4.4 Biological Resources

4.4.1 Introduction

This section discusses the potential for the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives to affect different types of habitats (e.g., uplands, riparian and wetlands) and special-status plant and wildlife species that may use these habitats. Specifically, this section describes existing regulations and the existing environmental setting in the potentially affected areas; then, the potential impacts of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives are evaluated in accordance with the CEQA Appendix G guidelines.

4.4.2 Regulatory Setting

Federal Laws, Regulations and Policies

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S. Code [USC] Section 1531 et seq.; 50 CFR Parts 17 and 222) provides for conservation of species that are endangered or threatened throughout all or a substantial portion of their range, as well as protection of the habitats on which they depend. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) share responsibility for implementing the ESA. In general, USFWS manages terrestrial and freshwater species, whereas NMFS manages marine and anadromous species.

Section 9 of the ESA and its implementing regulations prohibit the "take" of any fish or wildlife species listed under the ESA as endangered or threatened, unless otherwise authorized by federal regulations. The ESA defines the term "take" to mean "harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct" (16 USC Section 1532). Section 7 of the ESA (16 USC Section 1531 et seq.) outlines the procedures for federal interagency cooperation to conserve federally listed species and designated critical habitats.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 USC, Chapter 7, Subchapter II) protects migratory birds. Most actions that result in take, or the permanent or temporary possession of, a migratory bird constitute violations of the MBTA. The MBTA also prohibits destruction of occupied nests. The USFWS is responsible for overseeing compliance with the MBTA.

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC Section 668; 50 CFR Part 22) prohibits take of bald and golden eagles and their occupied and unoccupied nests. USFWS administers the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. In addition to immediate impacts, "take" also covers impacts that result from human-induced alterations initiated around a previously used nest site. Even if eagles are not present during the time of the alterations, if eagle(s) subsequently return and the

alterations agitate or bother an eagle to a degree that it interferes with or interrupts normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering habits, and causes injury, death or nest abandonment, this would be considered take.

Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act (CWA) is the primary federal law that protects the quality of the nation's surface waters, including lakes, rivers, and coastal wetlands. CWA Sections 401 and 404 are the key sections that pertain to biological resources and are described further below.

Section 401

Section 401 of the CWA allows for evaluation of water quality when a proposed activity requiring a federal license or permit could result in a discharge to waters of the United States (waters of the U.S.). In California, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and its nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCBs) issue water quality certifications. Section 401 of the CWA directly grants authority from the USEPA to the State, whose RWQCBs are charged with implementing Section 401 compliance consistent with its water quality control plan (also known as a Basin Plan) to maintain an efficient process, consistent with USEPA requirements . Applicants for a federal license or permit to conduct activities that might result in the discharge to waters of the U.S. (including wetlands) must also obtain a Section 401 water quality certification to ensure that any such discharge complies with the applicable CWA provisions. Compliance with Section 401 is required for all projects that have a federal component and may affect state water quality.

Section 404

CWA Section 404 regulates the discharge of dredged and fill materials into waters of the U.S., which include all navigable waters, their tributaries, and some isolated waters, as well as some wetlands adjacent to the aforementioned waters (33 CFR Section 328.3). Areas typically not considered to be jurisdictional waters include non-tidal drainage and irrigation ditches excavated on dry land, artificially irrigated areas, artificial lakes or ponds used for irrigation or stock watering, small artificial waterbodies, such as swimming pools, and water-filled depressions (33 CFR Part 328). Areas meeting the regulatory definition of waters of the U.S. are subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) under the provisions of the CWA Section 404. Construction activities involving placement of fill into jurisdictional waters of the U.S. are regulated by USACE through permit requirements. A water quality certification under CWA Section 401 is required before the USACE can issue a Section 404 permit.

State Laws, Regulations and Policies

California Environmental Quality Act

Section 15065 of the CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR) requires that a lead agency determine whether a project has the potential to substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, and/or substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of an endangered, rare, or threatened species. Such impacts would be considered significant under CEQA.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15380 defines the terms "species," "endangered," "rare," and "threatened" as they pertain to CEQA. Section 15380 also provides a greater level of consideration for state-listed or federally listed species, and for any species that can be shown to meet the criteria for listing, but that has not yet been listed. In summary, the criteria for considering a species endangered, rare, or threatened under CEQA are as follows:

- when its survival and reproduction in the wild are in immediate jeopardy from one or more causes, including loss of habitat, change in habitat, overexploitation, predation, competition, disease, or other factors; or
- although not presently threatened with extinction, the species is existing in such small numbers throughout all or a significant portion of its range that it may become endangered if its environment worsens; or
- the species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range and may be considered "threatened" as defined in the ESA.

