

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON CONTROL-SILVER PEAK PROJECT

DRAFT BI-STATE SAGE-GROUSE ON THE INYO NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

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1. Introduction

The proposed Control–Silver Peak Project (CSP Project or Project) is located in unincorporated Inyo County and unincorporated Mono County (Figure 1). The proposed CSP Project includes replacing existing facilities (generally wood poles) and installing new facilities along two existing subtransmission circuits operated at 55 kilovolts (kV). The existing subtransmission facilities that would be rebuilt or replaced under the CSP Project are located on or span private and public lands, including lands owned, administered, or managed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the United States Forest Service (USFS).

The purpose of this Bi-State Sage-grouse Management Plan (BSSGMP or Plan) is to specify the Southern California Edison (SCE) strategy and procedures to comply with applicable federal and state regulations and to identify specific measures and process to be employed if the bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of the sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), herein referred to as sage-grouse, are encountered during construction of the CSP Project; the Plan also addresses design considerations and operations and maintenance activities. The relevant Project-specific measures are included herein as they are committed to in SCE’s Applicant Proposed Measures (APMs) outlined in the Plan of Development (POD; SCE 2023). This Plan tiers off the Nesting Bird Management Plan (NBMP) developed for the CSP Project and provides specific measures for sage-grouse.

1.1. Project Overview

SCE proposes to rebuild some portions of two existing subtransmission lines and to replace or modify existing subtransmission structures along other portions of these existing subtransmission lines. The components of the CSP Project that would be constructed within the formerly-proposed sage-grouse critical habitat (which is used here as a proxy for suitable sage-grouse habitat, and hereafter referred to as suitable sage-grouse habitat) are presented in the following sections. Within suitable sage-grouse habitat, the two existing parallel subtransmission pole lines would be removed and a single subtransmission pole line would be installed; this would result in the permanent removal of approximately one-half of the poles present in suitable sage-grouse habitat (approximately 513 existing poles would be removed, and approximately 260 new poles would be installed).

1.1.1. Subtransmission

The CSP Project would rebuild existing 55 kV subtransmission circuit infrastructure in an approximately 11-mile-long corridor in suitable sage-grouse habitat by:

- Removing existing subtransmission wood poles and wood pole H-frames, and replacing them with TSPs and wood pole-equivalents.
- Removing existing conductor and installing new Aluminum Conductor Composite Core (ACCC) or Aluminum Conductor Steel Reinforced (ACSR) subtransmission conductor on replacement structures.
- Installing optical ground wire (OPGW), All-Dielectric Self-Supporting (ADSS) fiber optic cable, and OHGW for system protection.

1.1.2. Substations

The CSP Project would include the following substation-related work at a substation located within suitable sage-grouse habitat:

- Disconnect existing conductor from existing positions at the White Mountain Substation and connect new conductor to existing positions.
- Install new OPGW and OHGW and make minor modifications to the existing terminal racks at White Mountain substation to accommodate the new OPGW and OHGW.
- Update relay settings at Control, Deep Springs, White Mountain, and Zack substations.

2. Species Background and Biology

The r sage-grouse is a large, chunky grouse (length 28 inches weight 6.3 pounds, wingspan 38 inches) with a long-pointed tail, dark coloration, and a pale breast and black belly (Sibley 2003). The current range of the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment (DPS) includes the White Mountains of northern Inyo County, where the elevation range extends from 3,500 to 12,000 feet above mean sea level (Shuford et al. 2008).

Sage-grouse use several types of sagebrush habitat seasonally. They typically nest in dense stands of big sagebrush, as well as rubber rabbitbrush, black greasewood, and grassy areas. Sage-grouse breed in traditional display sites called leks (Patterson 1952). Males will mate with multiple females who will then nest, incubate, and brood young on their own. After breeding, females will typically move up to 6.2 kilometers (3.85 miles) from the lek to nest. Lekking and nesting begin around March to early June, depending on elevation and other environmental factors (Schroeder et al. 1999).

