

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

few hundred feet closer to the agricultural fields. The only agricultural activity that could likely conflict with the proposed transmission lines is aerial crop dusting. Since the SDG&E transmission line is already present, it is reasonable to assume that experienced crop dusters are aware of it and that it does not substantially interfere with their activities. There have been no known incidents between crop dusting operations and the SDG&E transmission line. The proposed project is expected to be compatible with agricultural operations.

4.2 Air Quality

This section discusses the impacts arising from construction of the subject transmission lines in the U.S. and impacts in the U.S. caused by the pollutant emissions transported to the U.S. from the Mexican power plants supplying power to the proposed transmission lines.

4.2.1 Impacts from Transmission Line Construction

The construction period for the BCP and SER transmission lines would be from December 2001 through April 2002, taking into account the BLM's administration of the flat-tailed horned lizard protection program. Construction of the transmission lines would involve setting foundations, which would require the movement of equipment along the route, as well as the placement of the steel lattice towers by helicopter. The primary equipment used in setting foundations would be cement trucks, pick-up trucks, and small construction equipment such as backhoes and skip loaders for excavation.

The amount of fugitive dust generated by these sources depends upon several factors including the number of wheels, vehicle speed, and soil moisture. However, the dust generated by entrainment on vehicle wheels is typically temporary in nature and settles in the immediate vicinity. Such fugitive dust emissions would not materially affect ambient PM₁₀ levels in the project region. Water sprayed from truck-mounted equipment would be used sparingly for dust control at access roads, work areas, and when helicopters are in use at tower sites. Any impacts would also be temporary in nature.

The emission factor for estimating fugitive PM₁₀ from unpaved roadways is based on an empirical equation that includes the following variables: silt content of the parent soil, the average vehicular weight in tons, and surface material moisture under natural conditions. The emission factor yielded is in pounds of PM₁₀ per vehicle-mile traveled (VMT). The estimated emissions for vehicular travel along the unpaved existing right-of-way during transmission tower construction includes generic assumptions for these variables, including an average soil silt loading of 23 percent, average vehicle weight of 2.2 tons, and surface soil moisture during construction of 0.2 percent (Environmental Protection Agency 2001). The number of days with measurable rain (greater than 0.01 inch) is also taken into account and the estimate reflects that construction would take place during the