

# Environmental Minor Project Refinement Form



**Project Name:** West of Devers Upgrade Project **Request Prepared By:** Sylvia Granados

**Date Approval Required:** 4/21/2020 **Variance Request No.:** 35

**Date Submitted:** 4/14/2020 **Locations:** Southwest of 4S56 in Calimesa; West of 6N17 in Whitewater; East of M2-T3(1) in Colton; Northeast of 6N28 in Whitewater (see *Description of Change and Justification* section below and figures attached).

## Landowners and Associated Parcel Numbers:

Proposed Work Area	Property Owner	Assessor's Parcel Number
WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 (Figure 1)	RIVERSIDE LAND CONSERVANCY	413-290-011
WA-6-6N17-MPR-35 (Figure 2)	SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON CO	668-080-045
MAC-2-S-2N18-1 (Figure 3)	BEUS, LEO R	0284-161-50
WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 HLZ (Figure 4)	ENERGY UNLIMITED INC; BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT	009-612-763

**Current Vegetative Cover/Land Use:** Developed/Disturbed; Grassland Forbland; Desert Scrub; Chaparral

**Existing Sensitive Resource?** NO ☒ YES Specify: SKR Suitable Habitat, DETO Modeled Habitat, CAGN Critical Habitat

**Modifying (check as many as apply):**

☐ MITIGATION MEASURE

☐ PLAN/PROCEDURE

☐ SPECIFICATION

☒ DRAWING

☐ PERMIT CONDITION

☐ OTHER

**Specify Source (e.g., Mitigation Measure B.5):** NTP #4 Work Areas/Conditions

## Description of Change and Justification (Attach additional sheets if needed.)

Attachments:

☒ CONSTRUCTION DRAWING ☐ ADDITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS ☐ CORRESPONDENCE ☐ OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

### WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35: Expansion of Supersite 4X56

A new temporary 0.51-acre work area adjacent to the southwest side of Supersite 4X56 is required to provide adequate work space for material and equipment staging during construction, including wire stringing and wire wreck-out activities associated with Supersites 4X55 and 4X56, as shown on Figure 1.

The new work area consists of approximately 0.51-acre of chaparral, is owned and maintained by the Riverside Land Conservancy, and is located entirely within the SCE transmission line right-of-way.

### WA-6-6N17-MPR-35: Work Area west of Supersite 6N17

A 0.35-acre temporary work area west of Supersite 6N17 is required to provide adequate work space for material and equipment staging during construction, including wire stringing and wire wreck-out activities associated with the adjacent supersites, as shown on Figure 2.

The total temporary disturbance area associated with the new work area is approximately 0.04-acre of developed/disturbed land and 0.31-acre desert scrub. The land is owned by SCE and located entirely within the SCE transmission line right-of-way.

### MAC-2-S-2N18-1: Relocation

A new temporary 0.03-acre work area is required to relocate the originally planned position of MAC-2-S-2N18-1 approximately 18 feet southeast along the approved access road. The location of the mac drain has been re-designed to better capture and divert storm flow at the bend in the access road downstream to uplands, as shown on Figure 3.

The total temporary disturbance area associated with the new work area consists of approximately 0.02 acre of developed/disturbed land and 0.01 acre of grassland/forbland, which will be offset by the originally planned location of the mac drain, which will not be used, and is located in similar habitat. The land is privately owned and located entirely within the SCE transmission line right-of-way.

#### **WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 HLZ: Extension of Use for TEWS 18 HLZ**

The 0.17-acre temporary work area is contiguous with an approved access road, located between MAC-6N28-1-NE and MAC-6N28-3-NE (MacCarthy drains). It was approved in TEWS 18 and is now required for continued project use as a helicopter landing zone, as shown on Figure 4. The temporary work area will be used to facilitate helicopter assisted activities associated with Segment 6 wire stringing and wreck-out, and as a staging area for construction vehicles, materials, and equipment. No ground disturbance will occur within the temporary work area, as it is a previously developed/disturbed unpaved access road turnout area. The temporary work area is devoid of vegetation and requires no site preparation to accommodate construction use.

