

Floodplain/Wetlands Effects

A wetland delineation was performed for the proposed project as described in Appendix C. There are no wetlands in Pinto Wash that would be affected by the proposed project. Actions that would affect the 100-year floodplain would be construction of the footings for the proposed lattice towers at location No. 21. Excavations for the footings would be backfilled and the original ground contours would be restored. Restoration of natural conditions would be required by mitigation measures for biological resources listed in Section 2.2.6 of this EA. Only cylindrical sections of the footings three to four feet in diameter would protrude above the ground surface. Based on present plans, a maximum of two lattice tower footings for each transmission line would be in the 100-year floodplain. Therefore, there would only be a minimal permanent change to conditions in the floodplain, with minimal effects on natural and beneficial floodplain values.

Alternatives

The locations of the proposed transmission lines are constrained by the connection points to transmission lines in Mexico on the south and by the location of the IV Substation in the north. Alternative locations to the east and west that were considered but rejected are presented in Section 2.3 of this EA. Since the Pinto Wash floodplain runs west to east across the entire project area, the routes must cross the floodplain. Locations of the towers are determined by engineering factors, so that relocation of the towers at location No. 21 is not practical without redesign of the project. Since the towers at location No. 21 are on the extreme fringe of the floodplain, would have minimal effects on natural and beneficial floodplain values, and would not be incompatible development in the floodplains, alternatives to avoid the floodplain effects are not required.

4.5 Biological Resources

The proposed project would permanently impact 3.10 acres of Sonoran creosote bush scrub and 0.28 acre of desert wash. Temporary impacts would be approximately 14.96 acres of Sonoran creosote bush scrub and 0.46 acre of desert wash (Table 4.5.1). The acreage of Sonoran creosote bush scrub temporarily impacted includes 9.5 acres calculated as the area of potential effects for the transmission lines east and north of the IV Substation. The actual impact in that area would likely be less. In addition, the calculation of impacts for both vegetation communities does not account for the overlap of temporary impacts from work areas and pull sites at the lattice tower and monopole locations.

General impacts to wildlife in the project area may occur. Birds are highly mobile and would most likely move out of the way during construction. Many small terrestrial

**TABLE 4.5.1
PROJECT IMPACTS
(acres)**

Resource	BCP Transmission Line (including SDG&E and IID)		SER Transmission Line		Total (Temporary/Permanent)
	Temporary Impacts	Permanent Impacts	Temporary Impacts	Permanent Impacts	
Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub	11.38 ¹	1.82	3.58	1.28	18.06 ¹ (24.54/3.08)
Desert Wash	0.21	0.13	0.25	0.15	0.74 (0.46/0.28)
TOTAL	11.59	1.95	3.83	1.43	18.80 (15.42/3.38)
Jurisdictional Waters of the U.S.	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.04	0.21 (0.13/0.08)

¹ Acreage of temporary impact includes the construction corridor for the BCP and SDG&E steel monopoles which will temporarily impact a maximum of 18.90 acres.

animals may do the same, but small mammals and reptiles with low mobility may be inadvertently killed during construction. After construction is completed, a relatively low acreage of habitat, dispersed over the six miles of the proposed route, would be lost as vegetated wildlife habitat. However, even new access roads may have some residual habitat value, as basking areas, for instance.

The proposed project would not impact any sensitive plant communities or plants federally listed as threatened or endangered but could potentially disturb 23 plant species considered sensitive by the California Native Plant Society.

No wetlands would be affected by the proposed project, but the project is expected to impact a total of 0.21 acre of non-wetland waters of the U.S. under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. This impact would result from the placement of tower footings and access roads in the desert wash areas. A permit from the Army Corps of Engineers would be required for project implementation, and the permitting process would also require a water quality certification from the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Watering may be used for dust control during construction. Watering, especially when combined with disturbance of the ground surface, may create conditions where invasive non-native species can grow. This appears to have occurred where a stand of tamarisks has become established east of the IV Substation in the area of the proposed transmission line routes.

The project site is located in the Yuha Basin ACEC and in the Yuha Desert Management Area for the flat-tailed horned lizard. The applicants have agreed to mitigation measures to minimize impacts to the flat-tailed horned lizard and the western burrowing owl, and other species that BLM consider sensitive biological resources as indicated in Tables 3.5.1, 3.5.2, and 3.5.3. These include measures listed in the "Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard Rangeland Management Strategy" to mitigate the effects of projects in the Yuha Desert Management Area. Pursuant to a court order of October 24, 2001, the Secretary of the Interior has been ordered to reinstate, within 60 calendar days, a previously effective proposed rule listing the flat-tailed horned lizard as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The flat-tailed horned lizard is active during most of the year but is dormant and hibernates approximately between November 15 and February 15. Hibernation is obligatory, and the animal hibernates in burrows, usually within a couple of inches of the ground surface. In the active period, the lizards often move about the surface during the day in spring and fall. As temperatures rise, the lizards appear to escape extreme daytime temperatures by retreating to burrows, but forage during the morning and evening. During the night in the active period, the animals spend the night below the sand, or on the surface, or in burrows. When approached, the lizards often remain still, relying on

camouflage for protection. Because of their cryptic coloration, this strategy makes them very hard to detect.

The applicants will attempt to schedule construction to occur as much as possible during the flat-tailed horned lizard's dormant period, November 15 to February 15, and to employ all mitigation measures recommended by the management strategy during that period. Construction is to be completed in as short a time as possible to minimize the length of time that habitat will be disturbed by activity. Some construction would probably be necessary during the lizard's active period (before November 15 and after February 15), however, and if so the applicants would employ additional mitigation measures during that period. In addition, the applicants would employ mitigation measures intended to minimize and mitigate for general disturbance of biological resources, and assure restoration of disturbed areas.

Several features of the project, as proposed by the applicants and described in Section 2.2.2, would be effective in minimizing harm to biological resources. These include positioning the lattice towers and locating the access roads so that permanent disturbance can be minimized. In addition, moving the tower assemblies to their locations in the line by helicopter, instead of assembling them on-site, would greatly reduce the amount of disturbance at each tower site. The mitigation recommended in this EA includes monitoring for flat-tailed horned lizards and western burrowing owls, and would help avoid impacts to other sensitive biological resources. A list of mitigation measures is in Section 2.2.6 of this EA.

4.6 Cultural Resources

The cultural resource survey conducted for the proposed project (see Section 3.6 of this EA) resulted in the relocation of 9 previously recorded sites, the discovery of 18 previously unrecorded sites, and the identification of 34 isolates. All of the sites, except one, date to the prehistoric period and appear to be linked to prehistoric human occupation focused on the 40-foot contour of Lake Cahuilla. Sites that are located below the 40-foot contour are considered important in the study of culture change because they represent activities that were undertaken after one of the intermediate recessions of the lake, or more likely, the final recession. Three of the sites were previously recommended as eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. The remaining sites should also be considered eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

If implemented, formation of a National Register district in the project area would include all of the sites recorded within the study for this EA. The proposed district would include the generalized boundaries for site 4-IMP-115, which extends outside of the project area. Site testing has been conducted on three of the identified sites. Eligibility