Species that meet the criteria listed above are often considered "Species of Special Concern" by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Species of Special Concern is an administrative designation and carries no formal legal status. Generally, Species of Special Concern should be included in an analysis of project impacts if they can be shown to meet the criteria of sensitivity outlined in Section 15380 of the CEQA Guidelines; however, some older lists of Species of Special Concern were not developed using criteria relevant to CEQA, and the information used in generating those lists is out of date. However, for the purposes of this analysis, such "species of special concern" are included with formally listed (i.e., threatened, endangered, candidate threatened, candidate endangered) and other protected species (e.g., fully protected) under the term "special-status species."

California Fish and Game Code

Sections 700 and Others – Species Protection

The California Fish and Game Code (CFGC) established CDFW (Section 700) and states that the fish and wildlife resources of the state are held in trust for the people of the state by and through CDFW. CFGC Section 1802 states that CDFW has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species. Provisions of the CFGC establish special protection to certain enumerated species, such as fully protected fish species.

Section 1602 – Lake or Streambed Alteration

Section 1602 of the CFGC states that "an entity may not substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of, or substantially change or use any material from the bed, channel, or bank of, any river, stream, or lake" unless CDFW receives written notification regarding the activity and the entity pays the applicable fee. If CDFW determines that the activity may substantially adversely affect an existing fish or wildlife resource, an agreement is issued to the entity that includes reasonable measures necessary to protect the resource.

Sections 1900 to 1913 – Native Plant Protection Act

Sections 1900 to 1913 of the CFGC codifies the Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA) of 1977, which directs CDFW to carry out the California State Legislature's intent to "preserve, protect and enhance rare and endangered plants in this state." NPPA authorizes CDFW to designate plants as endangered or rare and prohibits take of any such plants, except as authorized in limited circumstances.

CDFW and California Native Plant Society (CNPS), a non-governmental organization, jointly maintain California Rare Plant Rank (CRPR) lists. These lists include plant species of concern in California. Vascular plants included on these lists are defined as follows:

List 1A: Plants considered extinct or extirpated in California.

List 1B: Plants that are rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere.

List 2A: Plants which are presumed extirpated in California, but more common elsewhere.

List 2B: Plants that are rare, threatened, or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere.

List 3: Plants about which more information is needed—review list.

List 4: Plants of limited distribution—watch list.

Plants appearing on Lists 1 and 2 are, in general, considered to meet CEQA Guidelines Section 15380(b) criteria, and adverse effects to these species may be considered significant. Impacts to plants that are on Lists 3 and 4 are not significant under CEQA review.

Sections 2050 to 2098 – California Endangered Species Act

The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (CFGC Sections 2050–2098) prohibits state agencies from approving a project that would jeopardize the continued existence of a species listed under the CESA as endangered or threatened, or would result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat essential to the continued existence of those species. Similarly, CESA prohibits the take of any species that is state listed as endangered or threatened, or designated as a candidate for such listing. Under the CESA, CDFW may issue an incidental take permit authorizing the take of listed and candidate species that is incidental to an otherwise lawful activity, subject to specified conditions.

Sections 3503, 3503.5, 3513, and 3800 – Nesting Bird Protections

CFGC Sections 3503, 3513, and 3800 protect native and migratory birds, including their active or inactive nests and eggs, from all forms of take. Section 3503 states the following: "It is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird, except as otherwise provided by this code or any regulation made pursuant thereto." Section 3503.5 specifically protects raptors (i.e., eagles, falcons, hawks, and owls) (i.e., birds in the orders Falconiformes or Strigiformes) and their nests, while Section 3513 protects migratory birds. Section 3800 of the CFGC protects from take all birds occurring naturally in California that are not resident game

birds, migratory game birds, or fully protected birds or nongame birds, except when take is related to mining operations, and when a mitigation plan has been prepared and approved by CDFW.

Sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515 – Fully Protected Species

Sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515 of the CFGC identify species that are fully protected from all forms of take. Section 3511 lists fully protected birds; Section 4700 lists fully protected mammals; Section 5050 lists fully protected amphibians; and Section 5515 lists fully protected fish.

4.4.3 Environmental Setting

This section describes the environmental setting, including physical, climatic, recent temporal, and biotic characteristics of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas related to biological resources based on background data review, field data collection, and professional judgment of qualified biological resource professionals.

Regional Topography and Climate

The Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would be located in the north-central portion of San Luis Obispo County, between the Temblor Range and the Santa Lucia Coastal Range. Elevations in this area range from approximately 650 feet to 1,000 feet (200 to 305 meters) above mean sea level. Topography ranges from flat to gently sloping rolling hills to steep slopes along roadside cuts.