The total temporary disturbance space associated with the new work area consists of approximately 0.17-acre of developed/disturbed land. The work area is located on lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

#### **Environmental Analysis**

No impacts to regulated trees, jurisdictional waters, biological, or cultural resources are anticipated during the use of the new work areas.

#### **Biological Resources**

A desktop analysis was conducted for the new work areas using aerial imagery, publicly available data, and project biological data. The new work areas were covered during previous surveys, including FRED Preconstruction Survey IDs: 00041, 000144, 000110, and 000162.

**Desert Tortoise** – New work areas WA-6-6N17-MPR-35 and WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 are located within desert tortoise (DETO) modeled habitat (see Figures 2 and 4). No definitive signs of DETO have been observed in the new work areas during preconstruction surveys or protocol desert tortoise surveys covering these areas. With monitoring, no impacts are anticipated. To minimize temporal habitat loss, portions of previously approved work areas in DETO habitat, which were determined to no longer be necessary for construction, will be removed from the project data and avoided to offset mapped habitat impacts to WA-6-6N17-MPR-35 and WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35, as shown on see Figures 2 and 4.

**Special-status Terrestrial Herpetofauna** – No special-status terrestrial herpetofauna have been observed within the new work areas during project-related surveys. However, many species have the potential to occur throughout the project area. For instance, two red diamond rattlesnakes were observed approximately 465-feet northwest of WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 during surveys conducted to support licensing, permitting, and preconstruction planning efforts for the project (Figure 1). A preconstruction survey for each new work area will be conducted prior to use. With implementation of the mitigation measures and biological monitoring during construction, no significant impacts to special-status terrestrial herpetofauna are anticipated.

**Burrowing Owl** – Burrowing owl (BUOW) habitat in the form of annual and perennial grasslands and scrublands characterized by low-growing vegetation is present throughout the project area.

WA-6-6N17-MPR-35 intersects an active burrowing owl buffer (FRED\_000519). The nest is located approximately 30 feet south of the access road just north of 16th Ave, and approximately 170 feet southeast of WA-6-6N17-MPR-35 (Figure 2). The burrow is located under a concrete slab, with the mouth of the burrow is located on the north side of the slab. The nest location offers limited visual and acoustic buffers to ground sites in the general vicinity. If the 300-foot horizontal and 200-foot vertical avoidance buffers are not feasible during the breeding season (February 1 to August 31), SCE will notify CPUC, CDFW, BLM, and USFWS of a buffer reduction based on site-specific conditions such as distance to construction, type of disturbance activity, anticipated duration of the disturbance, microhabitat at the location of the nest, behavior of

the pair, reproductive stage, and known tolerances, including those observed by the Avian biologist, in accordance with the Burrowing Owl Management and Passive Relocation Plan. As the work activity is initiated, the Avian Biologist will monitor the nest long enough to determine how the nesting pair is responding to the disturbance activity. Biological monitoring, including regular nest status updates by an avian biologist, will occur thereafter. If necessary, the Avian biologist will adjust the buffer to minimize disturbance at the nest. With biological monitoring, including regular nest status updates by an avian biologist, no impacts to the nest are anticipated.

WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 HLZ is located approximately 975 feet northwest of active barn owl burrow (FRED\_000506), well outside of the 300-foot horizontal buffer shown in Figure 4. The nest is located in a south-facing cliffside approximately 35 feet above the ground. The nest height and location offers visual and acoustic buffers to ground sites near the nest. The nest is hidden within a cavity, therefore impacts to the nest are unlikely.

Active owl burrows observed during preconstruction surveys and during construction will be mitigated in accordance with the Burrowing Owl Management and Passive Relocation Plan. With implementation of the mitigation measures, including appropriate avoidance buffers and biological monitoring during construction, no impacts to burrowing owls are anticipated.

**Nesting Birds** – Suitable substrates for nesting birds protected by the California Fish and Game Code and Migratory Bird Treaty Act, including trees, shrubs, man-made structures, and the ground surface, can be found throughout the project area. Preconstruction surveys, including surveys for nesting birds during the avian breeding season (Jan 1 – Aug 31), will be conducted prior to the initiation of construction use in each area. If active nests are identified, avoidance buffers will be established in accordance with the Nesting Bird Management Plan.

