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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert Fletcher, San Diego Gas & Electric Company

FROM: Melissa Busby, Busby Biological Services, Inc.

DATE: December 3, 2014

RE: Response to Data Request #3, Issue 27: Provide GIS data for Quino checkerspot butterfly (QCB, *Euphydryas editha quino*) localities and Mapped Areas, and provide a project-specific habitat assessment.

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The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has identified data needs for the proposed San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project (Proposed Project), Application No. 14-04-011. Data Request #3, Issue 27 states the following:

***“Provide GIS data for Quino checkerspot butterfly (QCB, *Euphydryas editha quino*) localities and Mapped Areas, and provide a project-specific habitat assessment.*”**

*SDG&E’s response to Data Request #2 was incomplete. SDG&E did not provide the requested GIS data and project specific habitat assessment. The Low-Effect HCP may adequately cover species avoidance and mitigation measures, but is not a replacement for the CEQA analysis. We cannot analyze the impacts of the project on suitable habitat without first understanding where suitable habitat is located in the project area.*

*Provide GIS data identifying where QCB localities occur near the BSA or within the BSA. Confirm that the most current data for the QCB Mapped Area is sourced from the USFWS. Provide a Project-specific habitat assessment for the QCB for the BSA. The assessment needs to include GIS data and mapping of potential QCB habitat.”*

### RESPONSE

This section provides a response to each component of the data request, above.

**SDG&E did not provide the requested GIS data and project specific habitat assessment.**

In a memorandum dated October 28, 2014, BBS:

- Provided a figure that identifies where QCB localities occur within and adjacent to the BSA
- Provided a figure showing the most current SDG&E QCB “Mapped Areas” (i.e., suitable QCB habitat) within and adjacent to the BSA
- Addressed the request to provide a Project-specific habitat assessment for QCB for the BSA and the comment that USFWS will require protocol surveys for QCB

Please refer to Figure 1, which is also included with this memorandum. TRC Solutions, Inc. provided the GIS data to support the information depicted in this figure.

The request for a Project-specific habitat assessment is addressed further in the Discussion, below.

**The Low-Effect HCP may adequately cover species avoidance and mitigation measures, but is not a replacement for the CEQA analysis. We cannot analyze the impacts of the project on suitable habitat without first understanding where suitable habitat is located in the project area.**

This comment is addressed in the Discussion, below.

**Provide GIS data identifying where QCB localities occur near the BSA or within the BSA.**

This information was provided in response to Data Request #2 and is depicted in Figure 1.

**Confirm that the most current data for the QCB Mapped Area is sourced from the USFWS.**

The GIS data for the QCB Mapped Areas represents the most current QCB Mapped Areas provided to SDG&E by USFWS.

**Provide a Project-specific habitat assessment for the QCB for the BSA. The assessment needs to include GIS data and mapping of potential QCB habitat.**

According to the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP, the Proposed Project would not require habitat assessments, protocol level surveys, or mitigation because it is located entirely outside of current SDG&E QCB Mapped Areas (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP provides SDG&E with a take permit for the incidental take of QCB during otherwise lawfully covered activities associated with SDG&E's operations, maintenance, and new facility construction. The SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP emphasizes the protection of habitat through impact avoidance and use of operational protocols designed to avoid or minimize impacts to QCB. Incidental take of QCB is mitigated by fully implementing the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP.

The SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP was prepared in consultation with the USFWS to fulfill the requirements of section 10(1)(2)(A) of the Endangered Species Act. Therefore, SDG&E is not required to conduct any further assessments, mapping, or protocol survey efforts for the Proposed Project per the existing agreement.

Please refer to the Discussion, below, for a more detailed discussion of the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP and how it applies to the Proposed Project.

## **DISCUSSION**

In December 1995, USFWS and CDFW approved the San Diego Gas and Electric Company (SDG&E) *Subregional Natural Community Conservation Plan (Subregional NCCP)*, which addresses potential impacts to species and habitat associated with SDG&E's ongoing installation, use, maintenance, and repair of its gas and electric systems, and typical expansion to those systems throughout much of SDG&E's existing service territory. As a part of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, SDG&E has been issued an incidental take permit (Permit PRT-809637) by the USFWS and the CDFW for 110 Covered Species; however, the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* does not include QCB as a Covered Species.

To supplement the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, SDG&E worked closely with the USFWS to prepare the *SDG&E Low-Effect Habitat Conservation Plan for the Issuance of an Incidental Take Permit under Section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act for the Federally Endangered Quino Checkerspot Butterfly for SDG&E (SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP)*. This is considered an HCP and not an NCCP or NCCP/HCP because the QCB is federally listed as endangered but is not state-listed.

SDG&E prepared the *SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP* to minimize and mitigate the effects of its activities on the QCB and to obtain incidental take authorization for this

