



FEMA

April 26, 2016

California Public Utilities Commission
Re VIG/ASP c/o Ecology and Environmental, Inc.
505 Sansome Street, Suite 300
San Francisco, California 94111

To California Public Utilities Commission:

This is in response to your request for comments regarding the State of California Public Utilities Commission's Notice of Availability, Southern California Edison Valley Ivyglen Submission Line Project and Alberhill System Project Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Please review the current effective countywide Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for the County of Riverside (Community Number 060245), Maps revised August 18, 2014 and City of Lake Elsinore (Community Number 060636), Maps revised August 28, 2008. Please note that the City of Lake Elsinore, Riverside County, California is a participant in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The minimum, basic NFIP floodplain management building requirements are described in Vol. 44 Code of Federal Regulations (44 CFR), Sections 59 through 65.

44-1

A summary of these NFIP floodplain management building requirements are as follows:

- All buildings constructed within a riverine floodplain, (i.e., Flood Zones A, AO, AH, AE, and A1 through A30 as delineated on the FIRM), must be elevated so that the lowest floor is at or above the Base Flood Elevation level in accordance with the effective Flood Insurance Rate Map.
- If the area of construction is located within a Regulatory Floodway as delineated on the FIRM, any *development* must not increase base flood elevation levels. **The term *development* means any man-made change to improved or unimproved real estate, including but not limited to buildings, other structures, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations, and storage of equipment or materials.** A hydrologic and hydraulic analysis must be performed *prior* to the start of development, and must demonstrate that the development would not cause any rise in base flood levels. No rise is permitted within regulatory floodways.

44-2

- Upon completion of any development that changes existing Special Flood Hazard Areas, the NFIP directs all participating communities to submit the appropriate hydrologic and hydraulic data to FEMA for a FIRM revision. In accordance with 44 CFR, Section 65.3, as soon as practicable, but not later than six months after such data becomes available, a community shall notify FEMA of the changes by submitting technical data for a flood map revision. To obtain copies of FEMA's Flood Map Revision Application Packages, please refer to the FEMA website at <http://www.fema.gov/business/nfip/forms.shtm>.

44-2
(cont.)


Please Note:

Many NFIP participating communities have adopted floodplain management building requirements which are more restrictive than the minimum federal standards described in 44 CFR. Please contact the local community's floodplain manager for more information on local floodplain management building requirements. The Lake Elsinore floodplain manager can be reached by calling Rita Thompson, Senior Engineering Technician, at (951) 674-3124. The Riverside County floodplain manager can be reached by calling Deborah de Chambeau, Senior Civil Engineer, at (951) 955-1265.

44-3

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call Frank Mansell of the Mitigation staff at (510) 627-7191.

Sincerely,



Gregor Blackburn, CFM, Branch Chief
Floodplain Management and Insurance Branch

cc:

Rita Thompson, Senior Engineering Technician, City of Lake Elsinore

Deborah de Chambeau, Senior Civil Engineer, Riverside County

Garret Tam Sing/Salomon Miranda, State of California, Department of Water Resources,
Southern Region Office

Frank Mansell, NFIP Planner, DHS/FEMA Region IX

Alessandro Amaglio, Environmental Officer, DHS/FEMA Region IX

Freeman, Emma

From: Thiede, James <james_thiede@fws.gov>
Sent: Friday, July 15, 2016 8:33 PM
To: VIG/ASP
Cc: Karin Cleary-Rose; Pert, Heather@Wildlife; kim.freeburn@wildlife.ca.gov
Subject: CDFW & USFWS Comments on the Valley-Ivyglen & Alberhill System combined DEIR
Attachments: 16B0316-16CPA0338_WRIV jt_V-Ivyglen & Alberhill Transm Lines DEIR 20160715.pdf

Dear CPUC,

Attached to this message you will find a joint letter from the Wildlife Agencies (CDFW and USFWS) providing the Commission with our agencies' comments on the combined Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Southern California Edison's proposed Valley-Ivyglen Subtransmission Line Project and the Alberhill System Project.

A hard copy will not follow unless specifically requested.