Nesting occurs in big sagebrush with thick vegetative cover. Grass height and cover are important factors in nest site selection (Kolada et al. 2009). Sage-grouse are ground nesters and females lay a clutch of six to nine eggs from mid-March to mid-May depending on weather conditions. Nests are scraped into soft soils and typically lined with leaves, grasses, small twigs, and feathers. They are bowl-shaped and typically approximately 8 inches across and 2 to 4 inches deep. Clutch size can include up to 10 eggs with an average clutch size of 7 (Schroeder et al. 1999). Incubation occurs for 27 days on average.

Sage-grouse chicks are precocial, and typically able to forage for themselves upon hatching but are dependent on their mother for thermoregulation during the first few weeks of life. They are typically able to weakly fly within 10 days and strongly fly within 5 weeks.

2.1.1. Summary of Previous Surveys and Data

No sage-grouse were observed within the Project area during the surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018. However, CDFW data indicates the presence of this species along the CSP Project alignment in the central portion of Segment 3 within the Inyo National Forest: 278 individual telemetry points were reported within 1,640 feet (500 meters) of the CSP Project alignment, including 5 adults and 273 juveniles telemetry locations, with two juveniles within 164 feet (50 meters) of the CSP Project alignment.

Known occupied habitat for the Bi-state sage-grouse along the CSP Project alignment is shown on Figure 2. Habitat for this species occurs within the CSP Project alignment generally within the big sagebrush, rubber rabbitbrush, black greasewood, and grass vegetation types. (Figure 3). Potentially suitable nesting habitat is present within the alignment where dense stands of mountain big sagebrush scrub and rubber rabbitbrush scrub occur in Silver Canyon and Wyman Canyon. Sage-grouse are likely to occur within the Project alignment at the crest of the White Mountains and in portions of Wyman Canyon. The presence of juvenile and yearling sage-grouse within 164 feet of the alignment suggests the potential for breeding nearby. One lek in this dataset was reported near Bucks Peak approximately 3 miles north of the CSP Project alignment; no other leks were reported within 3 miles of the CSP Project alignment.

3. Compliance Framework

The Sage-grouse is a CDFW Species of Special Concern and USFS Sensitive species. The Project occurs within the known range for the Bi-State DPS, known as the Bi-State sage-grouse (BSSG), which encompasses most of Mono County and portions of Inyo and Alpine counties in California, as well as portions of Carson City, Lyon, Mineral, Esmeralda, and Douglas counties in Nevada. This DPS is proposed for listing as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. The CSP Project falls within proposed critical habitat for BSSG in the White Mountain Population Management Unit (Bi-State Technical Advisory Committee Nevada and California 2012) (Figure 4). Currently, BSSG is considered a Species of Conservation Concern by the Inyo National Forest and is protected by the following regulations.

3.1. Federal Endangered Species Act

The Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) regulates actions that may result in the “take” of a species or its habitat listed as threatened or endangered or is a candidate for listing. The FESA defines take as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.

3.2. California Fish and Game Code Sections 3503 – Birds.

These CFGC sections protect all birds, as well as their eggs and nests, for species that are not already listed as fully protected and that occur naturally within the state. Section 3503 of the CFGC stipulate the following regarding eggs and nests: it is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird, except as otherwise provided by CFGC or any regulation made pursuant thereto

4. Compliance Approach

SCE’s approach to BSSG protection is to avoid impacts to BSSG habitat to the extent feasible, and to implement avoidance and minimization measures that include surveys and compliance monitoring by biologists experienced with BSSG and avian monitoring as described below. In line with the goals of the Inyo National Forest, this Compliance Approach results in a no net loss of BSSG habitat.