San Luis Obispo County is characterized by a Mediterranean climate, with hot dry summers and cool wet winters. High temperatures in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives average 92 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) and low temperatures average 34°F (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA] 2018). Average annual precipitation is approximately 15.2 inches, with the majority of precipitation occurring between October and April (NOAA 2018). Soils in this area range from shallow to very deep, moderate to well drained, and consist of loams with variable sand, gravel, silt, and clay content (See Section 4.7, “Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources,” for more information).

Land Cover Types and Vegetation Communities

The Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would occur in areas largely typified by agricultural development, as well as non-native grassland and urban/developed areas. Portions of the Proposed Project and alternatives would also pass through areas classified as blue oak woodland, central (Lucian) coastal scrub, (Central Coast cottonwood-willow) riparian forest, and ruderal. There are also areas of sandy wash, coastal and freshwater marsh, and seasonal wetland in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. These land cover types are discussed further below. Mapping of land cover types is provided in the PEA (NEET West and PG&E 2017) and Biological Resources Technical Reports (BRTRs) for applicable alternatives (PG&E 2017, HWT 2019, and PG&E 2019).

Agricultural

Agricultural land cover is characterized by active cultivation of agricultural crops, oftentimes with irrigation. Agricultural crops in the area of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives include primarily grape vineyards, with a smaller abundance of row crops, irrigated pastures, and forage crops (NEET West and PG&E 2017).

Nonnative Grassland

Nonnative grasslands consist of annual grasses generally less than 1 meter high and dominated by nonnative grasses and forbs, including soft chess (*Bromus hordeaceus*), ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), slender wild oats (*Avena barbata*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), red brome (*Bromus madritensis*), red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), and short-pod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) (NEET West and PG&E 2017). Nonnative grassland habitat is present throughout the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas, frequently interspersing blue oak woodlands, margins of agricultural fields, and rural development. Some nonnative grasslands areas are subject to frequent mowing or discing.

Ruderal

Ruderal habitat is typified by weedy species that are able to quickly colonize disturbed areas due to their high rates of seed dispersal and fast growth. As such, ruderal vegetation often occurs along road edges and other highly disturbed areas. Species present in ruderal areas include, but are not limited to, nonnative annual grasses, poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), radish (*Raphanus* sp.), mustard (*Brassica* spp.), and various thistles (NEET West and PG&E 2017).

Urban/Developed

Urban/developed land cover includes areas that have been developed, paved, and/or planted with landscaping, such as trees, shrubs, ornamental plants, and turfgrass. Vegetation density, canopy cover, and species composition vary widely in these areas (NEET West and PG&E 2017). Vegetation in urban/developed lands is frequently maintained through mowing, trimming, irrigation, weeding, or planting.

Blue Oak Woodland

Blue oak woodlands are typically dominated by blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) trees, yet often include other oak species, as well as gray pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) and California Juniper (*Juniperus californica*). Blue oak woodlands range from open savannas scattered across the landscape to dense woodlands, and often contain an understory of grasses and forbs (NEET West and PG&E 2017). This habitat type usually contains shallow, moderately to excessively drained soils with rock fragments and occurs below 6,230 feet (Sawyer et al. 2009). Blue oak woodlands are scattered throughout the Proposed Project and alternatives areas, including along the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line north of Golden Hill Road.

Central (Lucian) Coastal Scrub

Central (Lucian) coastal scrub is typically dominated by California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), and/or white sage (*Salvia apiana*) as the co-dominant shrubs in the

canopy (Sawyer et al. 2009). Of these species, coyote brush typically forms the canopy of this community due to its comparatively greater height than the other co-dominants. This community is located at several dry locations in the vicinity of the Proposed Project and alternatives, often on steep, south-facing slopes. Sandy, mudstone, and shale soils typically support this plant community, but it is also found on stabilized dunes and flat terraces of varying slope aspects (CDFG 2002).

Sandy Wash

Sandy wash occurs in much of Huer Huero Creek and other ephemeral drainages in sandy soils. Soils within sandy wash are well-drained and support subsurface or relatively short-lived surface drainage events. Due to the infrequency of these drainages and the high mobility of the substrate, plants are frequently absent from sandy washes. Sparse plant cover, where it occurs, is often located within flat areas where sandy wash channels broaden and along segments of greater channel depth. Plant species observed in sandy wash included coyote brush, California sagebrush, and sandbar willow (*S. exigua*).

(Central Coast Cottonwood-Willow) Riparian Forest

Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest includes dominant species such as Fremont's cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), sycamore (*Platanus racemose*), and willows (*Salix* spp.). Other species associated with this community include coast live oak, valley oak, coyote brush, and stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*). Willow trees often occur in the mid-strata down to the understory, overshadowed by taller growing cottonwood and sycamore trees. This community is typically found along perennial to ephemeral drainages, including the Salinas River, Estrella River, and the lower portions of Huer Huero Creek.

