

4.0 Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, no Presidential permit or electricity export authorization would be issued by DOE, and no right-of-way would be granted by BLM. As a result, neither of the two transmission lines would be constructed, maintained, operated, and connected, and the applicants would not be able to export electric power to the U.S.

The direct implications of No Action are that the potential environmental impacts of the transmission lines, as described herein, would not occur. If one of the transmission lines were allowed by the Federal agencies but not the other, the impacts would be proportionately reduced. Furthermore, there would be a loss of economic benefits associated with the projects, including (1) purchase of equipment and materials, (2) proceeds from the grant of right-of-way by the BLM, (3) construction and labor expenditures including indirect (multiplier effect) economic benefits, and (4) ongoing expenditures by the transmission line operators for operations and maintenance. If one of the transmission lines were allowed but not the other, these benefits would be foregone, but to a lesser degree.

As an indirect implication of No Action, there would be no capability for the TDM and EBC electric generating facilities now under construction west of Mexicali, Mexico, to export electrical power to the United States. Therefore, the facilities would not be available to contribute a source of electrical energy to ease possible future shortages in California. In that event, the owners would need to decide whether to complete construction of the facilities and operate them to produce power for the Mexican market. If the owners elected to proceed with the facilities in the same manner as described in this EA, the impacts in the U.S. from their operation, as analyzed herein, would still occur. If the owners elected not to complete construction of the facilities, the impacts in the U.S. from the operation of one or both would not occur. Regardless of the decisions which TDM and EBC may make, the EAX turbine currently designated for export would still be build and its electrical output exported to the U.S. over the existing IV-La Rosita 230-kV transmission line, as originally planned (see Section 2.1).

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action.

Proposed Action. Construction, maintenance, operation, and connection of the proposed transmission lines in the U.S. and environmental impacts from the associated Mexican power plants would not be expected to result in any unavoidable adverse environmental impacts. With implementation of the design and mitigation measures committed to by the applicants (see Section 2.2.6 of this EA), the proposed project would be expected to result in only minor impacts on the environment. Principal effects on the environment would occur during construction, when the applicants have committed to environmental

monitoring to minimize adverse effects. Impacts during the construction period would be short-term and transient, limited to when construction workers and equipment are present. Permanent effects would be limited to visual presence of the transmission lines and principally to new access roads and support structure footings.

4.1 Land Use

The two proposed 230 kV transmission lines would be built adjacent to the existing SDG&E 230 kV transmission line. Adjacent lands are either vacant or, near the IV Substation, contain other substantial electrical transmission facilities, including the substation and other transmission lines. No changes in current and designated land uses would be required for project implementation. The proposed use would be compatible with nearby and adjacent uses and would not mark a major change in land use already present in the area.

The BLM has jurisdiction over land uses in the entire project area, and the entire project area is within the Yuha Basin ACEC. Within the ACEC, the proposed route would be within Utility Corridor N as designated in the Desert Plan. Because the proposed lines would be located as close to each other and to the existing SDG&E transmission line as practicable according to accepted engineering design practices, physical effects on the ACEC would be confined to a relatively compact area. The project would be compatible with the land use plans and policies of the BLM.

There are no urban uses in the vicinity of the proposed transmission lines and there would be no effects of project implementation on urban areas of Imperial County. Recreational use within the study area is primarily off-road vehicle use. A camping area is within approximately one-half mile of the proposed route. However, camping areas within the Yuha Basin have no established facilities or boundaries. Since the proposed route lies on the easternmost portion of the open space area within an existing utility corridor, and because the transmission line would not displace much land, the project would not have a substantial effect on off-road vehicle use or camping activities.

The proposed action is not expected to substantially affect the use of mineral resources in the project area. Geothermal, oil and gas, and gravel extraction operations generally affect relatively large areas. There are no current geothermal leases or mining claims in the vicinity of the proposed alignments. Both the proposed transmission lines, as well as the existing SDG&E transmission line easement, cross two sand and gravel leasehold areas of the County of Imperial. Although termed “active,” no extraction is being conducted at either leasehold.

Agricultural fields are at least a half-mile to a mile east and also to the north of the proposed routes. The closest proposed transmission line towers or poles would be only a