4.1. Qualified Personnel

Preconstruction clearance surveys, focused species surveys, and monitoring during construction will be conducted by qualified personnel as described below and in Section 2.1.1 of the CSP Project NBMP.a

- **Lead Avian Biologist:** As described in the CSP Project NBMP, the Lead Avian Biologist will be responsible for evaluating and approving Bird Nest Events (i.e., nest records) in the Field Reporting Environmental Database (FRED), default buffers and contractor-initiated buffer reduction requests for special status species to be implemented per this Plan; will be primary point of contact with CDFW, USFWS, CPUC, BLM, and USFS regarding active nests, default buffers, and reduced buffers; regularly reviews and critiques FRED nesting bird database (i.e., Bird Nest Events) and submits reports to CDFW, USFWS, CPUC, BLM, and USFS. Reviews and approves the Sage grouse Biologist’s conservation recommendations and directs the contractor to implement them; confers directly with agency staff regarding Project activities, bird behavior, and nest locations.

- **Sage grouse Biologist:** Will have a minimum 2 years' experience conducting surveys for sage grouse and have experience with the identification of sage grouse habitat, nests, and behavior. Searches for and identifies active sage grouse nests; documents behavior to evaluate appropriate default buffer; recommends buffer reduction distances as appropriate and communicates these to the Lead Avian Biologist; the Sage grouse Biologist may also recommend indirect impact reductions, such as establishing no parking/stopping/loitering zones or chick fencing for ground-nesting precocial species; approves buffers larger than standard buffers; determines when a nest is active or no longer active based on personal observations or those of the Biological Monitor (including all nests located at any time during Project survey efforts); tracks and updates the Bird Nest Events in FRED. May also erect any required Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) staking and fencing around an active nest. Confers directly with agency staff regarding bird behavior at specific nest locations.

Biological Monitor: Shall have a minimum of one-year general avian survey experience, including identification of habitat, nests, and behavior. Under the direction of the Sage grouse Biologist, responsible for monitoring compliance during construction activities, documenting non-compliances and wildlife species observations. Establishes any required ESA staking and fencing around an active nest following guidance provided by the Sage grouse Biologist; assists with monitoring nests and adjacent construction activities; conducts regular sweeps to search for and identify additional nests; reports observations and recommendations of nest activity and inactivity; and creates new and updates existing Bird Nest Events in FRED.

5. Resource Management

5.1. Surveys

Surveys for BSSG will occur prior to and during construction within the defined suitable sage-grouse habitat area.

5.1.1. Pre-construction Nesting Surveys

Pre-construction nesting surveys for BSSG will be conducted within the defined suitable sage-grouse habitat area during the breeding period of March through June, or during the period identified by the USFS. Pre-construction nesting surveys shall cover all potential nesting habitat within 500 feet of every work area within the defined suitable sage-grouse habitat area. Pre-construction surveys shall be conducted for each work area located within the defined suitable sage-grouse habitat area, no longer than 10 days prior to the start of construction activity.

5.1.2. Pre-construction Clearance Surveys

On the first day of construction at any given site, or the first day of use of a construction-support site such as a helicopter landing zone or staging area), a qualified Sage-Grouse Biologist will perform a pre-construction clearance survey to identify any bird nests or other resources that may have appeared since the performance of the pre-construction nesting survey. If a potential BSSG nest is identified, an appropriate buffer will be established around the nest. When an active nest is discovered during a pre-construction clearance survey, a Biological Monitor will delineate the buffer area and restrict construction as necessary per the species-specific default buffer.

5.2. Impact Avoidance and Minimization Measures

In addition to its Applicant Proposed Measures (APMs) described in the NBMP, SCE will implement measures developed by the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee (APLIC) and developed by the USFS as described in the sections below.