Sincerely,

James Thiede
Endangered Species Biologist
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777 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Suite 208
Palm Springs, California 92262
(760) 322-2070 x419 (Please note the new extension number - 419 instead of 219).



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California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Inland Deserts Region
3602 Inland Empire Blvd., Suite C-220
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In Reply Refer To:
FWS/CDFW-WRIV-16B0316-16CPA0338

California Public Utilities Commission
re: VIG / ASP
c/o Ecology and Environment, Inc.
505 Sansome Street, Suite 300
San Francisco, California 94111

July 15, 2016
Sent by email

Subject: Draft Combined EIR for the proposed Valley-Ivyglen Subtransmission Line Project and the Alberhill System Project, Riverside County, California

Dear Commission Staff:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department), hereafter collectively referred to as the Wildlife Agencies, have reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the proposed Valley-Ivyglen Subtransmission Line Project and the Alberhill System Project (Projects) received on June 9, 2016. The dual-project combined DEIR was prepared to identify the proposed Projects' direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts; to discuss alternatives; and to propose mitigation measures that avoid, minimize, or offset significant environmental impacts.

The primary concern and mandate of the Service is the protection of public fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. The Service has legal responsibility for the welfare of migratory birds, anadromous fish, and endangered animals and plants occurring in the United States. The Service is also responsible for administering the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

On June 22, 2004, the Service issued a section 10(a)(1)(B) permit for the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. The Department issued NCCP Approval and Take Authorization for the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) per Section 2800, et seq., of the California Fish and Game Code on June 22, 2004. The MSHCP established a multiple species conservation program to minimize and mitigate habitat loss and the incidental take of covered species in association with activities covered under the permit. The Department is responding to the DEIR as a Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources (California Fish and Game Code Sections 711.7 and 1802, and the California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] Guidelines Section 15386), and as a Responsible Agency regarding any discretionary actions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15381), such as the issuance of a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (California Fish and Game Code Sections 1600 et seq.) and/or a California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Permit for Incidental Take of Endangered, Threatened, and/or Candidate species (California Fish and Game Code Sections 2080 and 2080.1). The Department also administers the Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) Program. The Wildlife Agencies are providing the following comments as they relate to the MSHCP and impacts to sensitive natural resources.

The Projects are being proposed by Southern California Edison (SCE) to meet long-term forecasted electrical demand in the proposed Projects' service area and to increase electrical system reliability. The Projects would include the following:

Alberhill Systems Project:

- One 1,120 megavolt ampere (MVA) 500/115-kilovolt (kV) substation to be named the "Alberhill Substation", expandable to a maximum of 1,680 MVA. The substation is proposed to be built on approximately 34 acres of a 124-acre property located northwest of the intersection of Temescal Canyon Road and Concordia Ranch Road in unincorporated western Riverside County.
- Two 500-kV transmission lines to connect the proposed Alberhill Substation to the existing Serrano-Valley 500-kV transmission line. The transmission lines (approximately 3.3 miles, combined) would connect the proposed Alberhill Substation to the existing Serrano-Valley 500-kV transmission line.
- Approximately 11.75 miles of new double-circuit 115-kV subtransmission lines and removal of 11 miles of existing single-circuit 115-kV subtransmission lines primarily in the existing ROW.
- Approximately 3 miles of single-circuit 115-kV subtransmission lines with distribution lines underbuilt on the subtransmission line structures and removal of about 3 miles of electrical distribution lines within the existing ROW.
- A second 115-kV circuit on approximately 6.5 miles of single-circuit 115-kV subtransmission lines (the single-circuit line is to be constructed as part of the proposed Valley-Ivyglen Project).
- Fiber optic lines overhead (9 miles) on sections of the new or modified subtransmission lines and underground (1 mile) in proximity to the proposed Alberhill Substation and several of the existing 115/12-kV substations.
- A 120-foot microwave antenna tower at the proposed Alberhill Substation site. As installed, the microwave antenna tower would direct signals to a new dish antenna located approximately 7 miles to the southwest at the existing Santiago Peak Communications site.

