

## PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



May 3, 2012

Ms. Suzan Benz  
Environmental Project Manager  
Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 Transmission Project  
6 Point Drive, 1st Floor  
Brea, CA 92821-6320

RE: SCE Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 Transmission Line Project – Variance Request #31

Dear Ms. Benz,

On April 24, 2012, Southern California Edison (SCE) submitted a variance request to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) for modification to the boundary of Helicopter Landing Zone (HLZ) H2-DV to assist with helicopter construction of the Devers-Valley segment (Notice to Proceed #10) of the Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 (DPV2) Transmission Project.

The CPUC voted on January 25, 2007 to approve the SCE DPV2 Transmission Line Project ([Decision D.07-01-040](#)). On May 14, 2008, SCE filed a Petition for Modification (PFM) of the existing Certificate for Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) approved per Decision D.07-01-040. SCE requested that the CPUC authorize SCE to construct DPV2 facilities in only the California portion of DPV2 and the Midpoint Substation (now called the Colorado River Substation) near Blythe, California. The CPUC approved SCE's PFM on November 20, 2009 in [Decision D.09-11-007](#).

After the CPUC's 2009 Decision regarding the PFM, several large solar power projects were proposed in the Blythe and Desert Center areas. SCE filed Permit to Construct applications addressing expansion of the Colorado River Substation and construction of a new Red Bluff Substation. These components were not covered in the original DPV2 Final EIR/EIS, because the solar power projects had not yet been proposed, and supplemental environmental review has been conducted. The Colorado River Substation Expansion and the Red Bluff Substation were both approved by the CPUC on July 14, 2011 in Decisions D.11-07-011 and D.11-07-020, respectively.

The BLM issued a Record of Decision approving the Project on July 19, 2011 and approved exclusionary fencing activities on August 23, 2011. The Project also crosses lands under jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service on the San Bernardino National Forest within an existing Forest Service-issued easement. The Forest Service will issue a revised easement signed by the Forest Supervisor. The area requested under this variance does not fall under Forest Service jurisdiction.

The CPUC also adopted a Mitigation, Monitoring, Compliance and Reporting Program (MMCRP) to ensure compliance with all mitigation measures imposed on the DPV2 Project during implementation. The MMCRP also acknowledges that temporary changes to the project are anticipated and common practice for construction efforts of this scale and that a Variance Request would be required for these activities. This letter documents the CPUC's thorough evaluation of all activities covered in this variance, and that no new impacts or increase in impact severity would result from the requested variance activities.

Variance #31, which approves the boundary modifications to HLZ H2-DV, is granted by CPUC for the proposed activities based on the factors described below.

**SCE Variance Request.** SCE has requested a variance for the transmission line activities identified in Notice to Proceed #10 for HLZs along the Devers-Valley segment. Excerpts from the SCE Variance Request, received April 24, 2012, are presented below (indented):

Subsequent to approval of the Devers to Valley Transmission Line (Excluding the San Bernardino National Forest Portion) NTPR (NTP #10 dated December 2, 2011) by the CPUC, final design was completed and a modification to the boundary for Helicopter Landing Zone (HLZ) H2-DV is required. Figure 1 (attached [to SCE's variance request]) shows the proposed modification to H2-DV.

Biological Resources

The proposed H2-DV changes include removal of two areas to the north and west, with a portion of the HLZ area moved 150 feet to the south and east. The proposed changes to H2-DV would decrease the overall footprint from 7.44 acres to 4.98 acres.

## CPUC Evaluation of Variance Request

In accordance with the MMCRP, the subject variance request was reviewed by CPUC to confirm that no new impacts or increase in impact severity would result from the requested variance activities. The following discussion summarizes this analysis for biological resources, cultural resources, paleontological resources, noise/sensitive receptors, and other issue areas. A list of mitigation compliance conditions is presented below to define additional information and clarifications regarding mitigation requirements.