5.2.1. Avian Power Line Interaction Committee Measures

SCE will as appropriate implement measures described in APLIC's *Best Management Practices for Electric Utilities in Sage-Grouse Habitat* (APLIC 2015, see Appendix A) as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 APLIC BMPs

Measure	Text of Measure	Addressed
C-2	Where impacts to designated sage-grouse habitat from constructing a transmission lines and associated roads/other features cannot be avoided, implement lek buffers around leks and nesting habitat during breeding/nesting season. Consult federal land use plans and state sage-grouse conservation plans and/or strategies for buffer distances (e.g., habitat protection categories and associated buffer distances).	Section 5.3.1; Section 5.3.2; CSP Project NBMP
C-3	When disturbance to “designated” sage-grouse habitat areas cannot be avoided, implement seasonal timing stipulations/restrictions for construction work. Consult federal land use plans and state sage-grouse conservation plans and/or strategies for specific dates and time periods. Avoid active leks from 6:00 p.m. through 9:00 a.m. during the breeding (“lekking”) season. In the absence of specific dates: a. Breeding (lekking)/Nesting season: 1 March – 15 May. b. Brood-rearing season: 1 May – 31 July. c. Winter Concentration Areas (WCA) or identified winter range: 16 November – 28 February.	Section 5.3.1; Section 5.3.2; CSP Project NBMP
C-4	Projects with the potential to disturb sage-grouse should be implemented in the least amount of time or during specified periods least likely to impact sage-grouse (while maintaining safe working practices).	Section 5.2.4
C-7	Construct, upgrade, and maintain access roads to an appropriate standard but no larger than necessary to accommodate construction activities. Construct roads with considerations for minimizing vegetation removal (i.e., drive and crush), vehicle type (size, weight), and travel frequency, and with consideration of future access needs.	PEA Project Description
C-8	Conduct pre-construction weed surveys in areas before ground disturbing activities (e.g., high voltage transmission line construction) and implement conservation actions or preconstruction treatment to prevent and/or control noxious/invasive plant growth during and after reclamation and subsequent restoration efforts.	PEA APM BIO-RES-2; BIO-GEN-1
C-9	Vegetation and soil removal should be limited to the minimum disturbance required by the project. Topsoil that is removed should be stored in temporary use areas for re-use during reclamation if soil does not contain evidence of invasive grasses or noxious weeds.	PEA APM BIO-RES-2
C-11	Avoid or minimize disturbance/removal of vegetation beneficial to sage-grouse (e.g., sagebrush, forbs, and native grasses) in designated sage-grouse habitat by: a. Siting staging areas out of designated sage-grouse habitat and minimize size/footprint of staging areas. b. Siting pulling locations outside of designated sage-grouse habitat. c. Siting equipment storage outside of designated sage-grouse habitat. d. Minimizing development of new access roads by utilizing existing roads.	PEA APM BIO-BOT-2

	<p>e. Upgrading roads to the minimum extent necessary.</p> <p>f. Managing project access roads to limit public use in designated sage-grouse habitats.</p> <p>g. Use temporary mats laid down in sensitive sage-grouse use areas or habitats (e.g., wetlands, wet meadows, etc.) to prevent creation of tire ruts or vegetation damage.</p>	
C-12	<p>Routinely inspect and wash vehicles and equipment to remove invasive or noxious weeds/plant materials, or seeds during construction activities.</p> <p>a. Identify areas of known noxious weed infestations in construction areas to reduce the spread of invasive species to non-infested sites/areas regardless of habitat designation.</p> <p>b. Avoid off-road travel in areas of known noxious weed infestations to reduce the spread of invasive species to non-infested sites/areas regardless of habitat designation.</p>	PEA APM BIO-RES-2
C-13	<p>Close/cover exposed tower foundation holes at the end of the work day to prevent sage-grouse or other wildlife from falling in and becoming trapped.</p>	PEA APM BIO-AVI-6
C-14	<p>Limit the number of vehicles on site to those necessary to perform, monitor, and inspect work. Keep construction vehicles within designated construction areas and ROW</p>	TBD
C-15	<p>Limit motorized travel to designated roads, trails, and construction areas. Comply with seasonal road/primitive road/trail restrictions.</p> <p>a. Comply with seasonal closures outside of necessary utility access.</p> <p>b. Where authorized and appropriate, gate and lock access roads to limit access to utility employees, agency personnel, and private land owners.</p>	PEA APM WEAP
C-16	<p>During construction establish speed limits on utility access roads crossing designated sage-grouse habitats. Include speed limit signage or awareness training as needed and enforce speed limits for company employees and contractors.</p> <p>a. For a high voltage transmission line project where numerous vehicles are using an area over an extended period "Wildlife Crossing" signage may be used where applicable (e.g., near leks, brood-rearing habitat), to increase awareness of birds in the area and encourage safe and responsible speeds. This may reduce direct loss due to vehicle collision.</p>	PEA APM WEAP
C-17	<p>Contain, collect, and remove trash and construction debris regularly at construction sites and during maintenance activities to avoid attracting predators. Containers should have lids and trash removed as necessary to reduce overflow.</p>	PEA APM BIO-GEN-1 APM WEAP
C-20	<p>Establish and implement a fire prevention and suppression plan for construction activities. Adhere to seasonal fire restrictions and stipulations which may include:</p> <p>a. Educate crews how to enforce and practice appropriate fire prevention and suppression actions and behavior.</p>	CSP Project Fire Prevention and Emergency