As shown on Figures 1 and 3, active bird nests exist within the vicinity of WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 (FRED\_000676) and MAC-2-S-2N18-1 (FRED\_ID000583), however no active nest buffers intersect the proposed work areas. Common raven nest (FRED\_000676) is located approximately 200 feet northeast of WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 and common raven nest (FRED\_ID000583) is located approximately 290 feet northwest of MAC-2-S-2N18-1, well outside the existing nest buffers. With implementation of the NBMP, no impacts are anticipated.

Observations of special-status bird species (e.g., Yellow-Breasted Chat, Golden Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk) have occurred in the vicinity of the new work areas. However, the observations were ephemeral and are not associated with active nests. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated. If active nests are discovered in the future, impacts will be mitigated in accordance with the NBMP.

**Listed Riparian Birds** – No suitable habitat for riparian birds (least Bell's vireo [LBVI]/Southwestern willow flycatcher [SWFL]) occurs within 500 feet of the new work areas. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated.

**Coastal California Gnatcatcher** – Both the originally planned location of MAC-2-S-2N18-1 and its relocated area, approximately 18 feet to the east, are within mapped Coastal California Gnatcatcher Suitable Habitat (CAGN) (Figure 3). In the history (2014-2018) of protocol surveys conducted for the project in this area, there have been no CAGN nests observed. Results were also negative during preconstruction surveys, including FRED ID 000110.

Preconstruction surveys, including surveys for nesting birds, will be conducted in the new work areas during the avian breeding season (Jan 1 – Aug 31). With monitoring and implementation of mitigation measures, no impacts to CAGN are anticipated.

**Golden Eagle** – Based on habitat assessments and protocol surveys conducted for the project, no suitable nesting habitat for golden eagles (GOEA) is located within 2 miles of the new Segment 2 and 4 work areas. Based on aerial habitat assessments, limited suitable nesting habitat for golden eagles was identified within 2 miles of the survey area in Segment 6. Protocol aerial surveys conducted for the project in 2019 showed no golden eagle nests within 2 miles of the survey area. Golden eagles have been observed foraging north and east of Segment 6 (Figure 2). Based on information from the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, a perennial Golden Eagle nest is located in Big Morongo Canyon, outside the 2-mile survey area. CJ Drilling was conducting pouring activities at 6N17 at the time and the GOEA showed no signs of distress. Therefore, with monitoring and implementation of mitigation measures, no impacts are anticipated.

**Stephens' Kangaroo Rat** – WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 is located approximately 20 feet east of mapped suitable habitat for Stephens' kangaroo rat (SKR) (Figure 1). WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 is located within the WR-MSHCP, where SKR are a covered species.

A habitat assessment, pedestrian surveys, and several consecutive years of trapping surveys have been conducted within suitable habitat areas of the Project. Based on a lack of historic data, habitat conditions, and negative results over several years of surveys, SKR are not expected.

The other new work areas are not located within suitable habitat for the species; therefore, no impacts to SKR are anticipated.

**Special-status Bats** – No suitable bat roosting habitat or buffers occur within the new work areas; therefore, no impacts to special-status bats are anticipated.

**Special-status Small Mammals** – Special-status small mammals such as the pallid San Diego pocket mouse, northwestern San Diego pocket mouse, American badger, desert kit fox, San Diego desert woodrat, and/or San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit can occur in many parts of the project area. Ringtail and Palm Springs round-tailed ground squirrel are not anticipated to occur in the new work areas. However, if any of these species are found, potential impacts will be addressed according to the Small Mammals Avoidance and Minimization Plan.

A Los Angeles pocket mouse (LAPM) species event (FRED\_000881) was observed approximately 820-feet northwest of WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 in February 2020 (Figure 1). LAPM are a covered species in the WR-MSHCP.

Little pocket mouse (including Los Angeles pocket mouse [LAPM] and Palm Springs pocket mouse [PSPM] subspecies) occupied habitat is widespread throughout Segment 6. Three active woodrat middens are located within 50-feet of WA-6-6N17-MPR-35 (Habitat Events 000279, 000280, 000309) on the opposite side of Vernon Road, and a fourth (Habitat Event 000832) is located approximately 180 feet southeast of the new work area (Figure 2). Existing buffers will be avoided during construction activities associated with the new work area and potential impacts to these species will be addressed in accordance with the Small Mammals Avoidance and Minimization Plan. With implementation of the plan, no significant impacts are anticipated.

