5. Alternative 1 (No Project/Action): Impacts

Under the No Project/Action Alternative, the proposed Project and its alternatives would not be implemented. As such, associated impacts to biological resources would not immediately occur. However, in the absence of the proposed Project or project alternative, a similar project will need to be developed to interconnect new wind turbine-based electricity generated from the Tehachapi Wind Resource Area (TWRA) with the energy distribution systems of the Los Angeles Basin. This future project would be required to meet the power transmission needs and, consequently, would likely result in biological impacts similar to, or in addition to those stemming from the proposed Project and its alternatives.

Environmental conditions in the Project Area, including the regional setting and baseline conditions, are expected to change over time with or without the proposed Project or an alternative to the proposed Project. The following sections describe how biological resources within the Project Area are expected to change over time under the No Project/Action Alternative. Since the potential impacts of the proposed Project would not occur under the No Project/Action Alternative, the significance criteria described in Section 4 (Impact Analysis Approach) are not used to analyze this alternative.

Throughout the entire project area, ongoing maintenance of the existing transmission lines would continue to occur. With respect to Biological Resources, this includes periodic trimming of vegetation to maintain minimum clearance distances to the conductors and around towers, to comply with regulations governing the operation of transmission facilities. In addition, access roads require periodic maintenance and vegetation trimming to allow maintenance crews to access the lines.

Northern Region

There are currently 17 residential housing developments, infrastructural improvements, and wind energy generation facilities proposed for the Northern Region with a cumulative acreage of more than 98,000 acres (described in Table 6-9 of Section 6.2, Cumulative Impacts). In the reasonably foreseeable future, these and similar development projects will result in impacts to biological resources in the region. Impacts are expected to be greatest in the southern Antelope Valley surrounding the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale, and in the northern Antelope Valley near proposed wind energy developments in Willow Springs and east of Tehachapi Pass. Habitat loss and fragmentation within these areas will negatively impact State- and federally listed plant and wildlife species such the San Fernando Valley spineflower, desert tortoise, and Mohave ground squirrel.

Central Region

The Central Region of the Project Area includes the ANF. The ANF will continue to be managed by the FS, regardless of implementation of the proposed Project or an alternative to the proposed Project, including the No Project/Action Alternative. Under the No Project/Action Alternative, the existing transmission lines would remain in place and approximately 80 miles of access and spur roads would continue to be used and maintained for maintenance of the lines. Biological resources within the Central Region would continue to be managed by the FS.

Southern Region

The Southern Region is highly urbanized but includes patches of undeveloped lands that support unique and diverse biological resources. The cities and communities of the Los Angeles Basin are expected to expand in

the future, thereby placing greater strain on biological resources throughout the Southern Region. It is predicted that fragmentation and loss of habitat in the region will continue to impact rare, threatened, and endangered species in this region, including the coastal California gnatcatcher and least Bell's vireo. Most immediately impacted will be the Puente and Chino Hills in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino counties. Within this region, there are currently seven residential housing development projects planned covering more than 6,400 acres (described in Table 6-10 of Section 6.2, Cumulative Impacts).