Coastal and Valley Freshwater Marsh

Coastal and valley freshwater marsh is typically dominated by cattail (*Typha* sp.), California bulrush (*Schoenoplectus californicus*), and hardstem bulrush (*Schoenoplectus acutus*). Other cooccurring species typically include bur reed (*Sparganium* sp.), rush (*Juncus* spp.), rabbitsfoot grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), rough cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*), bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), and saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*). Coastal and valley freshwater marsh is associated with perennial to near-perennial surface water along stream channels, ponds, and similarly semi-permanent wetlands.

Seasonal Wetland

Seasonal wetlands are primarily located in the northern and eastern portions of the Proposed Project and alternatives vicinity within topographic depressions in flat terraces. Seasonal wetlands are freshwater wetlands that are seasonally inundated or their soil saturated during the wet season (i.e., winter and spring). These features are typically charged by direct rainfall and adjacent upland runoff, and seasonal wetlands dry completely during early spring to summer. Dominant plant species typically associated with seasonal wetlands include coyote thistle (*Eryngium vaseyi*), common spikerush (*Eleocharis macrostachya*), vernal pool popcornflower (*Plagiobothrys stipitatus*), smooth-rayed goldfields (*Lasthenia glaberrima*), cowbag clover (*Trifolium depauperatum*), blow wives (*Achyrachaena mollis*), and peppergrass (*Lepidium nitidum*).

Vernal pools are a subset of seasonal wetlands, but not all seasonal wetlands support vernal pool characteristics or branchiopods (e.g., fairy shrimp). Vernal pools exhibit a hydroperiod (i.e., inundation duration) longer than other seasonal wetlands, which do not remain inundated for a duration sufficient to support such branchiopods. Several shorebird, duck, and other water fowl species forage in seasonal wetlands, as these wetlands offer resting and feeding opportunities during migrations along the Pacific flyway. Sierran treefrogs (*Pseudacris sierra*) breed and forage in seasonal wetlands.

Drainages and Wetlands

Several major surface waterbodies (e.g., Salinas River, Huer Huero Creek, Dry Creek, and Estrella River), which are also discussed in detail in Section 4.10, "Hydrology and Water Quality," are the dominant drainages of the region. There are also a number of unnamed drainages, agricultural ponds, and some wetlands in the region, some of which are tributary to the major surface waterbodies. Figure 4.4-1 shows the location of drainages and wetlands in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

- ***Salinas River*.** The Salinas River is the largest river of the Central Coast region, running 170 miles from Santa Margarita flowing north-northwest through the central California Coast Ranges to Monterey Bay. Salinas River is a wildlife corridor, and provides the principal source of water from its reservoirs and tributaries for the farms and vineyards of the Salinas Valley (NEET West and PG&E 2017). The Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would not cross Salinas River, but the reconductoring segment of the Proposed Project and Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-C generally follow the river, east of River Road.

- ***Huer Huero Creek*.** Huer Huero Creek bisects the proposed 70 kV power line segment approximately 1.5 miles west of Estrella Substation. The headwaters of Huer Huero Creek are located in the Coast Ranges just south of Creston, California. This ephemeral creek generally flows northwest crossing over and briefly paralleling the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line before draining into Salinas River, 1 mile southwest of San Miguel Substation (NEET West and PG&E 2017). Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-C cross Huer Huero Creek approximately 1,450 feet upstream of its confluence with the Salinas River. In the area of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives, Huer Huero Creek contains sandy substrate with a sparse herb layer and intermittent cottonwood, willow, and other woody shrubs scattered throughout the drainage (NEET West and PG&E 2017).

- ***Estrella River.*** The Estrella River is an intermittent drainage originating from the confluence of San Juan and Cholame Creeks near Shandon, California. The Estrella River flows perennially underground, but typically exhibits surface water following rain events. The Estrella River is dominated by sandy substrate and supports woody riparian vegetation, including Fremont's cottonwood, willows, and sycamore trees, varying from sparse to relatively dense cover. Alternative PLR-1C (especially Minor Route Variation [MRV] 1) would be located close (to the south) to the river.

- ***Dry Creek.*** Dry Creek is an ephemeral drainage originating from the coastal mountain foothills approximately 4 miles northeast of Creston. From its headwaters, the creek

flows over 13 miles northwest through blue oak woodland to its confluence with Huer Huero Creek near Airport Road, approximately 0.6 mile north of SR 46. The Proposed Project, at its nearest point, is approximately 1,500 feet south of Dry Creek and does not cross the drainage (NEET West and PG&E 2017). However, the southern new reasonably foreseeable distribution line segment would be located approximately 160 feet west of Dry Creek. Alternative PLR-1A would cross Dry Creek northwest of the intersection of Union and Hidden Acre roads.

