transmission easement crosses a large stretch of land currently designated as Wilderness between the Narrows and Scissors Crossing. It appears that a only small portion may cross the proposed wilderness near Scissors Crossing. The vacant corridor would be subject to all appropriate state and federal environmental review, compliance, and permitting should SDG & E seek to utilize their easement. Changing the management zones to FUZ I or II would not allow California State Parks to be consistent with its *Mission*.

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5-3 (cont'd) resources and delivering such energy into the electric system is a primary goal of California, state agencies, the San Diego region and local interests. We will not be able to take advantage of a substantial amount of currently identified renewable resources, if land use restrictions such as the Park's exclusionary zoning prevent transmission access to the renewable resources.

5-4 It is imperative that the Commission reclassify the proposed management zones in areas of the Park related to SDG&E's existing facilities and land rights because all future actions must be consistent with the goals and guidelines of the General Plan, and if it does not conform, "it will not be implemented." (Plan, p. 4-9) The General Plan/DEIR is a first-tier environmental analysis of broad potential environmental impacts that will provide the basis for future second level environmental analysis. (Plan, p. P-3) If proposed uses and facilities are precluded by the first-tier document (General Plan), then there cannot be a second-tier review. The broad based goals and policies of the Plan propose the adoption of various management zones, which provide conceptual parameters for future management actions in the Park. (Plan, p. P-4) All future action by the Commission "will need to be found consistent with the adopted ABDSP General Plan."

5-5 (Plan, p. P-6) The Commission cannot implement a tiered approach effectively when the underlying zone designation in the first-tier document prohibits the existing facilities in that zone, let alone potential future facilities that would be considered in second-tier review. It is for this reason that the Department should revise the restrictive Wilderness and Backcountry zone designations either over or adjacent to SDG&E's easements and facilities to enable the Commission to consider site-specific projects in a second-tier review.

5-6 The General Plan admits that "the expansion of the designated wilderness is intended to prevent bisecting the natural areas and vistas . . . with man-made features such as utility corridors." (Plan, p. 3-15) The Park currently uses electricity and contemplates additional facilities without explaining how it will obtain energy for those facilities. Despite the Department's resistance to man-made features in the Park, it is critical to Southern California's electricity needs that SDG&E continue to operate, maintain and potentially expand its existing 69 kV line and plan for future transmission facilities in its other easement. The land use designations in the General Plan/FEIR significantly affect the region's ability to accommodate new energy infrastructure because the Park covers a vast majority of the eastern border of San Diego County.

5-7 At a minimum, the Final General Plan/FEIR should reflect a linear Backcountry zone rather than a Wilderness zone along the existing corridor as a buffer adjacent to other areas of the Park. But even the proposed Backcountry zone is not ideal because that zone designation does not explicitly allow for utilities and utility access roads. A Focused Use Zone II (FUZ II), which allows for utility corridors and roads, is preferable over and adjacent to SDG&E's facilities and land rights because "a majority of facility development will occur within the Focused Use Zone I and Focused Use Zone II." (Plan, p.4-9) To accommodate resource protection, SDG&E suggests a FUZ II buffer be placed on both sides of the existing 100-foot wide corridor currently containing electric facilities. A similar FUZ II buffer should be added along the currently unused transmission easement from Narrows to Scissors Crossing in the Park. These limited

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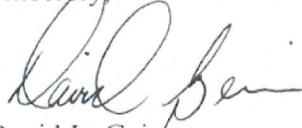
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management zone changes from Wilderness to Focused Use Zone II would still allow the Department to achieve consistency with its mission to protect natural resources and provide for over 400,000 acres of Wilderness under *any* alternative. .

SDG&E appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Anza-Borrego Preliminary General Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Report. Please contact me at (858) 650-6131 with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



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