	<p>b. Minimize idling during construction and routine maintenance activities.</p> <p>c. Park vehicles in designated parking or construction areas. Avoid parking over tall, dry vegetation.</p> <p>d. Implement use of spark arrestors.</p> <p>e. Conduct routine vehicle inspections: Increase inspection frequency during high fire dangers for build-up of flammable vegetation (and other materials) and remove such materials.</p> <p>ii. Confirm vehicles are equipped with designated fire suppression equipment.</p> <p>f. Follow protocol for combustible materials storage, and develop appropriate fueling plan.</p> <p>g. Clear flammable vegetation in work areas as appropriate before welding or related construction activities.</p> <p>h. When welding in areas of high-risk fire danger, use a spotter.</p> <p>i. Prohibit smoking or only smoke in designated areas.</p> <p>j. Implement appropriate bird management practices (e.g., problem nest management, electrocution prevention) to reduce fire danger (see APLIC 2006).</p> <p>k. As part of the fire suppression plan, identify fire suppression equipment needed in each vehicle and at each work site (e.g., number, size, and type of fire extinguishers, shovels, and Pulaskis) and identify fire suppression assistance contact information to keep in each vehicle and at each work site (e.g., telephone and radio contacts for federal and state land management agencies, local fire department, rural land fire protection associations, and county sheriff).</p> <p>l. In certain circumstances, a transmission line corridor and associated access roads may be used by fire crews to access remote areas to assist with fire suppression efforts while minimizing creation of new roads or additional habitat impacts</p>	Response Plan
C-21	<p>Reclaim ground/vegetation disturbances resulting from project-related construction activities and use local native seed mixes when they will meet restoration or re-vegetation efforts as approved by land owner/manager.</p> <p>a. Landowners should be encouraged to use native plant seed mix for re-vegetation efforts on private lands. Effort should be made to control noxious and invasive weed species, including cheatgrass and Japanese brome that may occur after re-vegetation activities.</p> <p>b. In certain instances, non-native vegetation (annual/sterile) may be used as a cover crop to prevent soil erosion and in fire prevention and suppression. A native understory may be ultimately established in the area. Ensure no invasive species are used. Consult with appropriate land management agency, especially when considering non-native adaptable species (e.g., forage kochia).</p> <p>c. Reclamation efforts should attempt to re-establish native grasses, forbs, and shrubs to achieve cover, species composition, and life form diversity to benefit sage-grouse. Consult with local resource and land management agencies for appropriate seed mixes for individual project sites.</p>	CSP Project Habitat Restoration Plan (PEA BIO-RES-1); PEA APM BIO-RES-2