- ***Unnamed Drainages.*** Various unnamed drainages occur throughout the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives vicinity, as shown in Figure 4.4-1. A number of these features cross or occur in close proximity to the Proposed Project and various alternative routes. Often, these unnamed features do not contain a defined bed and bank or ordinary high water mark.

- ***Wetlands.*** As shown in Figure 4.4-1, areas of freshwater emergent wetland and freshwater forested/shrub wetland exist throughout the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. Wetlands are primarily located along or adjacent to the named surface waterbodies and/or unnamed drainages. As described in the PEA, while field surveys identified several wetland features in the Proposed Project area, none of these were located within the Project footprint or within construction work areas (NEET West and PG&E 2017).

Special-Status Species

Special-status species include (1) species listed, or that are candidates for future listing, as threatened or endangered under the federal ESA or CESA; (2) plants listed as rare under NPPA; (3) plants considered by the CNPS to be “rare, threatened, or endangered in California” (CNPS Rare Plant Ranks 1 and 2); (4) species that meet the definitions of rare or endangered under CEQA; (5) animals fully protected in California under the CFGC, and (6) nesting raptors protected in California.

Identification of special-status species that are present, or may occur, in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives involved review of the USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) Report for the study area (USFWS 2019), California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) (CDFW 2019a), and CNPS’s Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants of California (CNPS 2019). The identification of special-status species also relied on the information in the PEA (NEET West and PG&E 2017) and the BRTRs for several alternatives provided by the Applicants (PG&E 2017, 2019; HWT 2019), including various field surveys conducted in preparation of these documents. Horizon Water and Environment, LLC (Horizon) also conducted several field surveys (Horizon 2019a, 2019b, 2019c), which confirmed or revealed the presence of certain special-status species.

The list of species with potential to occur in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas is provided in Table 4.4-1. Species that were reviewed but determined not to have potential to occur in the subject areas are included in Appendix D. The results of the CNDDB queries for plants and animals are shown in Figure 4.4-2 and Figure 4.4-3, respectively. Additionally, federally designated critical habitat for applicable species is shown in Figure 4.4-4. Known golden eagle nest locations are shown in Figure 4.4-5.

Table 4.4-1. Special-Status Plant and Animal Species with Potential to Occur in the Proposed Project, Reasonably Foreseeable Distribution Components, and Alternatives Vicinity

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
PLANTS				
Hoover's bent grass *Agrostis hooveri*	--/--/1B.2	Perennial herb. Occurs on dry sandy soils in open chaparral and oak woodlands. Blooming period: April-July. Elevation: < 600 meters above mean sea level (amsl).	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Blue oak woodlands may provide habitat for this species. No CNDDB records exist within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Santa Margarita Manzanita *Arctostaphylos pilosula*	--/--/1B.2	Perennial evergreen shrub found on sandstone (sometimes) soils. Blooming period: December-May. Elevation: 75-1,100 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Blue oak woodlands and chaparral on sandstone soil may provide habitat for this species. Six CNDDB occurrences (from south of Atascadero) have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Miles' milk-vetch *Astragalus didymocarpus* v*ar. milesianus*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb with arrowhead-shaped leaves associated with clay soils. Blooms March-June. Elevation: 20-90 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable coastal scrub habitat is limited in the area. One CNDDB record (east of Atascadero) is known within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
La Panza mariposa lily *Calochortus simulans*	--/--/1B.3	Perennial bulbiferous herb with a white to yellow bell-shaped flower with a dark red spot at the base. Meadow habitats. Sandy (often granitic) soils, sometimes serpentinite. Blooming period: April-July.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Grassland and blue oak woodlands may provide habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence (west of Atascadero) is recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
		Elevation: 325-1,150 meters amsl.		
dwarf calycadenia *Calycadenia villosa*	--/--/1B.1	Annual herb with a white to pink ray flower up to 18 inches tall. Associated with dry, rocky hills, ridges. Blooming period: May-October. Elevation: 240-1,350 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grassland may provide habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence (near Atascadero) has been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Hardham's evening primrose *Camissoniopsis hardhamiae*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb that is robust and rosette with a small yellow flower. Generally occurs in sandy soil, limestone, and disturbed oak woodland and also in burned areas. Blooming period: March-May. Elevation: 140-945 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Sandy soils and blue oak woodlands may provide suitable habitat. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
San Luis Obispo owl's clover *Castilleja densiflora* var. *obispoensis*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb with cream to pale yellow flowers. Occurs in coastal grassland. Blooming period: March-June. Elevation: 10-430 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grasslands and blue oak woodlands may provide suitable habitat for this species. The nearest CNDDB occurrence was recorded near the intersection of Jardine Road and the Estrella River in 2005.
Lemmon's jewelflower *Caulanthus lemmonii*	FE/SE/1B.1	Annual herb up to 32 inches tall with a creamy white flower with purple or brown tips. Blooming period: February-May. Elevation: 80-1,580 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grassland may provide suitable habitat for this species. Five CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives, although all of these were recorded between 1935 and 1960, and are

