



# 2010 Arroyo Toad Survey Relocation Plan for the SDG&E Sunrise Powerlink Project

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexander Fromer".

Alexander Fromer, Biologist

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Project Description

The Sunrise Powerlink Project (Project) is a new 500-kilovolt (kV) and 230-kV transmission line that San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) will build, operate, and maintain in San Diego and Imperial Counties, California. The Project was approved by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) in December 2008 and by the U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in January 2009. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS), a cooperating federal agency for the Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement, issued its own Record of Decision in July 2010. In May 2010, SDG&E submitted the *Sunrise Powerlink Project: Project Modification Report* (PMR) to the CPUC and BLM for review. The PMR for the Project was revised based on review comments, and the document was subsequently approved by CPUC and BLM in September 2010.

The transmission line will extend for approximately 117 miles between an existing SDG&E substation south of El Centro in Imperial County and an existing SDG&E substation on the northeast edge of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego County. Construction is projected to begin in the fall of 2010 and continue for approximately 30 months. The construction phase of the Project will entail the establishment of 443 towers and poles, a new substation (Suncrest Substation) where the line converts from 500 kV to 230 kV, permanent access roads, maintenance areas at structure sites, and permanent tower staging access pads for helicopters. The construction phase also has several temporary components, including construction yards, work areas at structure sites, wire stringing areas, guard structures, and some temporary access roads. The permanent components will be operated and maintained by SDG&E. The temporary components will be removed after construction, and the sites will be restored to pre-construction conditions. During the construction phase, SDG&E will also upgrade three existing 69-kV lines and their associated substations (Elliot, Pomerado, and Scripps Substations). The reconductoring work entails the replacement of insulators, conductors, and some 69-kV poles.

The Project alignment occurs on land owned by the USFS, BLM, Department of Defense, State of California, Imperial and San Diego Counties, SDG&E, various municipal departments, and private landowners. One new substation, the proposed Suncrest Substation, and three system upgrades (reconductors from Sycamore Canyon Substation to the existing Pomerado, Scripps, and Elliott Substations) are also part of the project and will be required to reliably operate the new transmission line.

## 1.2 Purpose

The federally endangered arroyo toad (*Bufo californicus*) has been observed at several locations along or near the proposed action area of the Project (RECON 2009 and 2010). This arroyo toad monitoring and relocation plan provides guidance for arroyo toad monitoring, relocation, and reporting in project areas in accordance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinion.

## 2.0 Survey, Monitoring, and Relocation

### 2.1 Pre-Activity Requirements

Prior to clearing, grubbing, and construction activities, a USFWS-permitted biologist will monitor arroyo toad breeding activity in those project areas containing or adjacent to breeding habitat. The biologist will determine when egg clutches or larvae are no longer present in the waterway (generally late May at lower elevation, June at higher elevation). When sign of breeding is no longer evident, an exclusionary fence will be installed and clearance surveys initiated.

The arroyo toad temporary exclusionary fence will be constructed along the perimeter of the project footprint within or immediately adjacent to arroyo toad breeding and aestivation habitat. The intent of the fence is to fully contain the area(s) to be impacted and to remove and exclude arroyo toads. Exclusionary fence in aestivation habitat will not be installed prior to May 1 (USFWS 2009). The USFWS-permitted biologist will be present during the exclusionary fence installation, reconfigurations, and breach repairs, and weekly during the breeding season.

The fence will consist of fabric or plastic at least 0.6 meter (2 feet) high, staked firmly to the ground with the lower 0.3 meter (1 foot) of material stretching outward along the ground and secured with a continuous line of gravel bags. No digging or vegetation removal will be associated with the installation of the fence, and all materials shall be removed when the Project is complete. The removal of some vegetation, without disturbing the soil, within the project footprint to aid in the observance and collection of arroyo toads is acceptable. All fencing materials (i.e., mesh, stakes, etc.) will be removed following construction. Ingress and egress of construction equipment and personnel will be kept to a minimum, but when necessary, equipment and personnel will use a single access point to the site. This access point will be as narrow as possible and will be closed off by exclusionary fencing when personnel are not on the project site.

