

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON COMPANY (U-338-E)'S APPLICATION NO. A.98-10-05 VALLEY-AULD POWER LINE PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the California Public Utilities Commission's (Commission) General Order 131-D, Southern California Edison (SCE) has filed an application for a Permit to Construct Electrical Facilities with Voltages Between 50kV and 200kV (A.98-10-05) with the Commission. SCE requests authority to: 1) construct a new 115 kV power line connection between the Auld Substation and the Moraga Substation; 2) remove the Pauba tap on the Auld-Moraga-Pauba line; and 3) add an additional 115 kV line and new poles all within an unincorporated area in southwestern Riverside County, near the cities of Perris, Hemet, and Murrieta, California. Under the Commission's General Order 131-D, approval of this project must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in order to assess the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. Based on this assessment from the Initial Study, this Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Valley 115 kV system provides electrical service to approximately one half million residents in unincorporated Riverside County. SCE has indicated that due to high growth in southwestern Riverside County service area, demand on the existing Valley 115 kV system has increased to a point where service to customers may be compromised during peak use because of system overload. To address this increasing problem, SCE proposes to improve system voltages and to expand transmission capacity. The proposed project will be constructed in two phases.

Phase 1 Auld-Moraga 115 kV Line

Phase 1 of the Valley-Auld Power Line Project consists of constructing a 0.9-mile 115 kV line on 30 wood and three tubular steel poles. This new line will extend from the Auld Substation south along the west side of Liberty Road until it connects with the existing Auld-Moraga-Pauba 115 kV line at Winchester Road.

The new 115 kV line will be constructed by overbuilding the existing Garboni 12 kV line (located on Briggs Road from Garboni Road south to Benton) and the Archie 33 kV line (located near the Auld substation at Los Alamos south to Winchester). The 12, 33, and new 115 kV lines will be placed on new wood poles with polymer post type insulators in a triangle configuration. A steel tubular pole will be placed at the end of the 115 kV line with a third steel pole placed for line rearrangement. The old poles will then be removed and disposed of off-site. As a condition of granting the easement from the property owner of the area just south of Liberty Road, existing SCE sub-transmission and distribution facilities currently crossing the northeastern portion of the property will be removed.

Phase 2 Valley-Pauba 115 kV Line

Phase 2 consists of constructing approximately 10.6 miles of new 115 kV line using 243 wood poles and 13 steel tubular poles from the Valley Substation (at the corner of Menifee Road and McLaughlin Road in the northwest portion of the project site) south to a tap point in the southern portion of the project site at the corner of Liberty Road and Los Alamos Road to connect to the existing Pauba 115 kV power line.

A 1.1-mile segment beginning at the Valley Substation would be constructed and would cross Menifee Road at McLaughlin Road then continue east along the south side of McLaughlin Road until it reaches the east side of Briggs Road. New lines and poles would be placed in the western one-third of this route that contains no existing facilities. On the remaining two-thirds of the route, existing poles carrying an idle 33 kV line and an active 12 kV line will be removed and the two existing lines will be placed on new poles with the new 115 kV line. A total of 20 wood poles and 2 steel tubular poles would be placed to complete this segment.

From there a new single-circuit 115 kV line would be constructed from the east side of Briggs Road south to the corner of Matthews Road and McLaughlin Road, for a total distance of 0.9 mile. Fifteen wood poles and one steel tubular pole would be placed to complete this segment.

From the corner of Mathews Road and McLaughlin Road to the existing Pauba 115 kV line at the corner of Los Alamos Road and Liberty Road (8.6 miles) the existing single circuit 115 kV line would be switched to a double-circuit kV line and all existing power lines would be replaced. New poles would be installed and all existing poles would be removed. A total of 208 wood poles and 10 steel tubular poles are required to complete this segment.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The Initial Study was prepared to identify the potential effects on the environment from the construction and operation of the proposed project and to evaluate the significance of these effects. The Initial Study was based on information presented in SCE's Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) (October 8, 1998) and the Supplement to the PEA (December 9, 1998) filed in its application for a permit from the California Public Utilities Commission, pursuant to CPUC General Order 131-D. Within the PEA and Supplement, mitigation measures addressing potentially significant impacts were proposed by the Applicant, and have been incorporated into the project description.