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				primarily from areas that are currently developed.
straight-awned spineflower *Chorizanthe rectispina*	--/--/1B.3	Annual herb that is generally decumbent with a small yellow tube flower and white lobes. Sandy or gravelly loams, unnamed drainage channels. Blooming period: April-July. Elevation: 85-1,035 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Sandy soils along Huer Huero Creek and other unnamed drainages may provide suitable habitat for this species. Two CNDDB occurrences (south of Atascadero and near the intersection of Jardine Road and Estrella River) have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Hall's tarplant *Deinandra halliana*	--/--/1B.1	Annual herb that grows up to 4 feet tall with deep yellow flowers. Occurs in grasslands, open slopes, sink edges, vertic clay, and rarely serpentine. Blooming period: April-May. Elevation: 260-1,000 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grasslands may provide habitat. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
yellow-flowered eriastrum *Eriastrum luteum*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb that grows up to 10 inches tall with a bright yellow flower. Grows on drying slopes in sandy or gravel soils. Blooming period: May-June. Elevation: < 1,000 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Blue oak woodlands and sandy soils along Huer Huero Creek may provide suitable habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence (from an area near Atascadero) has been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Temblor buckwheat	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb with a white flower and basal leaves, stems up to 6 inches tall. Associated	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grassland and blue oak woodlands may provide habitat for this species. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
Eriogonum temblorense		with sandy soils. Blooming period: April-September. Elevation: 300-1000 meters amsl.		within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Ojai fritillary *Fritillaria ojaiensis*	--/--/1B.2	Perennial bulbiferous herb found on rocky soils. Blooms February-May. Elevation: 225-998 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable rocky soil substrate in chaparral is present in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. There are 2 CNDDB occurrences (from an area near Atascadero) that have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Santa Lucia dwarf rush *Juncus luciensis*	--/--/1B.2	Annual pale yellow-green grass-like herb that grows in wet, sandy soils of seeps, meadows, vernal pools, streams, roadsides. Fruiting period: April–August. Elevation: 300–2,040 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Seasonal wetland and drainage features may provide habitat. One CNDDB occurrence was recorded near the intersection of Jardine Road and Estrella River and another occurrence was recorded approximately 3 miles southwest of the Proposed Project (this latter record dates back to 1958).
pale-yellow layia *Layia heterotricha*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb that is often considered to be apple- or banana-scented with yellow to brown disk flowers. Associated with open clay or sandy, sometimes +/- alkaline soils. Blooming period: April–June. Elevation: 200–1,800 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grassland may provide suitable habitat. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
Jared's pepper-grass *Lepidium jaredii* ssp. *jaredii*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb with lemon yellow spoon-shaped flower. Occurs in washes, slopes, dry hillsides, vertic clay, acidic and gypsiferous soils and alluvial fans. Blooming period: March-May. Elevation: 500-700 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Nonnative grassland may provide suitable habitat. There is 1 CNDDB occurrence (near Jardine Road and the Estrella River) recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Santa Lucia bushmallow *Malaco-thamnus palmeri* var. *palmeri*	--/--/1B.2	Perennial deciduous shrub found on rocky soils. Blooms May-July. Elevation: 60-360 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable chaparral habitat with rocky soils occurs in the Proposed Project and alternatives areas. There is one CNDDB occurrence within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
woodland woollythreads *Monolopia gracilens*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb with yellow flowers and erect and spreading stems. Blooming period: February–July. Elevation: 100–1,200 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Blue oak woodlands may provide suitable habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence was recorded approximately 2.4 miles southwest of the Proposed Project in 1957.
shining navarretia *Navarretia nigelliformis* ssp. *radians*	--/--/1B.2	Annual herb with light grey-green herbage and a white hairy inflorescence. Occurs in vernal pools and clay depressions. Blooming period: April–July. Elevation: 76–1,000 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Seasonal wetlands, drainages and blue oak woodland in the vicinity may provide habitat. The nearest CNDDB occurrences were recorded 3 miles north and 0.2 mile south-southwest of the Proposed Project in 2006 and 2014, respectively.