	<p>d. When reseeding temporary access roads, primitive roads, and trails, use seed mixes appropriate for vegetative conditions beneficial to sage-grouse and consider the use of transplanted sagebrush and/or sagebrush seedlings.</p> <p>e. Restore reclaimed construction-related disturbances to vegetation representative of healthy sagebrush ecosystems and functional sage-grouse habitat</p>	
C-22	<p>In areas where corvid nesting and associated predation on sage-grouse nests and broods is a concern, use methods to discourage corvid nesting. This may include constructing nest minimizing designs (e.g., monopoles, single crossarms, etc.) for new lines, or retrofitting existing structures where there is an identified problem nest.</p> <p>a. Migratory bird permits (e.g., utility SPUT permits) would typically authorize only the removal of inactive nests or active nests (excluding eagles and threatened/endangered species) that pose a safety, operational, or fire risk. Nest removal activities should be limited to those nests that pose a problem/risk (risk to birds or potential power outage), and as authorized by state and/or federal permits.</p> <p>b. Removal of nest material may be necessary multiple times during nest building to discourage corvids (ravens) from nesting on power poles. Nest material removal may also be most effective when done in conjunction with other methods to discourage corvid nesting. Utilities should contact the USFWS and their state wildlife agency to determine if removal of an active corvid nest would be authorized.</p> <p>c. In areas where perching and/or nesting and associated predation is a concern, consult with the appropriate resource agencies to explore options to reduce impacts.</p> <p>d. See APLIC (2006) and www.aplic.org for additional information on nest management</p>	Section 5.2.3
C-23	Utilize existing sage-grouse use and habitat data to avoid impacts to sage-grouse and their associated designated sage-grouse habitats related to construction activities by identifying designated habitat where existing lines are located and scheduled maintenance activities will occur.	Section 5.2.4

5.2.2. Inyo National Forest Measures

SCE will comply with the applicable Standards contained within *the Land Management Plan for the Inyo National Forest* (USFS 2019) shown in Table 2 below. Guideline 02, *Where feasible and where net impacts of habitat will be less than overhead facilities, bury new or reconstructed utility lines to reduce negative effects on sage-grouse habitat and other resources*, is not included in the table below. Burying the CSP Project underground would require trenching to bury the lines, excavation for vaults, and the required maintenance of the corridor resulting in permanent impacts with a net loss of sage-grouse habitat.

Table 2. Land Management Plan for the Inyo National Forest Standards

Standard	Text of Standard	Addressed
05	Require site-specific project mitigation if needed to insure no net loss of habitat within the Inyo National Forest due to project disturbance.	Section 5.2.3

06	Establish a limited operating period for the sage-grouse breeding season (which current best available science indicates is March 1 to May 15) within suitable breeding habitat for any activities that would cause disturbances during this time. These dates can be adjusted based on current nesting conditions or risk assessment.	Section 5.3.1
07	Establish a limited operating period for the sage-grouse nesting season (which current best available science indicates is May 1 to June 15) within suitable nesting habitat for any activities that would lead to disturbances during this time. These dates can be adjusted based on current nesting conditions or risk assessment.	Section 5.3.2; CSP Project NBMP
09	Within sage-grouse priority habitat, use genetically and climatically appropriate native plant and seed material when seeding the area.	PEA APM BIO-RES-1; BIO-RES-2
10	Subject to valid and existing rights, no new tall utility-type structures (e.g., poles that support lights, telephone and electrical distribution, communication towers, meteorological towers, and high-tension transmission towers, wind or solar generators or other similar infrastructure), which could serve as predator perches, will be authorized within 4 miles of an active lek in suitable habitat except as needed to adequately maintain existing infrastructure and comply with state and federal regulations. If structures are needed within this area protective stipulations (e.g. perch deterrents, guy wire removal) or mitigation will be required to offset the impacts of those structures. During the permit renewal process for such existing structures within 4 miles of an active lek in suitable habitat, protective stipulations or mitigations will be required to offset the impacts of those structures.	Section 5.2.3; Section 1.1; PEA Project Description; APM BIO-AVI-6
Guidelines	Text of Guideline	
03	Subject to valid and existing rights, where there would be a net benefit to habitat conditions, remove tall structures that protrude noticeably above the dominant shrub layer in suitable sage-grouse habitat within 4 miles of an active lek.	Section 5.2.3; Section 1.1; PEA Project Description; APM BIO-AVI-6

