

C.1 Introduction to Environmental Analysis

C.1.1 Section Content and Organization

Section C of this EIR examines the environmental consequences associated with the implementation of the proposed Project. Section C includes analyses of the 12 environmental issue areas listed below:

- C.2 – Air Quality
- C.3 – Biological Resources
- C.4 – Cultural Resources
- C.5 – Geology, Soils, and Paleontology
- C.6 – Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- C.7 – Hydrology and Water Quality
- C. 8 – Land Use
- C.9 – Agriculture
- C.10 – Noise
- C.11 – Visual Resources
- C.12 – Traffic and Transportation
- C.13 – Population and Housing

Analysis within each issue area includes consideration of the proposed Project, which is described fully in Section B of this EIR. The basic methodology used in the environmental analysis is described below.

Within each of the environmental issue area sections listed above, the environmental analysis of the Project is organized according the following major subheadings:

- Environmental Setting
- Regulatory Framework (federal, State, local)
- Applicant-Proposed Measures
- Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Each environmental impact identified is associated with a specific significance criterion, which is used to evaluate the severity, or significance, of the impact. Mitigation measures are proposed for each significant impact identified. Cumulative impacts are discussed in Section E, Other CEQA Considerations, of this EIR. Growth-inducing impacts of the proposed Project are also discussed in Section E.

The purpose of identifying the potential environmental impacts and the associated mitigation measures is to provide information to decision makers and the public about the proposed Project's environmental effects that can be used in deliberations about whether or not to approve the proposed Project. The information contained in this EIR will also be used by regulatory agencies that would need to issue to permits for the construction of the Project if approved by the CPUC. An evaluation of the impacts of Project alternatives is presented in Section D. Alternatives are evaluated at a lesser level of detail than the proposed Project.

Recognizing that there is a great deal of public interest and concern regarding potential health effects from exposure to electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) from power lines, Appendix 2 (Electric and Magnetic Fields) provides information regarding EMF associated with electric utility facilities and the potential effects of the proposed Project related to public health and safety. Appendix 2 does not consider magnetic fields in the context of CEQA and determination of environmental impact, first because there is no agreement among scientists that EMF does create a potential health risk, and second because there are no defined or adopted CEQA standards for defining health risk from EMF. As a result, EMF information is presented for the benefit of the public and decision makers. Information on EMF presented in Appendix 2 includes a definition and description of EMF, scientific background and regulations applicable to EMF, EMF conditions along the Project route, and methods to reduce EMF.

In addition, the potential effect of transmission line projects on property values is typically of interest and concern to the public. As such, Appendix 6 (Property Values) addresses issues associated with property

valuation effects near industrial facilities such as transmission lines in an effort to provide the reader with detailed background information based on extensive literature review and the property value effects of past and recent similar projects. This Appendix does not consider property values in the context of CEQA and the determination of environmental impact because direct social and economic effects, such as Project effects on property values, are not considered significant impacts under CEQA. As such, the information on property value issues is provided for the benefit of the public and decision-makers.

C.1.2 Environmental Assessment Methodology

For purposes of this EIR, and pursuant to CEQA Guidelines (Section 15125[a]), the environmental setting used to determine the impacts associated with the proposed Project and the alternatives to the proposed Project is based on the environmental conditions that existed in the Project area in April 2006, at the time the Notice of Preparation was distributed (see Section A). The Applicant's proposed Project traverses an area with an assortment of land uses, including undeveloped rural areas, agricultural areas, and suburban residential development in northern Los Angeles County and southeastern Kern County along the proposed transmission line route.

This EIR evaluates the potential direct and indirect impacts that would be caused by the proposed Project if approved and implemented. The impacts identified were compared with significance criteria established by the Lead Agency and, based on these criteria, the impacts have been classified according to significance categories described in Section C.1.3, below.

For each significant impact identified, mitigation measures have been identified that would reduce or avoid the impact. Where feasible, mitigation measures have been identified that would reduce significant impacts to a less-than-significant level. These mitigation measures are presented for consideration by decision makers as possible conditions of Project approval.

The Applicant has incorporated design features, measures, and procedures into the description of its proposed Project to avoid or reduce impacts from Project construction and operation. These measures are referred to as Applicant-Proposed Measures (APMs) in this EIR and are considered in the analysis of impacts and the determinations of impact significance. In the assessment of identified impacts, APMs are part of the proposed Project and, therefore, are not included as mitigation measures. The APMs are considered a commitment by the Applicant and implementation of each APM will be monitored by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) if the proposed Project is approved. The APMs that are considered necessary to reduce potential impacts are listed in the each environmental issue area discussion (Sections C.2 through C.12).

C.1.3 Significance Categories

In order to provide for a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of potential environmental impacts to the issue area categories, a classification system was applied to the impacts of the proposed Project. These classifications indicate whether an identified impact is significant and whether mitigation measures can reduce the severity of the impact to a level that is not significant. The following classifications were uniformly applied to each identified impact:

- **Class I: Significant impact; cannot be mitigated to a level that is not significant.** Class I impacts are significant adverse effects that cannot be mitigated below a level of significance through the application of feasible mitigation measures. Class I impacts are significant and unavoidable.

- **Class II: Significant impact; can be mitigated to a level that is not significant.** A Class II impact is a significant adverse effect that can be reduced to a less than significant level through the application of feasible mitigation measures presented in this EIR.
- **Class III: Adverse, less than significant.** A Class III impact is a minor change or effect on the environment that does not meet or exceed the criteria established to gauge significance.
- **Class IV: Beneficial impact.** Class IV impacts represent beneficial effects that would result from project implementation.

A significant impact is defined by CEQA as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project” (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15382). The determination of impact significance is based on the independent judgment of the Lead Agency which, for this proposed Project, is the CPUC. The establishment of any criteria used to evaluate the significance of impacts is also the responsibility of the Lead Agency. Criteria used to determine the significance of the proposed Project’s impacts are presented in the sections addressing individual environmental issue areas (Sections C.2 through C.12).

The determination of whether or not an impact is significant is the key consideration in the environmental impact analysis. It is the intent of CEQA to focus on the significant adverse effects of a project, and it is the potential for a project to result in such impacts that triggers the requirement to prepare an EIR. For impacts that are determined not to be significant, the EIR need only provide sufficient information to indicate why the impacts are not considered significant. For significant impacts, adequate information and analysis must be provided to characterize each impact and provide the public and decision-makers with an understanding of the nature and severity of the impact. The level of detail and analysis needed to adequately characterize significant impacts varies depending on the nature of the impact. Certain types of impacts require quantitative analysis in order to determine impact significance, characterize adverse effects, and formulate appropriate mitigation measures. Other types of impacts require more qualitative analysis and the determination of impact significance is based on professional judgment of the EIR preparers or guidance provided by resource agencies.