**Special-status Plants** – WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 HLZ is located approximately 75 feet east of Coachella Valley Milk-Vetch (CVMV) (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae* [CVMV]; FE, CRPR 1B.2) Modeled Habitat in the Whitewater Canyon Conservation Area and approximately 275 feet west of CVMV Critical Habitat (Figure 4). Previous surveys for CVMV were negative.

If special-status plants are later identified during preconstruction surveys/clearance sweeps/monitoring, they will be avoided to the extent feasible. Unavoidable impacts to special-status plants will be addressed in accordance with the Special-status Plant Salvage and Relocation Plan.

**Regulated Trees** – No tree trimming or tree removal is required for construction activities within the new work areas. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated.

#### **Jurisdictional Waters**

Wetland and non-wetland jurisdictional features are located throughout the project area. No jurisdictional features intersect the new work areas. ESA signs will be established at the edges of work areas and BMPs will be established in accordance with the SWPPP. No impacts to jurisdictional features are expected to result from use of the new work areas.

#### **Cultural Resources**

The new work areas are located within the WOD APE and were covered within the record search data that was conducted during previous WOD surveys and studies. The record search and survey results for the new work areas were negative for cultural resources. *Williams, Audry. 2016. Cultural Resources Management Plan for Southern California Edison Company's*

### **Paleontological Resources**

The WOD Paleontological Resources Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (PRMMP) requires full-time, qualified paleontological construction monitoring in areas determined to have moderate (PFYC 3) to very high (PFYC 5) sensitivity. Sediments of unknown (PFYC U) sensitivity shall be monitored by a qualified paleontological monitor on a part-time basis and geologic units with very low (PFYC 1) or low (PFYC 2) sensitivity may be spot checked to confirm paleontological sensitivity.

Per the PRMMP, the types of construction activities that require monitoring or spot-checking include:

- Grading
- Drilling (if drill bit is greater than two feet in diameter)
- Excavation for retaining walls
- Excavation of construction areas

**Types of construction activities that will not require monitoring or spot-checking, regardless of paleontological sensitivity include:**

- Small diameter drill holes (less than two feet in diameter)
- Pile driving
- Project activities that do not involve ground disturbance

The proposed work areas listed below are located in areas of low PFYC 2 paleontological sensitivity, therefore, the sites may initially be spot checked by a qualified paleontological monitor to confirm the PFYC 2 classification, if grading or excavation is required:

- WA-6-6N17-MPR-35
- WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 HLZ

No proposed work areas are located in areas of moderate (PFYC 3) paleontological sensitivity.

The proposed work areas below are located in areas of very high (PFYC 5) paleontological sensitivity, which require full time monitoring during ground-disturbing construction activities, if grading is required:

WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 Wire Site  
MAC-2-S-2N18-1

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### **Resources:**

Biological      ☐ NO SENSITIVE RESOURCES PRESENT      ☒ SENSITIVE RESOURCES PRESENT      ☐ N/A

New Survey Report Attached:      YES      ☒ NO

If No, Previous Biological Survey Reference: A preconstruction survey will be conducted prior to initiating work in each new work area. The new work areas were covered in FRED Preconstruction Survey IDs 00041, 000144, 000110, and 000162.

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**Cultural :**      ☒ NO RESOURCES PRESENT      ☐ RESOURCES PRESENT WITH PROJECT APE:      ☐ YES      ☒ NO  
                         ☒ (PAVED/GRAVEL AREA AND NO GROUND DISTURBANCE)

If in APE, Previous Cultural Survey Reference:

If not in APE, attach new survey report.

The new work areas are located within the WOD APE and were covered within the record search data that was conducted during previous WOD surveys and studies. The record search and survey results for the areas were negative

for cultural resources. Williams, Audry. 2016. Cultural Resources Management Plan for Southern California Edison Company's West of Devers Transmission Line Upgrade Project, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, California.