Based on the Initial Study, the project as proposed would have less-than-significant effects or no impacts in the areas of:

- Agricultural Resources
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Utilities / Service Systems
- Land Use / Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Population / Housing

However, the environmental assessment presented in the Initial Study identifies a number of environmental impacts that, although not potentially significant, deserve some mitigation effort. These are:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Transportation / Traffic
- Geology / Soils
- Noise
- Hydrology / Water Quality
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials

Measures have been formulated to effectively mitigate the environmental impacts as described in the Initial Study. Implementation of these mitigation measures can avoid the impacts or reduce them to a less-than-significant level. The mitigation measures, which SCE has incorporated into the overall project plan, are described below.

Aesthetics

Impact: Presence of poles along the power line route could create undesirable visual conditions as the area continues to convert from agricultural use to suburban development over time.

Mitigation Measure: As development occurs in the area, SCE will provide information to and work with developers and roadway designers to integrate subtransmission lines into landscape.

Air Quality

Impact: Construction activities may adversely affect air quality by the release of emissions from internal combustion engines on construction equipment and vehicles or from increased fugitive dust caused by construction activities or construction vehicles traveling on unpaved roads.

Mitigation Measure: Exhaust emissions from construction vehicles and increased fugitive dust shall be minimized.

This mitigation measure will be achieved by (i) limiting the time construction machinery are allowed to idle; (ii) minimizing the number of vehicles used during construction; (iii) minimizing the speed of vehicles; and (iv) by ensuring all construction personnel are briefed on these measures.

Biological Resources

Impact: Construction may require the disturbance of coastal sage scrub or riparian vegetation.

Mitigation Measure: SCE will reduce impacts to habitat by avoid grading within the coastal sage scrub or near riparian habitat to the greatest extent possible.

Impact: Construction vehicles and activities may damage or destroy up to 6,600 square feet of coastal sage scrub and up to 30 square feet of riparian habitat.

Mitigation Measure: SCE will contribute to the Skinner Lake Preserve by buying one acre of credit to cover impacts to coastal sage scrub habitat, as requested and approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. SCE will prepare a Riparian Habitat Restoration Plan in conjunction with the Section 1601 Streambed Alteration Agreement for approval by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Impact: California gnatcatchers (a Federally-listed Threatened species) and Stephens' kangaroo rat (a Federally-listed Endangered and State-listed Threatened species) occupy coastal sage scrub areas that occur in the project area. While project construction will not result in any incidental take of the California gnatcatcher, incidental take of the Stephens' kangaroo rat is possible.

Mitigation Measure: The project can be constructed without incidental take of listed species, pursuant to recommendations by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS). To mitigate and/or avoid any potential impacts, SCE will: 1) contribute to the Stephens' kangaroo rat Habitat Conservation Fund, 2) mark buffer areas around any known California gnatcatcher nests, and 3) not undertake construction activities in California gnatcatcher nesting areas between March 1 and August 15.

Impact: Construction within the wash on Segment C1 could damage or destroy a population of San Jacinto crowscale, a Federally-listed Endangered species.

Mitigation Measure: SCE will avoid the population of San Jacinto crowscale within the wash on Segment C-1.

Impact: Pole-setting along Segment C1 could damage or destroy populations of smooth tarweed, a former Federal candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act that is now considered a Federal Species of Concern and a sensitive plant by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS 1B).

Mitigation Measure: SCE shall avoid populations of smooth tarweed along Segment C-1.

Impact: The San Diego horned lizard, the orange-throated whiptail, and the western spadefoot toad are all wildlife Species of Special Concern (SCS) to the CDFG and are either known to occur within the coastal sage scrub habitat on Segments D1 and C1 or have suitable habitat within these segments of the project. With the loss of the scrub, there is a potential for the loss of some individuals of these species.

