## 5.5 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

### 5.5.1 Impacts

Under CEQA Significance Criteria, a project would be considered to have a potentially significant biological impact if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFG or USFWS.

  Summary: Habitat for some special-status plant and wildlife species may be impacted by ground-disturbing activity associated with the project. Except for permanent habitat losses, most project-related impacts are expected to be temporary and with no lasting effects on the future existence of the species in the area. SCE expects that any such impacts can be avoided or reduced to less than significant using appropriate mitigation measures. Where this cannot be achieved, appropriate compensatory mitigation would be negotiated with the appropriate agencies and implemented accordingly.

- Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by the CDFG or USFWS.

  Summary: No substantial adverse effects are expected as a result of the proposed project to any riparian areas or sensitive natural communities identified in any local or regional plans, policies, or regulations by the California Department of Fish and Game or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Riparian areas are spanned by T/Ls at stream crossings and no towers are planned for construction in riparian zones.

- Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means.

  Summary: Based on surveys completed to date there are no jurisdictional wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act that would be impacted by the project.

- Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites.

Summary: The construction and operation of the proposed project would not substantially interfere with the movement of any native resident fish or wildlife species or with any known or established migratory wildlife corridors. The work would be temporary and would create no physical barriers to wildlife movement in the region. No new paved roads would be created in the area.

- Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance.

  Summary: The proposed project would not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources. If the project requires that one or more oaks must be removed to facilitate construction, SCE would comply with the Los Angeles County Oak Tree Ordinance regarding permit requirements.

- Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan.

  Summary: The proposed project does not conflict with any provisions of any adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan. Portions of the project occur within the draft West Mojave Plan. This is a proposed Habitat Conservation Plan for a specific portion of the Mojave Desert. Despite this plan not being officially adopted, the draft West Mojave Plan was used as a guide in addressing impacts related to this project. It is likely that this Plan would be adopted while this project is under review.

In general, the primary criteria for determining significance of an impact on biological resources are sensitivity ratings and regulatory protection assigned by federal and state resource agencies (e.g., USFWS, CDFG). Any activity within the proposed project area that results in the "take" of a federally or state-listed threatened or endangered species would be considered significant. To "take" is defined in the federal Endangered Species Act as "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect an endangered or threatened species or to attempt to engage in any of these activities." Harm not only includes killing a species, but activities that modify or significantly degrade habitat that could result in death or injury to individual members of a species by significantly disrupting their essential behavioral patterns. The number of individuals impacted is not relevant to determining significance; if one individual is, or could be impacted, then the impact would be considered significant.

Impacts to biological resources resulting from the construction of the proposed project and each alternative can be characterized as four types that are described below:

- Direct impacts occur when biological resources are altered, disturbed, destroyed, or removed during the course of project implementation. Examples of direct impacts are loss of habitat because of grading, filling or "take" of a sensitive species.
- Indirect impacts occur when project-related activities impact biological resources in a manner other than direct. Potential indirect impacts include increased noise levels and nonnative weed establishment.
- Permanent impacts result in the irreversible loss of biological resources. Examples include the removal of sensitive vegetation or vegetation that supports a sensitive species, or chronic disturbance of sensitive species during a critical period (e.g., breeding season).
- Temporary impacts are reversible with the implementation of mitigation measures. Examples include the revegetation of an area cleared during construction, or short-term noise events associated with operations.

Twelve general habitat types are designated as occurring along Segment 1 and Alternate 1. Several sensitive habitat types identified and tracked by the CNDDB also occur in the region. Construction impacts would affect vegetation, and therefore wildlife habitat, where certain ground-disturbing activities would occur.

Land disturbance associated with construction of the proposed project is summarized in Table 3-3.

Indirect impacts associated with construction would likely include an increase in non-native invasive weeds. SCE would, especially on USFS lands, implement BMPs to avoid the spreading of, and establishment of, noxious weeds. Native species would be used for reestablishing seedbeds where native vegetation was displaced by construction activities.

Special-status plant species, other than state/federal listed species, that are found prior to construction in areas where ground-disturbing activity is expected would be flagged and protected from permanent loss. When this is impossible, an effort would be made to salvage and replant, or to collect seeds and reseed the area post-construction.

No federal or state listed wildlife species would be expected to be impacted by the project. Other non-listed but special-status species may be encountered. In some cases, local construction activities may cause permanent impacts such as loss, injury, permanent displacement, and permanent or temporary avoidance of particular areas.

### 5.5.2 Mitigation

**APM Bio-1.** SCE would perform pre-construction clearance surveys to help ensure that no special-status plants or wildlife species are negatively impacted by construction.

**APM Bio-2.** Every effort would be made to minimize vegetation removal and permanent loss at construction sites. If necessary, native vegetation would be flagged for protection.

**APM Bio-3.** Construction crews would avoid impacting the streambeds and banks of any streams along the route to the extent feasible. If necessary SCE would secure a Streambed Alteration Agreement (SAA) from California Department of Fish and Game. Impacts would be mitigated based the terms of the SAA. No federally listed special-status species occurring on US Forest Service Lands are expected to be impacted; therefore, no mitigation is expected to be required by that agency. No streams with flowing waters and capable of supporting special-status species are expected to be impacted by the project.

**APM Bio-4.** Crews would be directed to use BMPs where applicable. These measures would be identified prior to construction and incorporated into the construction operations to the fullest extent possible.

**APM Bio-5.** SCE would assign Biological Monitors to the project. They would be responsible for ensuring that impacts to special-status species, native vegetation, wildlife habitat, or unique resources would be minimized to the fullest extent possible. Where appropriate, monitors would flag the boundaries of areas where activities need to be restricted in order to protect native plants and wildlife, or special-status species. These restricted areas would be monitored to ensure their protection during construction.

**APM Bio-6.** SCE would implement a worker environmental awareness training program to ensure that construction personnel are aware of the environmental conditions that must be adhered. All field construction personnel would be required to sign a statement that they agree to comply with all environmental protection measures associated with the project.

**APM Bio-7.** If it is determined that unanticipated significant and unavoidable impacts occurred to any special status resources, SCE would purchase lands or otherwise enhance habitat to compensate.