**Other Potential Impacts:** (Check any potential changes to permitted impacts and provide details below. Attach additional sheets if needed.)

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> AIR QUALITY          | <input type="checkbox"/> LAND USE            | <input type="checkbox"/> TRAFFIC         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES | <input type="checkbox"/> NOISE               | <input type="checkbox"/> VISUAL          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CONTAMINATED SOILS   | <input type="checkbox"/> PALEO RESOURCES     | <input type="checkbox"/> WATER RESOURCES |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CULTURAL RESOURCES   | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIOECONOMIC       | <input type="checkbox"/> WETLANDS        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HAZARDOUS MATERIALS  | <input type="checkbox"/> STORM WATER (SWPPP) |  |

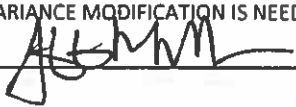
NA

**CEQA and Permitting:** (Provide details for any "Yes" answer and attach additional information if needed.)

1. Will modification involve substantial changes that will require major changes to the CEQA document?  
☐ YES ☒ NO
2. Will modification result in new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified impacts?  
☐ YES ☒ NO
3. Additional agency notifications and/or permit modifications required? ☐ YES ☒ NO

**Conditions of Approval or Reasons for Denial:** (Attach additional information if needed.)

     **Required Signatures:** (Attached email approvals may be used in lieu of signatures.)

  X   Chief Construction Inspector or Foreman: ☒ VARIANCE MODIFICATION IS NEEDED FOR SAFE AND EFFICIENT CONSTRUCTION  
Name: Jeff Miller Signature:  Date: 4/13/2019

Environmental Inspector: ☒ FIELD REVIEW COMPLETE  
Name: Lisa Amador Signature: *Lisa Amador* Date: 4/13/2019

  X   Land Agent: ☒ CONSISTENT WITH EXISTING RIGHTS ☐ NEW RIGHTS OBTAINED  
Name: James Spence Signature: Pending BLM approval for Figure 4 Date: 4/13/2019

  X   Environmental Compliance Lead: ☒ APPROVED ☐ APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS (SEE CONDITIONS ABOVE) ☐ DENIED  
Name: Sylvia Granados Signature: *Sylvia Granados* Date: 4/13/2019