Mitigation Measure: SCE shall establish measures to avoid impacts to the San Diego horned lizard, the orange-throated whiptail, and the western spadefoot toad in SCE's Environmental Protection Plan (EPP).

Impact: Some potential exists for the loss of raptors through electrocution when perching or nesting on the power lines.

Mitigation Measure: Project design shall incorporate measures to avoid impacts to raptors.

Cultural Resources

Impact: As part of the easement agreement with the property owner, the existing subtransmission line and poles will be removed from a portion of Segment D1. This falls within the boundaries of a large recorded prehistoric archaeological site in the vicinity of Warm Springs Creek. There is an Archaeological Sensitive Area on the eastern side of Segment D1 between Winchester Road and Briggs Road. Segment B crosses an area of Archaeological Sensitivity located near the corner of Briggs Road and Matthews Road. Segment C1 crosses through an extensive district of archaeological and historical resources located on and around the hills located between Simpson Road and Newport Road. In addition, Segment C1 passes near historic Leon Mine located just north of Scott Road. Construction equipment, vehicles, and pole setting could damage artifacts and archaeological sites. As a result, there is potential for significant impacts to these sensitive areas.

Mitigation Measure: SCE will reduce potential impacts to Archaeologically Sensitive Areas by carefully siting transmission poles and by using rubber tired vehicles at all times during construction.

Impact: Fossil-bearing Pleistocene alluvium deposits may be encountered and damaged during pole drilling activities on Segment C1 north of Holland Road.

Mitigation Measure: Paleontological sites shall be protected through the implementation of a construction monitoring plan.

Geology and Soils

Impact: Potential impacts to soils could occur if poles are placed in areas of high erosion or areas subject to scouring or heavy flooding.

Mitigation Measure: To minimize the potential impact to native soils, SCE shall implement soil management measures during construction.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Impact: Old wooden poles that are replaced but not properly disposed could result in contamination of topsoil due to the leaching of creosote used on poles as a wood preservative.

Mitigation Measure: Disposal of debris and old poles will be limited to the construction phase and these items will be recycled by SCE.

Impact: During and after construction, energized components of the project could cause a fire resulting from a spark or other kind of accidental charge release.

Mitigation Measure: SCE shall maintain a cleared buffer zone around energized components of the power line.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Impact: Placing poles in channels or creeks or on the banks of channels or creeks could impact water quality by altering stream flow, changing scour characteristics, and increasing sedimentation.

Mitigation Measure: SCE shall obtain a Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Game pursuant to Section 1601 of the California Fish and Game Code prior to any construction within the unnamed Warm Springs Creek tributary along the west side of Briggs Road. If required, SCE shall obtain a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to any construction within the unnamed Warm Springs Creek tributary along the west side of Briggs Road. SCE shall comply with all conditions stipulated in the required permits.

Noise

Impact: Existing noise levels will increase temporarily during construction due to the operation of construction equipment, potentially disturbing residents in the immediate area.

Mitigation Measure: SCE shall minimize noise through careful work scheduling and by having properly functioning mufflers on construction vehicles

Transportation and Traffic

Impact: Construction activities could obstruct traffic blocked on some roads by construction vehicles.

Mitigation Measure: SCE shall minimize obstruction of traffic caused by construction activities. Cones and signs shall be used to warn motorists of the construction activities. Flagmen will be utilized as necessary to control traffic in the construction zone.

A Mitigation Implementation and Monitoring Plan has been prepared to ensure that the mitigation measures are properly implemented. The plan describes specific actions required to implement each mitigation measure, including information on responsibility for implementation of the measures, the timing of implementation, and monitoring requirements.

Based on the analysis of Initial Study and the mitigation measures identified therein and incorporated into the project, the Commission finds that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment.

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California Public Utilities Commission

Date