

# A. Introduction/Overview

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to inform the public and to meet the needs of local, State, and federal permitting agencies to consider the project proposed by San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E or “the Applicant”). This EIR does not make a recommendation regarding the approval or denial of the project; it is purely informational in content, and will be used by the CPUC in considering whether or not to approve the Proposed Project or an alternative.

On July 12, 2002, SDG&E submitted an application (A.02-07-022) and a Proponent’s Environmental Assessment (PEA) to the CPUC for the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project (SDG&E, 2002). The purpose of this application was to obtain a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN). The project proposed by SDG&E (the “Proposed Project”) is described briefly below, and in detail in Section B of this EIR.

The purpose of the EIR is to evaluate the environmental impacts that would be expected to result from construction and operation of SDG&E’s Proposed Project, and to provide recommended mitigation measures that, if adopted, would avoid or minimize the significant environmental impacts identified. In accordance with CEQA requirements, this EIR identifies alternatives to the Proposed Project that could avoid or minimize significant environmental impacts associated with the project as proposed by SDG&E (including the No Project Alternative), and evaluates the environmental impacts associated with these alternatives. Based on this environmental impact assessment, as well as the relative sensitivities of impacts in the study region, this EIR in Section E determines the Environmentally Superior Alternative as required by CEQA.

The content of this EIR reflects input by government officials, agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and concerned members of the public during the EIR scoping period following the CPUC’s publication of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR (September 5, 2003). During this comment period, several public involvement activities were completed: public distribution of the NOP and a scoping meeting notice, establishment of an Internet web page and a telephone hotline, two public scoping meetings, and meetings with a number of affected local jurisdictions (see details in Section H). Consultation with agencies also continued after the formal scoping period ended.

This section is organized as follows:

- Section A.1 briefly describes the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project as proposed by SDG&E.
- Section A.2 explains the area’s electric system and presents information related to the need for the Proposed Project.
- Section A.3 discusses the San Diego fires of October and November 2003.
- Section A.4 describes agency use of the EIR, and includes a brief description of the CPUC process for consideration of project approval.
- Section A.5 presents a Reader’s Guide to this EIR, explaining how it is organized.

## **A.1 History and Overview of Proposed Project**

As described above, SDG&E submitted an application and a PEA to the CPUC on July 12, 2002, to obtain a CPCN for the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project. As proposed by SDG&E, the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project includes the following major components:

1. Installation of a 35-mile, single-circuit 230 kV transmission circuit between Miguel Substation and Mission Substation, including replacement or modification of existing 138 kV steel lattice tower structures between Miguel Substation and Fanita Junction, as well as circuit reconductoring between Fanita Junction and the Mission Substation;
2. Relocation of the existing 138 kV and 69 kV circuits onto a new pole alignment within the existing SDG&E right-of-way between Miguel Substation and Fanita Junction; and
3. Modifications to both Miguel and Mission Substations to accommodate the new 230 kV transmission line.

On December 12, 2003, SDG&E filed an Addendum with the CPUC to modify its application to add a second 230 kV circuit in the vacant position on steel lattice and pole structures between Miguel Substation and Fanita Junction. This new circuit would eventually connect the Miguel Substation with the Sycamore Substation, which is located to the north of Fanita Junction on Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar property. Section B.1.2 of this EIR describes this proposed partial second circuit.

Subsequent to filing the Addendum, on December 19, 2003, SDG&E filed a retraction of the second 230 kV circuit proposal. Administrative Law Judge Peter Allen filed the formal retraction on December 29, 2003. However, because of its direct connection with the Proposed Project and the likelihood of this project being filed in the future, the construction and operation of this future 230 kV circuit is evaluated in this EIR for CEQA purposes.

## **A.2 Project Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project is to reduce existing transmission constraints on SDG&E's electrical system consistent with the objectives of Assembly Bill 970 (AB 970). These constraints are expected to increase as new merchant generators under construction or proposed for construction become interconnected with the existing transmission system in the San Diego Region. The main interconnection constraints lie south and east of SDG&E's Miguel Substation and include generators located in Arizona, as well as in Mexico near the California border.

The Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project is intended to provide customers of SDG&E and the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) with benefits, including system reliability and increased access to remote sources of generation, which will enhance competition among energy suppliers. Access to new generation is needed to provide substantial reliability benefits to SDG&E's service territory and improve the regional transmission infrastructure, while at the same time adding to statewide capacity requirements and to helping to prevent future electric energy resource deficiencies, load curtailments, and energy price spikes.

## A.2.1 Statement of Objectives

CEQA Guidelines (Section 15126.6.a) require that project objectives be defined in an EIR in order that alternatives to the Proposed Project can be defined in a manner that meets most of the objectives. SDG&E lists the following basic objectives of the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project:

1. **Reduce Transmission Constraints on SDG&E's Electric System.** The first project objective is to reduce constraints on SDG&E's existing electrical transmission system in accordance with AB 970. AB 970 directed the CPUC to "undertake and identify those actions necessary to reduce or remove constraints on the State's existing electrical transmission and distribution system . . . ." Reducing system constraints in SDG&E's service territory would allow electric generation to meet demand by increasing statewide and regional access to new merchant generation capacity. In addition, system congestion costs would be reduced, and SDG&E and CAISO consumers would realize potentially significant economic benefits. On February 27, 2003, the CPUC made a finding of need for the Proposed Project citing these benefits (see Decision D.03-02-069 in docket No. I.00-11-001) (CPUC, 2003).
2. **Provide Reliability Benefits and Operational Flexibility for SDG&E's Service Territory.** The second project objective is to improve the existing SDG&E transmission system infrastructure and to ensure that the electric system can safely and reliably serve the SDG&E service territory. The project has the potential to prevent overloads on various 138 kV and 69 kV circuits in the SDG&E service territory, and eliminate various Remedial Action Schemes (RAS) that limit the ability of Miguel Substation to accept and transfer power from new generation sources into the existing transmission system. Elimination of existing RAS would allow for greater system reliability, greater operational flexibility, and more frequent maintenance of existing transmission facilities.
3. **Improve Regional Transmission System Infrastructure.** The third project objective is to improve regional transmission system infrastructure in order to ensure that the electric system better provide for delivery of economic energy supplies and reliability for the State of California, and the WECC area. Infrastructure improvements would allow the reliable transfer of power from new merchant generating facilities south and east of Miguel Substation, increasing local, statewide, and regional access to additional generating capacity and improving the overall reliability of the State's integrated transmission grid.

## A.2.2 Regulatory Background and Project History

In September 2000, California passed AB 970 to address some of the key factors underlying the emergence of California's energy crisis. Through AB 970, the California Legislature ordered the CPUC to identify and undertake those actions necessary to reduce or remove constraints on the State's existing electrical transmission and distribution system. In response to AB 970, the CPUC investigated California's electric transmission and distribution constraints (Docket No. I.00-11-001 of the AB 970 proceeding) (CPUC, 2000). The results of this investigation demonstrated that California's electric system "has shown increasing signs of strain and . . . vulnerability to market power. . ." and noted various instances when the State faced actual and potential disruptions to electric supply.

During Phase 2 of the AB 970 proceedings, SDG&E was directed by the CPUC to evaluate the net economic benefit (benefit minus cost) to ratepayers of two projects (one of which is the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project) that would relieve two potential in-state transmission constraints on SDG&E's system in Southern California. These constraints included: (1) constraints west of SDG&E's Miguel Substation and (2) constraints at SDG&E's Imperial Valley Substation. The utilities and interested parties were required to present testimony on the potential for generation projects coming online that would

trigger constraints or congestion in these areas, the costs of alternatives to relieve the constraints as well as the allocation of benefits between ratepayers and project developers (CPUC, 2001).

SDG&E responded to the above directives in its September 2001 testimony filed in the CPUC's AB 970 proceedings. This testimony included an economic study performed by an independent consultant demonstrating that the two projects identified in the CPUC ruling would reduce transmission constraints on the SDG&E system, enabling additional new generation in California and Mexico to serve load in the western United States and potentially produce significant customer benefits. Results of SDG&E's economic assessment were supported by the Border Generation Group (BGG), a group of generators with projects in the border area, and by the CPUC's Office of Ratepayer Advocates (ORA), and culminated with a set of milestones for this project and the BGG.