5.2.3. Siting

The CSP Project includes upgrades of existing facilities and does not include the development of new subtransmission lines or new access roads. Therefore, because the CSP Project infrastructure will be constructed and operated within an existing utility corridor, there are no line route siting approaches to minimize impacts to the BSSG.

However, under the CSP Project, the number of poles located within suitable habitat for BSSG will be reduced. This will reduce the potential perching and nesting for habitat for BSSG predators and will reduce the number of poles subject to operation and maintenance-related work. The new poles will be designed to be avian-safe in accordance with APLIC guidance, thus reducing potential mortality of BSSG individuals posed by the poles. Further, following construction activities, SCE will restore habitat

disturbances associated with construction, thus ensuring no net loss of BSSG habitat. Further, the project, as currently proposed, will decommission one of the two subtransmission lines, thus increasing sage-grouse habitat with restoration.

5.2.4. Construction

Construction activities will avoid and minimize impacts on BSSG and their associated habitat to the extent feasible as described in the following sections. The limited operating period for the Inyo National Forest is generally March 1 to May 15. In order for SCE to implement APLIC Measure C4 (Table 1), the CSP Project shall use no-activity buffers (Section 5.3) as modified limited operating periods rather than strict limited operating periods in order to complete the Project in the least amount of time possible. In addition, SCE will coordinate with Inyo National Forest to obtain the most current GIS data for sage-grouse locations and habitat to identify overlap with the CSP Project and inform construction scheduling and location to minimize disturbance.

5.3. Buffers

5.3.1. Lek Buffers

The Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Plan Amendment (Appendix B) (BLM and NFS 2015) recommends a 2-mile buffer for transmission lines from leks. The closest known lek to the CSP Project is 3 miles to the north (Figure x). In addition, topography prevents line-of-sight view from the lek to the Project. Project activities are not expected to cause disturbance to breeding activities of leks in the vicinity. However, should updated surveys show active leks within the 2-mile buffer, the following measures shall be applied:

- APLIC BMP C3
- INF Standard 06

5.3.2. Nest Buffers

As described in Section 2.3.1 in the CSP Project NBMP, buffers for BSSG will be established at the discretion of the Sage grouse biologist and in coordination with USFS. Buffers are measured from the nest to the site of the construction activity outwards (horizontally for ground or helicopter activities) or upwards (vertically for helicopter activities), as appropriate. The default buffer for BSSG will be 500 feet. The following measures shall be applied during the nesting season:

- APLIC BMP C3
- INF Standard 07

5.3.3. Winter Concentration Areas (WCA) Buffers

Preactivity surveys shall be performed within BSSG habitat between November 16 and February 28 at the direction of the Greater Sage grouse Biologist to identify WCAs within 500 feet of work activities. WCAs are defined as areas with consistent aggregation of ≥ 50 sage-grouse (State of Wyoming 2015, Smith et al. 2019). The default buffer for a WCA is 500 feet. The following measure shall be applied during the wintering season:

- APLIC BMP C3

5.3.4. Buffer Reductions

Buffer reductions can occur, depending on the determination of the Sage grouse Biologist and in coordination with USFS. At times, SCE or its contractor may propose buffer distances different from the default 500-foot buffer established for BSSG. Buffer adjustments shall be reviewed and recommended by the Sage grouse Biologist. The NBMP provides a procedure and timing requirements for notifying USFS, CDFW, and USFWS of any planned adjustments to a BSSG nest buffer. The NBMP lists the information to be included in buffer reduction notifications in a standardized format. This procedure shall also be used for WCA buffer reduction requests.