Valley-Ivyglen Subtransmission Line Project:

- One new, single-circuit 115-kV subtransmission line¹ and fiber optic line. The route of the proposed Valley-Ivyglen Project would be approximately 27 miles long and constructed within approximately 23 miles of new right-of-way.
- Overhead fiber optic lines on the proposed structures and underground in new and existing

conduit.

- Transfer of existing distribution circuits along portions of the proposed subtransmission line to new 115-kV structures or to underground positions.
- New 115-kV switching and protective equipment at Valley and Ivyglen Substations.

The proposed facilities traverse the MSHCP Criteria Area and various species survey areas identified in MSHCP Sections 6.1.3 (Narrow Endemic Plant Species) and 6.3.2 (Species requiring Additional Surveys and Procedures). The Projects will affect MSHCP riparian/riverine resources, CDFW jurisdictional areas, and will potentially have significant impacts on multiple special-status species occurring within the Projects' respective footprints.

Wildlife Corridors and Conservation Areas

The DEIR briefly discusses potential impacts to wildlife movement/wildlife corridors and states that “the 115-kV subtransmission line would intersect [MSHCP] Proposed Linkages 1, 2 5, 6, and 19, Core 1, and Extension of Existing Core 2” (DEIR, 4.4-32). However, the DEIR focuses on direct, construction-related impacts, such as wildlife entrapment in trenches and habitat fragmentation due to vegetation removal. The Wildlife Agencies are concerned that the DEIR does not adequately identify and assess potential indirect impacts to proposed and existing wildlife corridors and MSHCP planned conservation areas (“Criteria Area”) as a result of the ongoing and long-term operation of the Projects. For example, the proposed 34-acre Alberhill Substation will be situated directly adjacent to MSHCP Proposed Linkage 1 and Proposed Constrained Linkage 6, but the DEIR does not address the potential long-term effects of the operation of that facility on the viability of the proposed linkages. The DEIR should address potential impacts related to the ongoing and long-term operation of the Project, such as lighting, noise, and increased traffic, and propose specific minimization measures to ensure the MSHCP’s proposed wildlife corridors are not affected. Other potential indirect effects that should be analyzed, and mitigation as appropriate, include, but are not limited to: the potential increase in unauthorized access to proposed conservation areas from SCE access roads, trash dumping along access roads in conservation areas, the introduction and spread of invasive species as a result of ongoing use of access roads, increase in fire risk, and the potential increase in depredation of special-status species by raptors and corvids through the installation of perch structures (transmission poles) in areas currently devoid of perches. In addition to measures already identified in the DEIR, mitigation measures could include gates and fencing to restrict access on new and existing roads, use of infrastructure in conservation areas that is less likely to provide nesting substrate for raptors and corvids, and a maintenance plan for trash and invasive plant species management. Please provide a more detailed analysis of the Project’s indirect impacts to proposed wildlife corridors and conservation areas with the identification of clear and enforceable mitigation measures to offset those impacts in the final EIR (FEIR).

111-1

Special-Status Natural Communities

Construction of the proposed Projects would have direct, permanent impacts on riparian habitat

and several special-status vegetation communities, including Chamise Chaparral, Coast Live Oak Woodland, Riversidean Sage Scrub, Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Woodland, and Southern Sycamore-Alder Riparian Woodland. The DEIR also identified Riversidean Alluvial Fan Scrub within the Projects, which is considered a state-designated S-1.1 “very threatened” community, and as such, should be identified in the DEIR as a special-status natural community. The Wildlife Agencies also consider alkali wetland, grassland, and shrub communities on Willows-Traver-Domino soils on the floodplains of the San Jacinto River as special-status natural communities in urgent need of conservation. The DEIR acknowledges that direct, permanent impacts on special-status natural communities would result from the removal of vegetation for 115-kV installation and access road construction, and proposes to reduce impacts by limiting construction to designated areas, requiring preconstruction surveys and biological monitoring, and limiting the removal of native vegetation. However, the DEIR should provide compensatory mitigation, such as acquisition or conservation, where impacts to special-status communities are unavoidable. The Wildlife Agencies recommend the FEIR include measures to fully avoid and otherwise protect the special-status natural communities from project-related direct and indirect impacts, or provide specific and enforceable compensatory measures to offset the unavoidable impacts.