In a February 27, 2003, Decision D.03-02-069, the CPUC found that the Miguel-Mission and Imperial Valley Projects are needed and in the public interest (CPUC, 2003). CPUC found that the Imperial Valley Project does not require the issuance of a Permit to Construct or CPCN under requirements of General Order (GO) 131-D. However, CPUC concluded that the CPCN process does apply to the Miguel-Mission Project because this project would increase the existing 138 kV/69 kV transmission lines to 230 kV capacity. This EIR addresses the potential environmental impacts associated with SDG&E's CPCN Application for the Miguel-Mission Project.

### **A.3 San Diego Wildfires of 2003**

On September 5, 2003, the CPUC issued the Notice of Preparation stating that an EIR was being prepared for the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project. Under CEQA, the NOP establishes the date used in establishing the baseline conditions of a Proposed Project. Subsequent to the NOP's release, a number of large wildfires denuded portions of the existing Miguel-Mission ROW, destroying both the vegetation and infrastructure within the project area. This section summarizes the effects the San Diego wildfires had on the existing infrastructure and baseline conditions. Figure A-1 provides an overview of the fire boundaries in comparison to the Proposed Project ROW.

The effect of the wildfire on the Proposed Project is addressed in this EIR for those issue areas that may be affected by the change in existing conditions (e.g., Water Resources, Visual Resources, Biology). Refer to Section D, Environmental Analysis, for further discussion of these issue areas.

**Summary of the San Diego Wildfires.** During late October and early November 2003, large wildfires burned record acreages in California. In southern California, major contributing factors in the outbreak of large wildfires were dry conditions, Santa Ana winds, and large amounts of available fuel (e.g., dead and dormant vegetation). Within San Diego County, three fires, the Paradise, Otay, and Cedar Fires, broke out during the week of October 26, 2003. The Paradise Fire was located in the Valley Center area to the east-northeast of the City of Escondido and resulted in 24 injuries and two deaths and destroyed 413 structures and 406 vehicles (SBFIJIC, 2003). The Paradise Fire destroyed approximately 56,700 acres overall. The Otay Fire burned more than 46,000 acres in the area around the City of Otay Mesa. The Cedar Fire started on October 25, 2003, in Cleveland National Forest and is considered the largest fire in California history, burning over 273,000 acres. The Cedar Fire contributed to 113 injuries and 14 deaths and damaged or destroyed over 2,800 homes, commercial properties, and other structures (SBFIJIC, 2003). The Cedar Fire impacted areas north of Interstate 8 in the Laguna Mountain and Pine Valley areas and included northern and eastern parts of the Proposed Project. In total, the wildfires burned 1,143 acres of 2,550 total acres within the project survey area.

Figure A-1. Burned Areas Along Miguel-Mission ROW

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**Effects of the Cedar Fire in the Miguel-Mission ROW.** Within SDG&E territory, more than 12 substations and 17 high voltage transmission lines were damaged or destroyed by the San Diego County wildfires. A total of 3,000 power poles were damaged in SDG&E’s transmission and distribution system, resulting in loss of service to over 108,000 customers and the need to restring over 1.5 million feet of conductor (SDG&E, 2003).

Within the ROW of the Proposed Project, the Cedar Fire caused no damage to substations or transformers. As shown in Figure A-1, the majority of the damage occurred between the Elliot and Los Coches Substations in and around the City of Santee, with additional damage south of Los Coches Substation and east of the City of El Cajon.

Table A-1 defines the extent of SDG&E system damage within the Proposed Project area. A total of 57 single- and two-pole structures were damaged and required replacement. There were two incidents of poles falling onto steel lattice towers, damaging portions of the towers. These steel towers are not in need of immediate attention, but they will need to be repaired or replaced as routine maintenance items.

**Table A-1. Damaged Poles within the Miguel-Mission ROW**

Transmission Line	Location	Number and Type
TL 638	Los Coches to Santee	2 single-pole structures
TL 636/TL 639	Elliot to Santee / Sycamore to Elliot	32 double-circuit single-pole structures
TL 636	Elliot to Santee	5 single-pole structures 4 two-pole structures
TL 6914	Los Coches to Loveland	12 single-pole structures 1 two-pole structure
TL 632	Granite Tap to Los Coches	1 single-pole structure

Source: SDG&E, 2003.

