

Southern California Edison
A.22-02-014 – SCE Application for a Permit Construct Electrical Facilities with Voltages
Between 50kV and 200Kv: Gorman-Kern River Project

DATA REQUEST SET E D - S C E - 0 0 1

To: Energy Division
Prepared by: Gary Busted
Job Title: Environmental Project Manager
Received Date: 3/14/2023

Response Date: 3/22/2023

Question 01:

The Project's Sensitive Species Report and the PEA notes the BNLL is likely to occur in two areas within the GKR alignment - where the alignment crosses annual grassland and open scrub habitat in the San Joaquin Valley and nearby foothills of the Tehachapi Mountains north and south of Comanche Point southeast of Arvin in Segments 1, 2, and 4 and near the California aqueduct between Wheeler Ridge and Grapevine in Segment 2 based on CNDDDB records and SCE's field surveys. During our meeting on February 27, 2023, SCE biologists noted that some areas of the alignment are highly suitable for BNLL and have known occurrences. Please provide the additional records or results of focused surveys available to refine data on BNLL observations near the Project alignment.

Response to Question 01:

SCE does not have any additional data or focused survey results that can be used to refine BNLL presence along the Project alignment. SCE's comment that some areas of the GKR alignment were occupied or potentially occupied by BNLL was based on the CNDDDB records of the species, SCE's herpetologist personal observations--on his own CNDDDB record near Commanche Point, and a conversation with the USGS about a population along the foothills near Wheeler Ridge, west of Interstate 5. However, SCE's wildlife surveys, noted in the PEA Appendix C, and completed between May 15-19, 2017 and April 29-May 2, 2018, did not detect BNLL and no protocol/focused surveys of the species were conducted.

Because the USGS found BNLL populations west of Interstate 5 at the base of the foothills (Wheeler Ridge), SCE is assuming potential presence of BNLL from the base of the foothills at the at M38-T7 north to the agricultural fields at M36-T2.

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Question 02:

In the Sensitive Species Report a map is shown for blunt-nosed leopard lizard probability of occurrence (Figure 7, page 291 of 517). The map shows “Predicted Occupied Habitat and Probability of Occurrence based on USGS models”. Please confirm that the figures included in the Report are utilizing data derived from USGS predicted habitat models and are not reflecting results of habitat assessments during surveys.

Response to Question 02:

SCE is confirming that Figure 7 in Appendix C of the PEA is modeling predicted habitat based on USGS models and locations from the CNDDDB records. Figure 7 does not reflect any results from SCE’s habitat assessments.

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Question 03:

The attached figure shows the suitable habitat mapped for BNLL along the project alignment based on GIS data we received from SCE. Please confirm whether these areas align with the suspected occupied habitat areas and what criteria were used to determine habitat suitability. Please provide the source of this information (presence of suitable habitat and the professional opinion of SCE surveyors and biologists or consultants, on the “Predicted Occupied Habitat and Probability of Occurrence based on USGS models”, or another source of information).

Response to Question 03:

The data request states that the attached figure showing suitable habitat for BNLL along the alignment is based on GIS data provided by SCE. It is not clear to SCE how the suitable habitat determination shown in the attached figure was derived from the USGS probability map provided by SCE as Figure 7 of Appendix C to the PEA. This figure indicates where SCE expects there to be occupied or potentially occupied habitat for BNLL along the project alignment.

To determine the location of occupied or potentially occupied habitat, SCE's subject matter experts and local expert biologists reviewed CNDDDB records, had communication with USGS, and conducted site visits of the local habitat. SCE took into consideration topography and land use (agricultural, roads, and developed lands) to identify suspected occupied habitat. However, some areas identified in the probability map (Figure 7 of Appendix C to the PEA), will need to be confirmed through focused/protocol surveys to determine BNLL presence.

To clarify and for reference the source of the information used to create SCE’s probability map referenced above as, “*Predicted Occupied Habitat and Probability of Occurrence based on USGS models*” is as follows:

Predicted Occupied Habitat and Probability of Occurrence data derived from Blunt Nosed Leopard Lizard Maxent Continuous Output model, as contained in the Blunt Nosed Leopard Lizard – Species Distribution Model, Solar Energy and Conservation in the San Joaquin Valley dataset (<https://databasin.org/datasets/e02db184ff08428eb9a6da4072a4ebfd/>). Data presented in Cowan,

Jane, Andrew Gwin, Dustin Pearce, Graham Wesolowski, and Sam Young. 2015. WildLight Final Report: San Joaquin Valley Landscape-Scale Planning for Solar Energy and Conservation.