111-2

Impacts subject to Fish & Game Code Section 1602 and the MSHCP’s Riparian/Riverine Policy

The DEIR identifies potential temporary and permanent impacts to wetlands, drainages, and riparian areas as a result of the implementation of the Projects. To reduce these potential impacts to less than significant, the DEIR proposes to implement Mitigation Measures BR-1, BR-2, BR-3, and BR-15, which would limit construction to designated areas and protect aquatic resources, require site-specific surveys, require biological monitoring, and control erosion, sedimentation, and input of pollutants. The Wildlife Agencies are not opposed to the proposed mitigation measures; however, we cannot agree that those measures reduce the Projects’ impacts to “less than significant”. The Wildlife Agencies request the FEIR include specific and enforceable compensatory measures to offset the permanent loss of Section 1602 and Riparian/Riverine resources, such as re-establishment, rehabilitation, or enhancement of similar habitats offsite, acquisition and conservation of similar habitats, or purchase of in-lieu fee or mitigation bank credits.

111-3

Proposed Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The Wildlife Agencies request minor adjustments to the wording of selected mitigation measures in the DEIR:

- MM BR-6

DEIR Mitigation Measure BR-6 proposes to mitigate the Project’s removal of native oak trees (*Quercus agrifolia*, an ecological keystone species) by planting replacement trees in the 15-gallon size at a 2:1 (replacement-to-removal) ratio. While we commend the commitment to replace native oak trees removed by project activities, we do not

recommend that 15-gallon specimens be used in the mitigation plantings. Wild coast live oak trees face a long and severe summer dry season, which they survive by tapping into the water table using deep roots. Specimens cultivated in pots or boxes experience a rapid loss of vigor in the root system by the time that they must be grown in 5-gallon pots or larger containers, and the plants are typically “root-bound” at this point, meaning that the roots are coiled around the inner perimeter of the container, tangled and meshed together, and typically growing sideways (sometimes even upward) rather than being oriented downward for deep growth. The result is that native oak trees in the 5-gallon size and larger sizes typically fail to develop extensive deep roots after planting, and then they must be supported permanently by heavy irrigation, perish from drought during the summer dry season, or remain permanently stunted and in poor health.

The Wildlife Agencies applaud Southern California Edison for being willing to bare the greater expense of larger replacement saplings. However, to improve the success of Measure BR-6, we recommend that the measure be adjusted to replace removed or otherwise impacted native oak trees by planting 1-gallon size replacement oaks at a 12:1 mitigation-to-impact ratio. Over several decades of future tree growth, this should result in the maintenance or a gain in the number of native oak trees onsite (after allowing for some mortalities of planted trees due to droughts and herbivory by gophers and squirrels).

111-4

We request the MM BR-6 be modified as follows: “If the applicant cannot feasibly relocate oak trees that are removed, 1-gallon oak trees shall be planted at a 12:1 ratio within the appropriate habitat to replace removed trees. These replacement trees shall be indigenous coast live oak trees . . . The applicant shall be responsible for monitoring and maintaining the relocated and replacement trees for a minimum of two years (to include at least two complete California rainy seasons, here defined as the period of the year from November – May).

To evaluate whether or not this type of mitigation is successful over the long-term, the relocated oak trees and replacement oaks will be revisited by a certified arborist in the fifth, tenth, and fifteenth years after relocation or planting to assess the survival/mortality rate of these oaks, and to evaluate the health of the surviving individuals. The applicant will prepare an initial report on the implementation of this measure after the second year of monitoring and maintenance has been completed. A Final Report will be prepared after the Year-15 assessment has been carried out; the Final Report will be submitted to the CPUC, and copies shall be sent to the USFWS (Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office), to the CDFW (Inland/Deserts Regional Office in Ontario, California), and to the California Native Plant Society’s Conservation Program staff.”