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
prostrate vernal pool navarretia *Navarretia prostrata*	--/--/1B.1	Annual prostrate herb with a central head that occurs in alkaline floodplains in vernal pools. Blooming period: April–July. Elevation: <1,210 meters amsl.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Seasonal wetlands and blue oak woodland may provide habitat. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, or alternatives.
ANIMALS				
Invertebrates				
Crotch's bumble bee *Bombus crotchii*	--/CE/--	Bumble bee that builds nests underground, typically in rodent burrows, and occasionally in brush piles. Dependent on wildflowers for nectar sources and susceptible to pesticides and agricultural development. Currently restricted to the Central Valley and South Coast to inland within California.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable ground squirrel burrows are present in areas of grassland, but grasslands near agriculture where pesticide is applied are not expected to support this species. Three historic CNDDB occurrences (1960s or earlier) have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. Significant agricultural and human development has occurred in the region since these historical CNDDB observations.
vernal pool fairy shrimp *Branchinecta lynchi*	FT/--/--	Small translucent crustaceans that occur in vernal pool habitats, including depressions in sandstone, to small swale, earth slump, or basalt-flow depressions with a grassy or, occasionally, muddy bottom in grassland.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable habitat exists in seasonal wetlands and drainages in the area. One seasonal wetland with adjacent upland is located approximately 115 feet east of Buena Vista Drive along the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line. Other seasonal wetlands occur within grassland areas north of Wellsona Road and near the western portions of Neal Springs Road, Charolais Road, and Estrella Road. Three CNDDB occurrences (2001, 2001,

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				and 2005) were recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. Portions of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives are located within federally-designated vernal pool fairy shrimp critical habitat (Unit 29C, Central Coast Range Region) (see Figure 4.4-4).
Amphibians				
California red-legged frog (CRLF) *Rana draytonii*	FT/SSC/--	Medium-sized frog with prominent dorsolateral folds extending along the side of the body. Occurs in semi-permanent or permanent water at least 1.6 feet deep, bordered by emergent or riparian vegetation, and upland grassland, forest, or scrub habitats for refugia and dispersal.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	The Salinas River and some isolated ponds in the area provide suitable breeding habitat, while Huer Huero Creek, Estrella River, and other waterbodies provide suitable movement habitat. The nearest known breeding population of CRLF is located approximately 6 miles south of the Proposed Project in Graves Creek. Three CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. No CRLF individuals were observed during surveys in 2019 (Horizon 2019b).
western spadefoot toad *Spea hammondii*	--/SSC/--	Small toad with warty skin and vertical pupils. Occurs in grasslands and valley foothill woodlands, with vernal pools that are used for breeding.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable breeding and upland habitat exists in seasonal wetlands in and near the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. Three CNDDB occurrences (from between 2002 and

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
		Outside of breeding season, they burrow in upland areas.		2006) have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. The closest of these is from approximately 1.3 miles south of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas, near Huer Huero Creek.
Reptiles				
Northern California (=silvery) legless lizard *Anniella pulchra*	--/SSC/--	Slender lizard without legs. Requires loose soil for burrowing, moisture, warmth, and plant cover. Burrows in washes, dune sand, loose soil near bases of slopes, and near permanent or temporary streams.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Sandy soils, such as those observed in Huer Huero Creek and other ephemeral drainages, are suitable habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence was recorded in 1994 approximately 5 miles northwest of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. Another occurrence from 1954 was recorded near the intersection of Huer Huero Creek and Union Road.
western pond turtle *Emys marmorata*	--/SSC/--	Small-to-medium sized turtle with a dark brown or dull olive shell. Found in permanent ponds, lakes, streams, irrigation ditches or permanent pools along intermittent streams, sandy banks (Morey 2000), and nearby uplands.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	The Salinas River and numerous ponds and drainages (and nearby uplands) in the area could support this species. Three CNDDB occurrences (from 2005 and more recent) are reported within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. These occurrences were from near the Salinas River and its southwestern tributaries. Several pond turtles also were observed in Santa