The applicant will submit, in writing, the names, any permit numbers, résumés, and at least three references (of people who are familiar with the relevant qualifications of the

proposed biologist) of all biologists who might need to handle, move, or monitor arroyo toads for the proposed project. This information will be submitted to the USFWS for approval at least 15 days prior to the initiation of any arroyo toad surveys. Proposed activities will not begin until an authorized biologist has been approved by the USFWS.

## **2.2 Surveys and Monitoring**

After exclusionary fencing has been installed, but prior to clearing, grubbing, and grading activities, USFWS-approved biologists will perform a minimum of three nighttime surveys inside the exclusionary fence and remove all arroyo toads found within its perimeter. The approved biologist will continue until there have been two consecutive nights without arroyo toads inside the fencing. Any breach in the exclusionary fence during times when arroyo toads are active above ground will result in repeating the three-day minimum clearance surveys for that particular area.

If conditions do not occur that result in sufficient arroyo toad emergence and movement, a USFWS-approved biologist will attempt to elicit a response from the arroyo toads during nights late in the known breeding season, with temperatures above 50 degrees Fahrenheit, by spraying the area inside the exclusionary fence with water to a depth of approximately 2 to 5 centimeters (1 to 2 inches) to simulate a rain event.

Whether or not a simulated precipitation event is done, arroyo toads found within the project footprint will be captured and translocated by USFWS-approved biologists to the closest area of suitable habitat. The USFWS-approved biologist will coordinate with the appropriate property owner(s) and the USFWS on where the arroyo toads will be placed.

After the clearance surveys outlined above have been completed, daily surveys will be conducted each morning prior to the continuation of construction activity.

## **2.2 Arroyo Toad Relocation**

Any arroyo toads found within the exclusionary fence during clearance surveys will be relocated to adjacent, suitable arroyo toad habitat. If no suitable habitat is available adjacent to the site, suitable habitat near the site and within the same watershed will be acceptable. Potential suitable relocation sites for each exclusionary fence location will be determined before clearance surveys begin.

Arroyo toads found at any time of the construction process within the exclusionary fence will either be stored on-site (see below) or transported to a selected relocation site in five-gallon plastic buckets with at least three inches of clean, moist (though not inundated) sand. Relocations will be conducted by USFWS-approved biologists for the project. To avoid unnecessary stress, moisture loss, and predation risk, relocations of

arroyo toads will take place at night or dusk. If arroyo toads are found within the exclusionary fence during daylight hours, they may be stored in a shady area in a covered (not sealed) five-gallon bucket with three inches of moist sand. The toads should be stored in a secured location where predators and construction accidents are unlikely to occur. Handling of arroyo toads will be minimized. Latex gloves will be used to handle the toads. In the event that an arroyo toad voids during handling (and consequently loses internal water reserves), the toad will either be relocated into a moist area within suitable habitat or, if all available suitable habitat is dry, the individual will be placed into a five-gallon bucket with three inches of moist sand for 30 minutes to rehydrate before release.

To avoid transferring disease or pathogens between aquatic habitats during surveys and handling of arroyo toads, approved biologists will follow the Declining Amphibian Population Task Force's Code of Practice (1991).

## **2.3 Reporting**

The USFWS-approved biologists will maintain a complete record of all arroyo toads encountered and moved from harms way during translocation efforts. The date and time of capture, sex, physical dimensions, and coordinates/specific location of capture will be recorded and provided to the USFWS within 30 days of the completion of translocation. In addition to reporting on the translocation effort, monthly reports (including photographs of impact areas) will be submitted to the USFWS during construction activities within areas demarcated by arroyo toad exclusion fencing.

The monthly reports will document general compliance with all applicable conditions (USFWS 2009) and report all incidents not in compliance with this biological opinion. The reports will also outline the duration of arroyo toad monitoring, the location of construction activities, the type of construction that occurred, and equipment used. These reports will specify numbers, locations, sex, observed behavior, and remedial measures employed to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to arroyo toads. All field notes and other documentation generated by the USFWS-approved biologist will be made available upon request to the USFWS.

## 3.0 References Cited

Declining Amphibian Population Taskforce

1991 Fieldwork Code of Practice.

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2009 Arroyo Toad Survey Report for the SDG&E Sunrise Powerlink Project.

2010 Arroyo Toad Survey Report for the SDG&E Sunrise Powerlink Project.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

2009 Biological Opinion on the Sunrise Powerlink Project, Imperial and San Diego Counties, California (FWS-2008B0423-2009F0097).