- MM BR-7: Habitat Restoration and Revegetation Plan Requirements

Much of strategy to reduce the two Projects’ effects to the level identified in the DEIR as “less than significant after mitigation” for the lengthy list of special-status species and natural communities occurring in the Projects’ respective footprints and alignments

depends on to-be-developed Habitat Restoration and Revegetation Plan (HRRP). Since some of the species affected are listed as threatened, endangered, or Fully Protected by either the Department, the Service, or both, the Wildlife Agencies request that the final sentence of MM BR-7 be adjusted to read as follows:

111-5

“A copy of the final Habitat Restoration and Revegetation Plan, along with documentation of agency review and incorporation of comments into the final version, shall be provided to the CPUC, the USFWS, and the CDFW for approval prior to the CPUC issuing a Notice to Proceed.”

- BR-8: Special-Status Plant Species Avoidance and Mitigation Measures

Since some of the species affected are listed as threatened or endangered by the Service, the Wildlife Agencies request that the phrase “...shall develop and implement a transplantation plan in coordination with the appropriate agencies (CDFW, RCA)” be amended to include the Service. Thus, the parenthesis at the end of that sentence would then read as follows: “(CDFW, USFWS, RCA).”

111-6

- Impact BR-6 (VIG) (p. 4.4-34):

Determinations of Biologically Equivalent or Superior Preservation (DBESPs) prepared pursuant to the MSHCP must be provided to the Wildlife Agencies for review and comment. A DBESP must also be included in the Joint Project Review package and reviewed by the RCA if the project occurs within the MSHCP Criteria Area.

111-7

The Wildlife Agencies request that the wording of the first sentence on page 4.4-34 be amended accordingly.

- Quino Checkerspot Butterfly

Suitable habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly (checkerspot) consists of open shrubland dominated by native forbs and containing native plantago species. This natural community was widespread prior to European settlement, but has now become rare and patchily distributed in the checkerspot’s range. The DEIR concludes that “construction of the proposed project is not anticipated to impact Quino checkerspot butterflies” because no Quino checkerspots or their larvae were found during the 2009 Quino survey. However, the DEIR acknowledges that “Quino checkerspot butterfly habitat exists ... in the southeastern portion of the substation footprint and within the central portion of the Import Soil Source Area.”

111-8

The federally endangered Quino checkerspot butterfly (*Euphydryas editha quino*) is a species which exhibits “meta-population dynamics”; that is, it has a patchy distribution wherein the patches of suitable habitat distributed across its range are subject to a continually shifting pattern of local butterfly extirpation and recolonization events over

the long term. Since the number and distribution of this taxon’s suitable habitat patches are quite limited, the permanent loss of any patch contributes significantly toward pushing this endangered species closer to extinction. Therefore, even if those patches are presently unoccupied, the destruction of two patches of suitable habitat by the Projects must be considered a significant effect.

We request that, if at all possible, the Projects avoid the portions of the two properties mentioned, above, which contain Quino checkerspot habitat. If further investigation determines that the proposed Alberhill Substation and the proposed soil source area cannot be adjusted to avoid the portions containing Quino checkerspot habitat, then the project proponent should contact the Wildlife Agencies for assistance in developing appropriate compensatory mitigation measures.

The Projects’ respective alignments or footprints are within the MSHCP Plan Area. This is acknowledged in the DEIR and reference is made to the applicant becoming an MSHCP Participating Special Entity. Under the terms of the MSHCP Participating Special Entities participate in the MSHCP by carrying out proposed projects in a manner consistent with MSHCP policies and procedures and contributing funds for land acquisition and management and monitoring. Proposed projects are specifically identified and become MSHCP covered activities with incidental take authorization conveyed via a certificate of inclusion. The applicant’s participation in the Participating Special Entity process for the Projects would address most or all of our comments.

111-9

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this DEIR. If you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, or to schedule a meeting or a discussion of mitigation options, please contact Kim Freeburn of the Department at (909) 945-3484, or Jim Thiede of the Service at (760) 322-2070, extension 419.

Sincerely,



for
Kennon A. Corey
Assistant Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Leslie MacNair
Regional Manager
California Department of Fish and
Wildlife

cc:
Charles Landry, Regional Conservation Authority
Jeff Brandt, California Department of Fish and Wildlife