

# 4 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

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## INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This chapter includes descriptions of the existing environmental setting in the project area and analyses of the environmental impacts that would occur from implementation of the Proposed Project and alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. Discussions and explanations of the findings are provided for the following topics:

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| 4.1 Biological Resources                  | 4.10 Recreation                           |
| 4.2 Aesthetics                            | 4.11 Hazards and Hazardous Materials      |
| 4.3 Cultural Resources                    | 4.12 Fire and Fuels Management            |
| 4.4 Paleontological Resources             | 4.13 Air Quality                          |
| 4.5 Geology, Soils, and Mineral Resources | 4.14 Greenhouse Gas Emissions             |
| 4.6 Hydrology and Water Resources         | 4.15 Agriculture and Forestry Resources   |
| 4.7 Transportation and Traffic            | 4.16 Population and Housing               |
| 4.8 Noise                                 | 4.17 Utilities and Public Service Systems |
| 4.9 Land Use and Planning                 |   |

## FORMAT OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE SECTIONS

The analysis of each environmental resource area consists of eight subsections:

1. Environmental setting;
2. Applicable regulations, plans, and standards;
3. Applicant proposed measures;
4. CEQA significance criteria;
5. Approach to impact analysis;
6. Proposed Project impacts and mitigation measures;
7. Project alternatives; and
8. References.

Cumulative impacts are addressed in Chapter 5: Cumulative Impacts. An overview of the information included in these sections is provided below.

Each resource area section begins by describing the existing environmental and regulatory setting in the vicinity of the Proposed Project to help the reader understand the baseline conditions against which the environmental changes caused by the Proposed Project will be measured. Each section then assesses the impacts of the Proposed Project, and measures these impacts against a series of significance thresholds, in order to determine whether each impact

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would be “significant” prior to application of APMs and mitigation measures. A significance determination is then made after the application of APMs, which are considered part of the Proposed Project. No mitigation is required where APMs would reduce the impact to less than significant. Finally, mitigation measures are recommended in the individual sections to reduce significant impacts, and a significance determination is made after application of mitigation measures. Throughout Chapter 4, both impacts and the corresponding mitigation measures are identified (e.g., Impact Noise-1 and Mitigation Measure Noise-1).

In performing the analysis for this EIR, the EIR preparers relied on available published studies and reports as well as conducting independent investigations. Information provided by SDG&E in their application and accompanying environmental documentation was also considered in the EIR analysis after independent review and assessment by the CPUC. The specific documents considered and relied upon are cited in the References subsection for each issue area.

### **Environmental Setting**

The analysis of each environmental resource area begins with a description of the existing physical setting (baseline conditions as determined pursuant to Section 15125(a) of the CEQA Guidelines) that may be affected by the Proposed Project and alternatives. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(a), the environmental setting used to determine the impacts associated with the Proposed Project and alternatives is based on the environmental conditions that existed in the study area in August 2014, the time that the NOP for the Proposed Project was published.

### **Proposed Project Components**

Proposed Project components collectively refers to all project work areas, as well as all physical activities that would occur as part of the Proposed Project, including pole removals, new pole installations, construction of duct bank and vaults, stringing sites, guard structures, staging yards and material storage areas, and access roads.

### **Proposed Project Area**

The Proposed Project area includes both the extent of direct impact areas (i.e., physical limits of work or disturbance) and the extent of indirect impacts by resource topic (e.g., an adjacent buffer area that would be affected by construction noise or dust).

### **Applicable Regulations, Plans, and Standards**

The applicable regulations, plans, and standards subsection provides a description of the relevant regulations and guidelines that pertain to the issue area for each of the 17 environmental topics listed above. This section may contain information from various sources, such as federal or state regulations and local agency guidelines, plans, and policies.