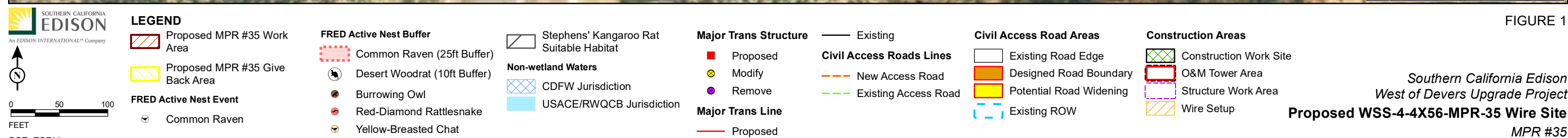
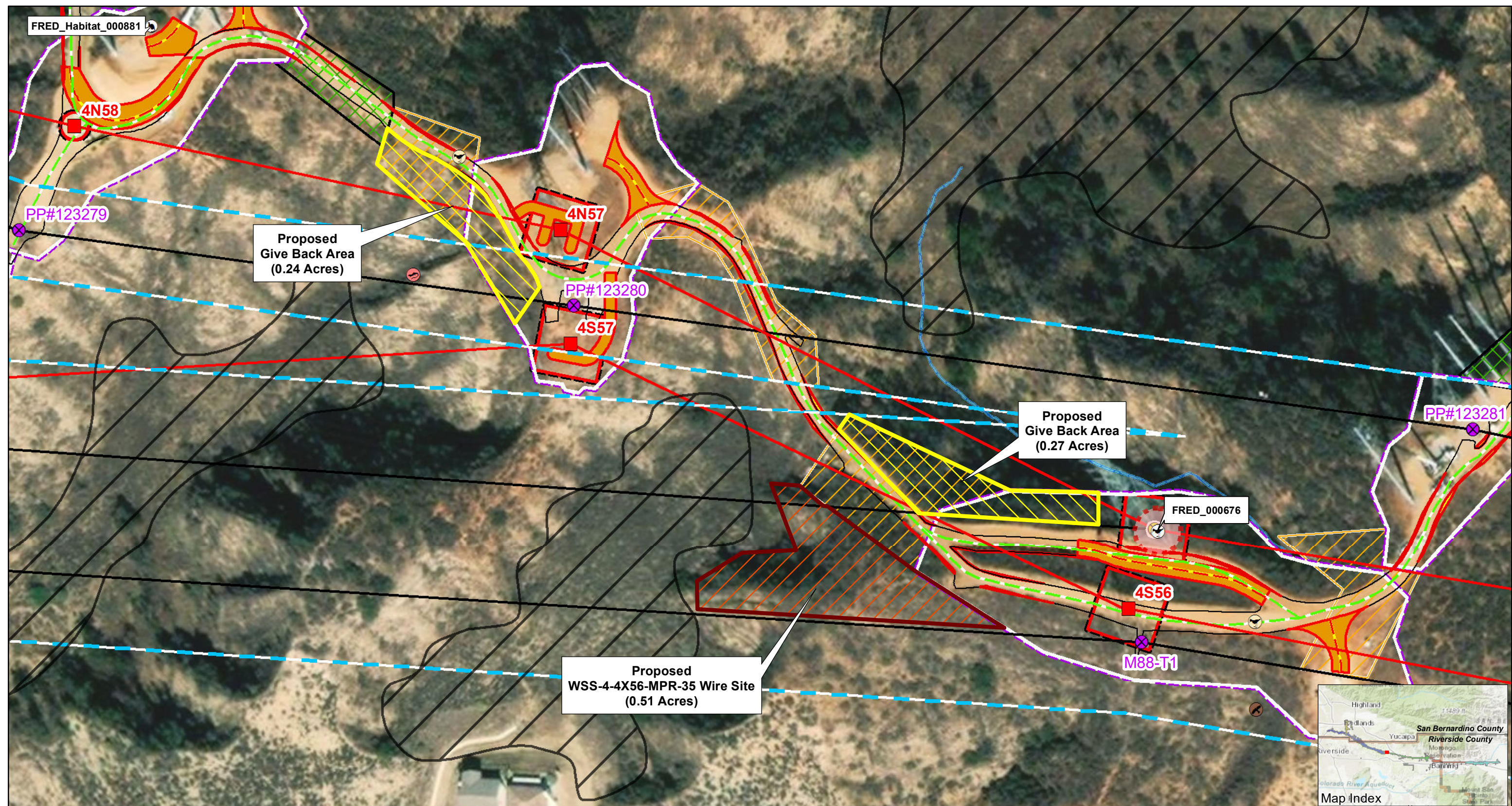


FIGURE 1

Southern California Edison  
 West of Devers Upgrade Project  
**Proposed WSS-4-4X56-MPR-35 Wire Site**  
 MPR #35