Note: There were no damaged poles associated with TL 678 (Los Coches to Alpine) located within the Miguel-Mission ROW.

## A.4 Agency Use of This Document

### A.4.1 CPUC Process

Pursuant to Article XII of the Constitution of the State of California, the CPUC oversees the regulation of investor-owned public utilities, including SDG&E. The CPUC is also the lead State agency ensuring compliance of the SDG&E’s proposed Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project with CEQA. The CPUC has directed the preparation of this EIR, which will ultimately be used by the CPUC, in conjunction with other information developed in the CPUC’s formal record, to act on SDG&E’s application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for construction and operation of the Proposed Project. Under CEQA requirements, the CPUC will determine the adequacy of the Final EIR and, if adequate, will certify the document as complying with CEQA. If the CPUC approves a project with significant and unmitigable impacts, it must state why in a “Statement of Overriding Considerations,” which would be included in the Commission’s decision on the application.

The CPUC has assigned Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Kim Malcolm to oversee the proceeding on the Proposed Project, and Commissioner Loretta Lynch is the Assigned Commissioner for the CPCN application. The ALJ, in accordance with the Scoping Memo, is expected to hold Evidentiary Hearings on the CPCN application in mid-2004 and will issue a Proposed Decision on the project in late 2004. The ALJ’s Decision, and the Evidentiary Hearings, will cover issues of project cost and other considerations. Project need was already established on February 27, 2003 (See Decision 03-02-069 in docket No. I.00-11-001 in which the Proposed Project was identified as an action necessary to reduce or remove constraints on the state’s existing electrical transmission and distribution system, thereby reducing costs to SDG&E ratepayers as new generation becomes operational in the California-Mexico border region and Mexico for export to California).

## **A.4.2 Other Agencies**

Several other State agencies will rely on information in this EIR to inform them in their decision over issuance of specific permits related to project construction or operation (refer to Table A-2). In addition to the CPUC, State agencies such as the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Department of Fish and Game, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Native American Heritage Commission would be involved in reviewing and/or approving the project. On the federal level, agencies with potential reviewing and/or permitting authority include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Advisory Council on Historic

**Table A-2. Permits Required for the Miguel-Mission Project**

<b>Permits</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Jurisdiction/Purpose</b>
<b>Federal Agencies</b>		
Nationwide or Individual Permit (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act)	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Waters of the United States, including wetlands
Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Construction across Navigable Waters
Section 7 consultation (through U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' review process)	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Consultation on federally listed species; incidental take authorization (if required)
Review of Committee for Land and Airspace Management Policy (CLAMP) to cross Marine Corps Air Station Miramar	Naval Engineering Command	Construction, operation, and maintenance on land under Marine Corps management
Lift Plan Permit	Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)	Helicopter Construction Plans
<b>State Agencies</b>		
Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity	CPUC	Overall Project approval and CEQA review
National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System – General Construction Stormwater Permit	California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), San Diego Region	This permit applies to all construction Projects that disturb more than 5 acres
Section 401 Water Quality Certification (or waiver thereof)	RWQCB	Requests RWQCB's certification that the project is consistent with State water quality standards
Road Closures	Caltrans	I-15, I-8, SR 52, SR 67, and SR 94 closures during sky-crane material overflights
Endangered Species consultation	California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG)	Consultation on State-listed species; incidental take authorization (if required)
Section 1601 Streambed Alteration Agreement	CDFG	Alteration of the natural state of any stream
Consultation (through CEQA review process)	State Historic Preservation Officer	Cultural resources management (if appropriate)
<b>Local Agencies</b>		
Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Site Activity Permit	San Diego County	For biological impacts to sensitive habitats
Roadway Encroachment and Closure Permit	San Diego County	Construction, operation, and maintenance within roadway right-of-ways
Roadway Encroachment and Closure Permit	City of Santee, City of San Diego	Construction, operation, and maintenance within roadway right-of-ways
Grading and Building Permits	City of Santee, City of San Diego	Permission to conduct grading and building activities
Trail Closures/Construction	San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation	Permission to implement construction within DPR lands



Preservation, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The Marine Corps Air Station at Miramar will also review the project and conform to the requirements of the National Environmental Quality Act (NEPA) because the route will pass through lands under its jurisdiction.