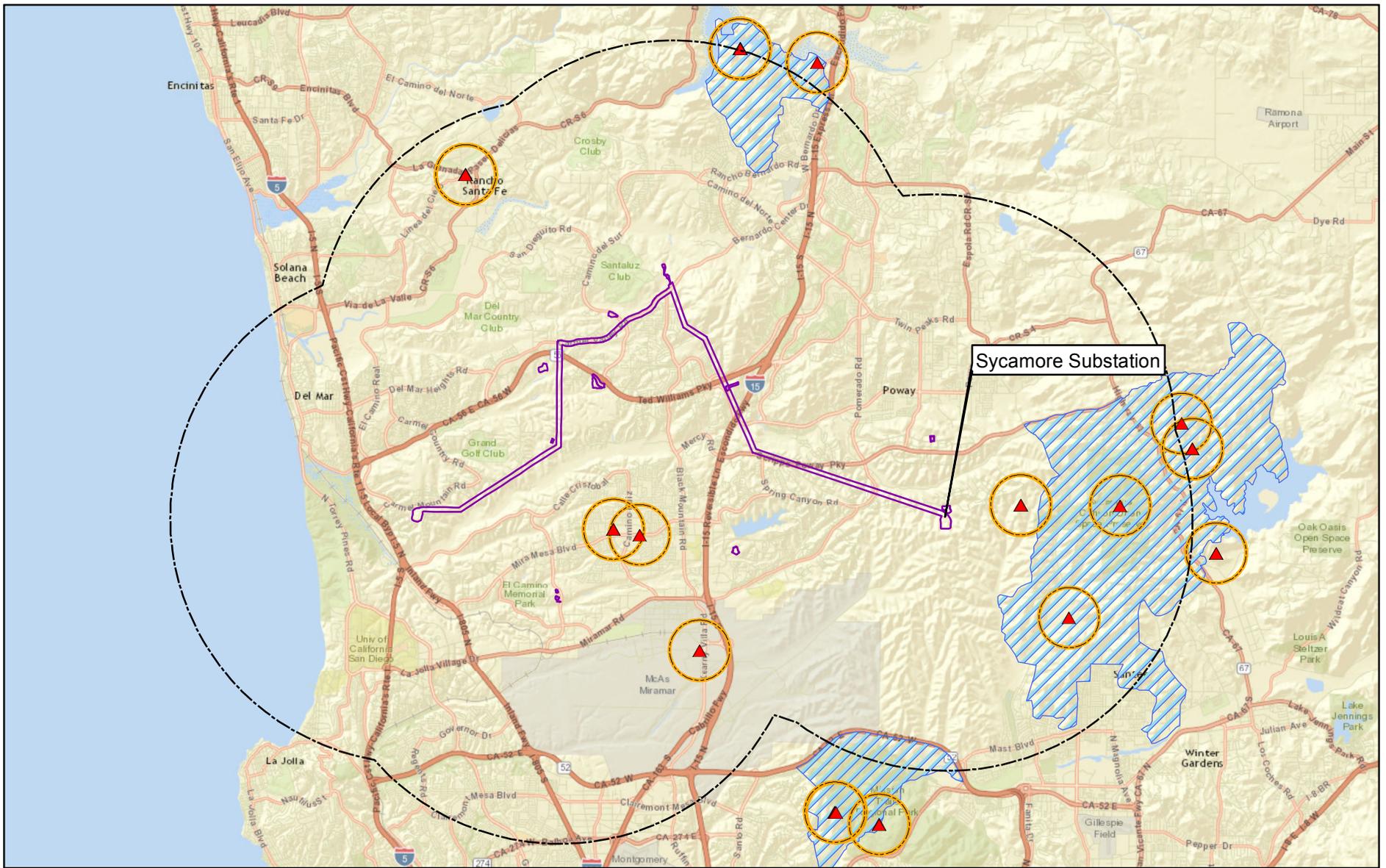
species. The SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP Plan Area covers the same Plan Area as the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. The SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP was approved in 2007 and qualifies as a "Low-Effect" HCP as provided by the Department of the Interior Manual (516 DM 2 Appendix 1, and 516 DM 6 Appendix 1) and as defined in the Habitat Conservation Planning Handbook (November 1996).

Because both the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* and the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP provide incidental take authorization, SDG&E can apply these plans to their activities and, with full implementation of these plans, is not required to conduct detailed studies for Covered Species on a project by project basis.

The SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP designates areas within the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP Plan Area as suitable QCB habitat, referred to as "Mapped Areas". Activities that are proposed within the "Mapped Areas" require focused surveys or assumed occupancy if timing precludes focused surveys from being performed as well as implementation of additional appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures in these "Mapped Areas". However, activities that are proposed outside of the "Mapped Areas" do not require surveys or any avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures because all potential impacts to the QCB are mitigated through the full implementation of the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP.

The Proposed Project is located completely outside the SDG&E "Mapped Areas" for the QCB (Figure 1). The closest "Mapped Area" is almost 2 miles from the Proposed Project alignment. In addition, an analysis of historical occurrence data for the QCB indicates that the closest historical record for this species is approximately 1.6 miles east of the Sycamore Substation, which is located at the easternmost end of the Proposed Project Alignment (Figure 1).

Because the Proposed Project is located outside of the SDG&E "Mapped Areas", no focused surveys or additional analysis for the QCB are required for the Proposed Project, and no additional avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures are required for this species. All impacts to the QCB would be permitted under the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP, and – through full implementation of the SDG&E Low-Effect QCB HCP – impacts to the QCB are anticipated to be less than significant.



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**Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 kV Transmission Line Project**  
**Historical QCB Locations and Mapped Areas**  
**Figure 1**

SDG&E is providing this map with the understanding that the map is not survey grade. Certain technology used under license from AT&T Intellectual Property I, L.P. Copyright ©1998 – 2007 AT&T Intellectual Property I, L.P. All Rights Reserved.

- BSA    ▲ QCB Historical Occurrence
- 5-mile (8-kilometer) Buffer Around BSA
- 0.6-mile (1-kilometer) Buffer Around QCB Occurrence
- SDG&E QCB HCP Mapped Areas

0      2      4      6  
 Miles



Sources: CNDDDB October 2014 Database, CA Dept Fish and Wildlife; Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, USGS, Intermap, increment P Corp., NRCAN, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri (Thailand), TomTom, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community