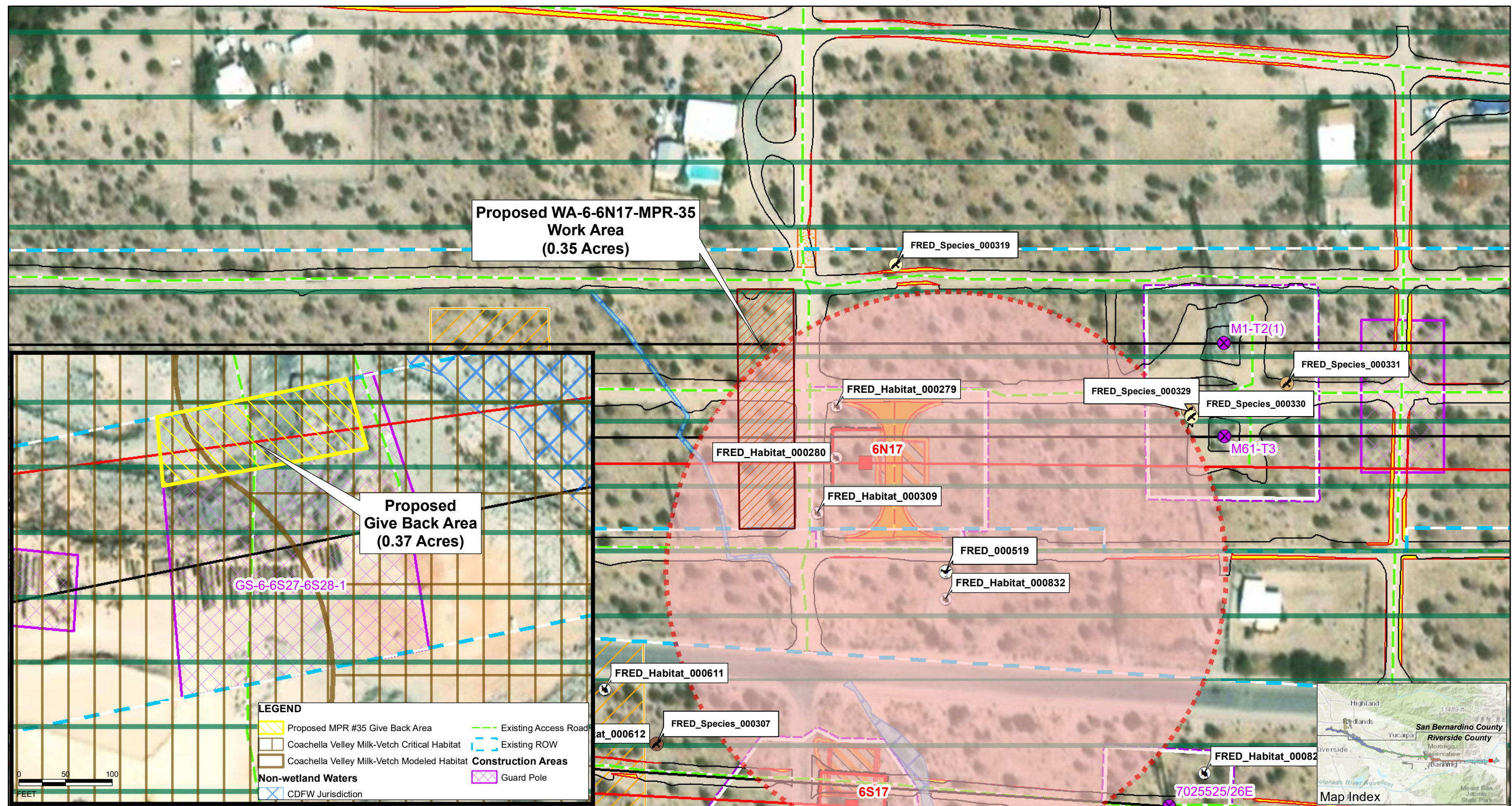
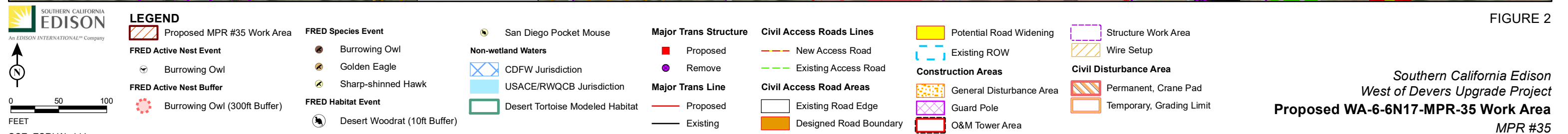