5.4. Vegetation Impact Reduction

SCE will employ several primary approaches to reduce impacts to vegetation, including BSSG habitat.

5.4.1. Overland Travel

Where existing access roads and/or spur roads are not present, and where the topography and soil conditions are suitable, construction equipment will travel overland from existing access or spur roads to construction work areas (overland travel is sometimes also referred to as “drive and crush”). Where overland travel is to be employed, vegetation may be trimmed (as needed, and leaving the root stock in-place) and staking/flagging would be used to define a route between the nearest access and/or spur road and a construction work area to permit the safe transit of construction vehicles. In some locations where surface conditions are not suitable for overland travel (where soft soils are present for example), temporary matting may be placed on the surface from an existing access or spur road to the construction work area, and additional matting laid to form a construction work area. The temporary placement of matting would reduce vegetation impacts compared to conventional construction approaches.

5.4.2. Helicopter-Supported Construction

SCE anticipates utilizing helicopters to support construction of much of the CSP Project that is located in suitable BSSG habitat. Helicopter-supported construction results in a large reduction in the temporary disturbance area associated with the installation of new poles or removal of existing poles compared to conventional construction approaches or the utilization of overland travel.

5.5. Monitoring¹

5.5.1. Updating Nest Events

If nests are identified during pre-construction nesting or clearance surveys, the location of the nest will be geolocated, identified in FRED, and monitored for activity. If no activity is observed within a minimum one-hour monitoring period, the nest would be approached to check the status. The Sage grouse Biologist will use best professional judgement regarding the monitoring period and whether approaching the nest is appropriate. If no adult or juvenile bird activity and no eggs are observed within one hour the nest can be considered inactive.

¹ Note that no monitoring of leks is proposed as part of the CSP Project. Given the distance between the CSP Project alignment and the known leks, no disturbance of leks is anticipated.

Sage grouse Biologists will be responsible for documenting new nests, providing status updates of previously identified active nests, and monitoring implemented buffers within and adjacent to construction areas. Sage grouse Biologists will utilize construction maps, flagging, staking, and signage, and in-field communication to monitor for compliance with plan requirements. Methods described in the NBMP Section 3.0 will be used to schedule nest monitoring depending on the location of the nest and the active work areas.

5.5.2. Monitoring/Updating Reduced Buffers

Biological Monitors will be responsible for monitoring the contractor's adherence to the established nest buffers, the contractor's adherence to the conditions of buffer reduction approvals and monitoring the nesting birds' behavioral reaction to construction throughout the day during active construction. If buffers are reduced, the location of the revised buffer will be identified in FRED.

5.5.3. Reporting Sage-Grouse Predator Observations

Biological monitors will be responsible for recording observations of sage-grouse predators, such as coyotes, raptors, and corvids, etc. Predator observations will be included in Daily Monitoring Reports and in FRED.

6. Reporting

Reporting will be performed as described in the NBMP for the CSP Project.

7. Plan Approval and Amendment

This Plan will be implemented following approval or review by the USFS. Any proposed revision or amendment must be reviewed by USFS to confirm consistency with any mitigation measures identified for the CSP Project by the USFS, and by CDFW and USFWS for consistency with the respective state and federal wildlife statutes.

Minor amendments or clarifications to the Plan will be implemented following coordination with the USFWS and/or CDFW, and concurrence from USFS staff. Minor amendments or clarifications may include, but are not necessarily limited to, additional blanket or programmatic buffer reductions/exemptions, or additional construction activities and disturbance levels not already included in Table 1 of the NBMP. Major amendments to this Plan that may result from changes in applicable regulations, which alter the procedures outlined in this Plan, will be developed in coordination with the USFWS and/or CDFW and submitted to the USFS for concurrence prior to implementation. Following concurrence of minor or major amendments, a revised version of the plan with date of revision will be provided to USFS.

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