**Biological Resources.** The proposed modifications fall within the areas previously surveyed under NTP #10 and include elimination of the small polygon to the north of Tower 1051, elimination of the small polygon to the southwest of the HLZ H2-DV/Tower 1051 site, and subtle changes in the shape and size of the primary HLZ H2-DV polygon. According to SCE's NTPR, the proposed changes to HLZ H2-DV will decrease the overall footprint from 7.44 acres to 4.98 acres, and will result in an overall decrease in temporary impacts to vegetation communities (2.46 acres), a decrease in temporary impacts to Coachella Valley milk-vetch modeled habitat (0.47 acres), a decrease in temporary impacts to desert tortoise modeled habitat (2.45 acres), and a decrease in impacts to jurisdictional waters (0.06 acres).

Based on review of the biological report and field verification, there are no biological resources concerns associated with approval of this variance. All mitigation measures, APMs, and conditions of the Biological Opinion (BO) should be implemented at HLZ H2-DV, as applicable.

**Cultural Resources.** Based on background research and a site visit, no known cultural resources were identified within the vicinity of HLZ H2-DV. In the event of an unanticipated discovery of cultural materials within the proposed HLZ boundary, the find shall be managed in compliance with the following procedures provided in Section 4.4 - Plan of Discovery of Cultural Resources of the approved HPMP as itemized below:

- All work within 200 feet of the discovery will be halted and the onsite Archaeological Field Monitor will evaluate the discovery.
- The Environmental Monitor will notify the Lead Archaeological Monitor, Consultant Project Manager (CPM), Work Package Archaeologist(s) (WPA), or SCE Archaeologist (in that order) immediately.
- Activities within 200 feet of the discovery will not resume until the discovery has been assessed by a member of the Cultural Resources Team.

**Paleontological Resources.** Based on the Paleontological Monitoring and Treatment Plan, submitted to the California Public Utilities Commission on April 20, 2011, the potential to encounter paleontological

resources near the proposed helicopter landing zone (HLZ) H2-DV is low. In addition, ground disturbing activities associated with HLZ H2-DV will not disturb sediment below 2 or 3 feet and therefore are not likely to damage paleontological resources.

**Noise/Sensitive Receptors.** The boundary modification of HLZ H2-DV would have similar noise-generating activities to those that would have occurred within the original boundary. Construction activities, including noise associated with helicopter usage, was addressed in the DPV2 Final EIR/EIS and there are no concerns noted under this variance.

**Other Issue Areas.** No concerns noted under this variance.

### **Mitigation Compliance Conditions of Variance Approval.**

The mitigation compliance conditions presented below shall be met by SCE and its contractors:

1. All applicable project mitigation measures, APMs, conditions of the Biological Opinion, compliance plans, permit conditions and NTP conditions shall be implemented. Some measures have on-going/time-sensitive requirements and shall be implemented prior to and during construction where applicable.
2. Copies of all relevant permits, compliance plans, and this Variance approval shall be available on site for the duration of construction activities.
3. All disturbance areas shall be clearly delineated and marked prior to any ground disturbance associated with the modified disturbance areas.
4. SCE shall provide updated maps showing the new disturbance limits to the CPUC EMs and all monitors in the field prior to construction activities in the revised HLZ H2-DV.
5. In the event of an unanticipated discovery of cultural materials within HLZ H2-DV, the find shall be managed in compliance with the following procedures provided in Section 4.4 - Plan of Discovery of Cultural Resources of the approved HPMP as itemized below:
  - All work within 200 feet of the discovery shall be halted and the onsite Archaeological Field Monitor shall evaluate the discovery.
  - The Environmental Monitor shall notify the Lead Archaeological Monitor, Consultant Project Manager (CPM), Work Package Archaeologist(s) (WPA), or SCE Archaeologist (in that order) immediately.
  - Activities within 200 feet of the discovery shall not resume until the discovery has been assessed by a member of the Cultural Resources Team.
6. The CPUC EM shall be notified immediately of any unanticipated cultural, paleontological, or biological resource discoveries.
7. All crew members shall be Safe Worker and Environmental Awareness Program (SWEAP) trained prior to working on the project. A log shall be maintained on-site with the names of all crew personnel trained. For any crew members with limited English, a translator shall be on-site to ensure understanding of the training program. In place of a translator, the SWEAP training brochure can be provided in Spanish or other languages as appropriate. All participants will receive a hard-hat sticker for ease of compliance verification.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

DPV2 Project

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Sincerely,

*Billie Blanchard*

Billie Blanchard

CPUC Environmental Project Manager

DPV2 Transmission Project

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