### **Applicant Proposed Measures**

SDG&E has proposed measures to avoid or reduce Proposed Project impacts. The APMs shall be considered as part of the Proposed Project and tracked through the Mitigation Monitoring

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and Reporting Plan (MMRP), similar to mitigation measures. The APMs proposed as part of the Proposed Project are provided in Table 2.6-1 of Chapter 2: Project Description and in each resource area analysis section in Chapter 4, as applicable.

### CEQA Significance Criteria

Significance criteria are identified for each environmental resource area and used as a benchmark for determining if a project would result in a significant environmental impact when evaluated against the baseline conditions (i.e., existing conditions). The significance criteria were developed using Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines as a foundation and were modified as appropriate.

### Approach to Impact Analysis

The approach to the environmental impact analysis for each environmental resource area is presented prior to discussion of the results of the impact analysis.

### Proposed Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The results of the environmental impact analysis conducted for the proposed project and alternatives are presented in Sections 4.1 through 4.17. Each environmental impact analysis includes the following elements:

- Impact discussion
- Significance determination before and after application of APMs
- Mitigation measures for significant impacts
- Significance determination after mitigation

### Evaluation of Impacts

Each section includes a discussion of the effects of the Proposed Project and alternatives on the environment. The significance of each project impact is first considered prior to application of APMs, and a significance determination made. The implementation of APMs is then considered part of the project when determining whether impacts would be significant and thus would require mitigation. The CPUC has determined whether there is “no impact,” a “less than significant impact,” a “less than significant impact with mitigation,” or a “significant unavoidable impact” for each threshold of significance.

The impact analyses are organized by the two phases of the Proposed Project (i.e., (1) construction; and (2) operation and maintenance) and further organized by project component (i.e., Transmission Line Segments A through D, Substations, Encina Hub, Mission—San Luis Rey Phase Transposition, and staging yards) if appropriate for each impact.

Feasible mitigation measures are identified to eliminate or reduce the intensity of significant impacts. The impact remaining after mitigation is then evaluated. Impacts meeting or exceeding the impact significance threshold after mitigation are considered significant and unavoidable impacts.

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Implementation of more than one mitigation measure may be needed to reduce an impact below the level of significance. The mitigation measures identified to reduce Proposed Project impacts in this document are detailed within each section (Sections 4.1 through 4.17) as well as within the Executive Summary and Chapter 9: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan. Mitigation measures are written in full upon first use. Thereafter, the mitigation measures are referred back to the first use.

### **Project Alternatives**

Chapter 3: Alternatives, provides a list, description, and map of alternatives to the Proposed Project. Sections 4.1 through 4.17 present the impact analyses for the alternatives carried forward for analysis in this EIR, including the No Project Alternative. Alternatives are analyzed at the same level of detail as the Proposed Project, consistent with CPUC policy. The detailed analysis of each alternative provides decision makers with the opportunity to approve an alternative or combination of alternatives over the Proposed Project. The No Project Alternative is not analyzed at the same level of detail as the Proposed Project because the No Project Alternative includes separate projects that would not be approved should the CPUC choose to deny the CPCN for the Proposed Project. The analysis of impacts from alternatives focuses on how the impacts of each alternative differ from that of the Proposed Project. If an alternative would have no impact associated with a significance threshold, the rationale is provided at the beginning of the section and no further analysis is provided. Chapter 6: Comparison of Alternatives provides a comparative analysis of the impacts of the Proposed Project and the alternatives.

### **Cumulative Projects Impacts Analysis**

Cumulative impacts of the Proposed Project are discussed in Chapter 5: Cumulative Impacts. The focus of the cumulative impact analysis is to identify those project impacts that might not be significant when considered alone, but may contribute to a significant impact when viewed in conjunction with past, current, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. The analysis of cumulative impacts identifies whether a particular cumulative impact is significant, and then identifies whether the Proposed Project's contribution would be cumulatively considerable. Feasible mitigation measures are identified that would reduce the Proposed Project's contribution to a cumulative impact to a less-than-significant level.