The CPUC's authority does not preempt special districts, other State agencies, or the federal government. No local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required, since the CPUC has preemptive jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of SDG&E facilities in California. However, SDG&E would still be required to obtain all ministerial building and encroachment permits from local jurisdictions. In addition, the CPUC's General Order 131-D requires SDG&E to comply with local building, design, and safety standards to the greatest degree feasible to minimize project conflicts with local conditions.

SDG&E's agency consultation is ongoing with the CPUC, the USFWS, the CDFG, and others, as necessary. In addition, SDG&E has conducted meetings with key community groups and applicable planning agencies as described in Section 9 and Appendix E of SDG&E's Proponent's Environmental Assessment.

## A.5 Reader's Guide to This EIR

### A.5.1 Incorporation by Reference

SDG&E's Proponent's Environmental Assessment (submitted as part of its Application A.02-07-022 for the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project) contains certain information that is incorporated by reference in some sections of this EIR. This document is available for public review during normal business hours at the CPUC's Central Files (505 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco), in local libraries (see Section H), and also via the Internet at:

[http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/aspen/miguel\\_mission/toc-pea.htm](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/aspen/miguel_mission/toc-pea.htm)

### A.5.2 EIR Organization

This EIR is organized as follows:

**Executive Summary.** A summary description of the Proposed Project, the alternatives, their respective environmental impacts and the Environmentally Superior Alternative.

**Impact Summary Tables.** A tabulation of the impacts and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and alternatives.

**Section A (Introduction/Overview).** A discussion of the background, purpose and need for the project, briefly describing the proposed Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project, and outlining the public agency use of the EIR.

**Section B (Project Description).** Detailed description of the proposed Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project.

**Section C (Alternatives Process and Description).** Summarized from Appendix 2, description of the alternatives evaluation process, description of alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis and the rationale therefor, and description of the alternatives analyzed in Section D.

**Section D (Environmental Analysis).** A comprehensive analysis and assessment of impacts and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and several alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. This section is divided into main sections for each environmental issue area (e.g., Air Quality, Biological Resources) that contain the environmental settings and impacts of the Proposed Project and each alternative. At the end of each issue area analysis, a Mitigation Monitoring table is provided.

**Section E (Comparison of Alternatives).** Identification of the CEQA Environmentally Superior Alternative and a discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the Proposed Project and alternatives that were evaluated.

**Section F (Additional CEQA Considerations).** A discussion of growth-inducing impacts, irreversible environmental changes, and cumulative impacts.

**Section G (Proposed Mitigation Monitoring, Compliance, and Reporting Plan).** A discussion of the CPUC's mitigation monitoring program requirements for the project as approved by the CPUC.

**Section H (Public Participation).** A brief description of the public participation program for this EIR.

**Section I (Report Preparation).** List of preparers of the EIR and contacts with public agencies.

**Appendices:**

1. Proposed Project Aerial Photographs
2. Alternatives Screening Report
3. Biological Resources Technical Report
4. Alternative Route Feasibility Report
5. EMF Data
6. Native American Consultation

## **A.6 References**

CPUC (California Public Utilities Commission). 2000. Order Instituting Investigation into Assembly Bill 970 Regarding the Identification of Electric Transmission and Distribution Constraints, Actions to Resolve Those Constraints, and Related Matters Affecting the Reliability of Electric Supply. November 2.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2001. CPUC Administrative Law Judge Ruling, Docket No. I.00-11001. July 19.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2003. Order Instituting Investigation into Implementation of Assembly Bill 970 Regarding the Identification of Electric Transmission and Distribution Constraints, Actions to Resolve Those Constraints, and Related Matters Affecting the Reliability of Electric Supply (Decision D.03-02-069). February 27.

SBFJIC (San Bernardino Fire Information Joint Information Center). 2003. "California Wildfire Information: Cedar Fire." <http://www.esri.com/jicfire/fireinfo/cedarfire.html>. Accessed November 21.

SDG&E (San Diego Gas and Electric Company). 2003. Response to CPUC Data Request #4 dated November 20.

SDG&E. 2002. Proponent's Environmental Assessment for the Miguel-Mission 230 kV #2 Project. Submitted to the California Public Utilities Commission. July.