FIGURE 2









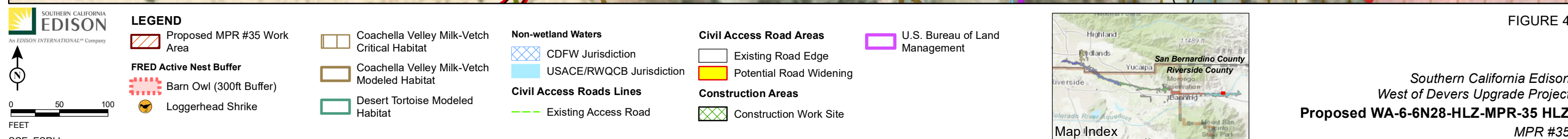
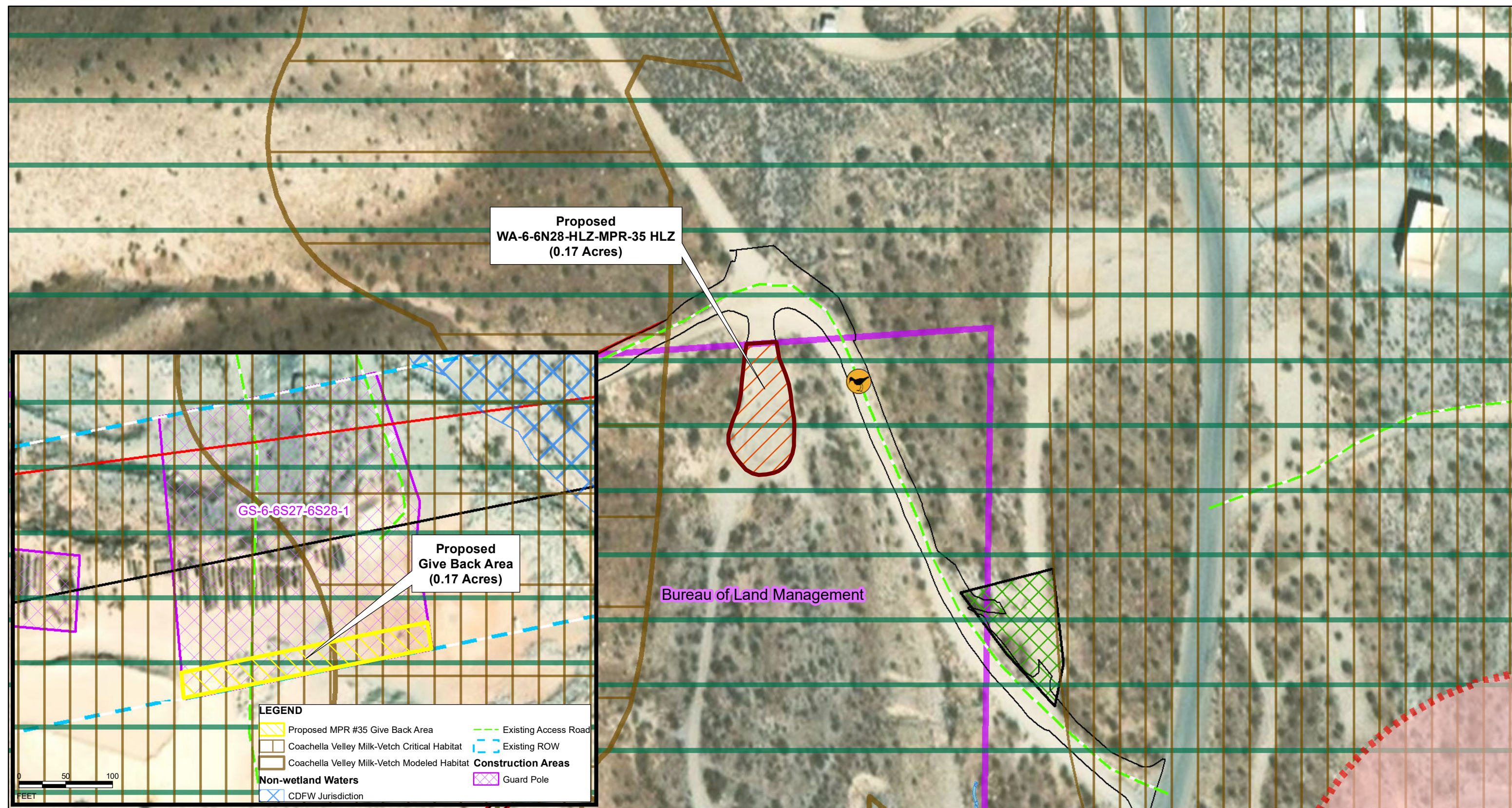


FIGURE 4

*Southern California Edison*  
*West of Devers Upgrade Project*  
**Proposed WA-6-6N28-HLZ-MPR-35 HLZ**  
**MPR #35**