Available at <https://bren.ucsb.edu/media/2740>

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Question 04:

During our February 27, 2023 meeting, SCE noted they would start consultation and coordination with USFWS and CDFW regarding potential impacts to BNLL. Please define the area that SCE is presuming are occupied habitat where a federal “take” permit will be obtained.

What procedures is SCE proposing to avoid "take" under Fish and Game Code. Please also define the areas of potentially suitable habitat where SCE is presuming BNLL are not expected to occur and where surveys will be used to verify absence in lieu of a “take” permit and more advanced avoidance measures.

Response to Question 04:

SCE anticipates conducting protocol-level surveys in areas of suitable habitat to determine presence or absence of the species. Areas to be surveyed will be subject to agency concurrence, but currently these areas are presumed to include the foothills south of the Kern River Generation Station (approximately structure M2-T4 to M8-T3), the junction where Segments 1, 2 and 4 come together (approximately structure M1-T4 to M24-T6), and near the town of Grapevine (approximately structure M36-T3 to M38-T7). Surveys will exclude agricultural fields.

Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard is fully-protected under Fish and Game Code §5050. Because Take Authorization is not available for this species, SCE will discuss the proposed procedures outlined in SCE’s applicant proposed measures for the species with USFWS and CDFW and discuss any additional measures or procedures recommended by the USFWS and CDFW. Currently, to avoid or minimize potential impacts to reptiles from GKR Project construction activities--such as native vegetation clearing and grubbing, grading, and earth-moving--SCE would implement APM BIO-GEN-1: Pre-construction Biological Clearance Survey and Monitoring, which includes pre-construction biological surveys and flagging boundaries of areas supporting native vegetation and special-status reptiles for avoidance, when feasible. SCE would also implement APM WEAP: Worker’s Environmental Awareness Training (WEAP), to ensure contractor understanding and implementation of these protective measures. In addition, SCE would implement BIO-HERP-7 (see current APM language below): Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard to avoid or minimize potential impacts

to this listed species. The measures outlined in these APMs would serve to avoid or minimize potential impacts to the special-status reptile species.

SCE does not anticipate BNLL along the USGS modeled habitat on Segment 1, 2 or 4 in the foothills where there is steep terrain or in the agricultural fields along segments 1 and 2. In Segment 1, SCE does not expect BNLL in the foothills south of the Kern River Generation Station (approximately structure M2-T4 to M8-T3) due to steep terrain and lack of records, along Segment 2, SCE assumes BNLL are absent south along the grapevine from tower M24-T7 because the previous CNDDDB record to the south of this tower is in steep terrain and over 100 years old, and on Segment 4, SCE assumes BNLL are absent east of M1-T4, also due to steep terrain.

As reflected in the answer above, areas to be surveyed will determine presence or absence of the species. Areas where presence is determined will be subject to applicable APMs and permitting.

APM BIO-HERP-7:

Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard

Pre-construction survey/Construction monitoring. Prior to initial ground-disturbing activities, a qualified blunt-nosed leopard lizard biologist will conduct surveys within areas identified as habitat for this species. The qualified blunt-nosed leopard lizard biologist shall be experienced in conducting surveys for the species, be able to identify suitable habitat for the species, and identify sympatric species. Prior to project activities SCE will provide a map of potentially suitable habitat for blunt-nosed leopard lizard along the project alignment.

One pre-construction survey shall be conducted within 14 days of construction by a qualified biologist(s) and an additional pre-construction survey shall be completed within 24 hours to the onset of construction. The biologist(s) will identify and clearly mark the location of areas where any blunt-nosed leopard lizard were observed. If a blunt-nosed leopard lizard is observed within the project site, U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be Provided written notification of avoidance measures taken. If construction stops for longer than 2 weeks, a preconstruction survey will need to be conducted prior to construction starting again. Surveys will focus on identifying occupied burrows within areas identified as habitat.

In blunt-nosed leopard lizard occupied habitat, exclusion fencing shall be installed in such a manner as to segregate blunt-nosed leopard lizard from the construction and to ensure that direct take of the species does not occur. The actual distance from the construction area where exclusion fencing is installed may depend on each construction site, but the fencing will be installed at a maximum 50-foot radius from the outermost edge of the construction impact zone, directed by the qualified biologist. The qualified biologist shall be on site during the fencing installation to ensure that no blunt-nosed leopard lizard are inadvertently impacted during installation.

A qualified biologist will monitor all project activities occurring within potentially occupied habitat. Coordinate with agencies. SCE will consult with CDFW and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine if additional avoidance measures will be required (e.g., fencing and/or scoping of burrows).