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				Ysabel Lake and its tributary in 2019 (Horizon 2019c).
coast horned lizard *Phrynosoma blainvillii*	--/SSC/--	Wide oval-shaped lizard with pointed fringe scales along the side of their bodies. Frequents a wide variety of habitats, but most common in lowlands along sandy washes with scattered low bushes; open areas for sunning; bushes for cover; patches of loose soil for burial, and where there is an abundant supply of native ants and other insects.	**Present** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	In general, sandy creek beds in the vicinity may provide suitable habitat for this species. One coast horned lizard was observed by biologists in a March 2016 approximately 0.5-mile northeast of the Estrella Substation site in Dry Creek (NEET West and PG&E 2017). However, this occurrence is not yet available in the CNDDB and no other records of coast horned lizard were identified in CNDDB within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, or alternatives.
Birds				
tricolored blackbird *Agelaius tricolor*	MBTA/SSC, CT/--	Medium-sized blackbird with a black body and glossy blue tint. Shoulder patches are red and bordered with white. Found in cattails and tules (*Schoenoplectus* spp.), Himalayan Blackberry (*Rubus discolor*), and other vegetation surrounding wetlands. Also found in agricultural and grain fields, grasslands, feedlots, riparian scrub habitats and vernal pools.	**Possible** (PP, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable foraging habitat exists in the area, but suitable nesting habitat is only present in tall emergent marsh vegetation in limited locations. Three recent (1999 or later) CNDDB occurrences are recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project and alternatives. Eight individuals were observed in 2016 (eBird 2020a) approximately 0.1 mile southwest of the Proposed Project's new 70 kV power line segment, north of Dallons Road and west of Golden Hill Road.

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*	MBTA/FP, WL/--	Large dark brown eagle with a golden sheen on the back of the head and neck. Requires broad expanses of open country for hunting. Nests primarily in rugged mountainous areas with large trees or on cliffs (and sometimes in wetland, riparian and estuarine habitats).	**Present** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Multiple active and inactive nests have been identified in the vicinity, including one near the Cava Robles RV Resort and several in the vicinity of the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment. Known golden eagle nests are shown in Figure 4.4-5. Expansive grasslands and open oak woodlands within and around the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas provide suitable hunting and nesting habitat for this species. Multiple sightings of golden eagles have been recorded within Paso Robles city limits between 1982 and 2015, with the closest observation to the project site being at Cuesta College North Campus just north of SR 46 (eBird 2020b). Horizon biologists also observed golden eagle individuals during March and July 2019 surveys (Horizon 2019a, 2019c).
grasshopper sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*	MBTA/SSC/--	Sparrow that exclusively occurs in open grassland-type habitats and builds nests within clumps of grasses. This species preys upon grasshoppers and other insects, with a winter diet of seeds gleaned from the ground.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable grassland habitat is present in the area, including large patches of grasslands isolated from residential development. No CNDDB occurrences exist within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives, but the species has been observed in the region (eBird 2020c).

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
great blue heron *Ardea herodias*	MBTA/--/--	Large and lanky bird that forages in freshwater, brackish, and marine wetlands, as well as in flooded agricultural fields. Nests in colonies in trees located adjacent to waterbodies, rivers, estuaries, and marshes.	**Possible** (PP, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable nesting habitat is present in riparian woodlands and trees near perennial waterbodies that occur in the area. No CNDDB occurrences exist within 5 miles of the Proposed Project and alternatives; however, this species was observed near the Salinas River in 2019 and is known to occur in the region.
burrowing owl *Athene cunicularia*	MBTA/SSC/--	Long legged owl with bright yellow eyes that occurs in open, dry, annual, or perennial grasslands, deserts, and scrublands characterized by low-growing vegetation. Burrowing owl uses rodent or other burrows for roosting and nesting cover.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Grasslands, open blue oak woodlands, and agricultural areas with dense burrow complexes throughout the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternative areas may provide suitable habitat. No CNDDB occurrences exist within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. However, there are two observation records from 2018 and 2019, both southeast of Paso Robles (eBird 2019d). Additionally, literature indicates that wintering burrowing owls are occasionally observed in the Paso Robles region (Althouse and Meade, Inc. 2013).
Swainson's hawk *Buteo swainsoni*	MBTA/ST/--	Large, slim hawk with a dark or reddish-brown chest, brown or gray upperparts, light-colored stomach, and a gray (male) or brown (female) head. Found in, or near, wide-open grasslands	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	The Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas contain suitable foraging and nesting habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence is recorded from Shimmins Canyon Road, north of Highway 46.

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
		and agricultural fields intermixed with native habitat (Cornell University 2015).		Additionally, one Swainson's hawk was observed during reconnaissance-level surveys conducted in July 2019 near the intersection of Jardine and Estrella roads (Horizon 2019c). Several other sightings have been documented in the vicinity (eBird 2020f).
northern harrier *Circus hudsonius*	MBTA/SSC/--	Slender, long tailed hawk with an owl-like face. Frequents meadows, grasslands, open rangeland, desert sinks, fresh and saltwater emergent wetlands; seldom found in wooded areas.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable foraging habitat exists in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives vicinity. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. However, several individuals were observed foraging in the region during the March and July 2019 surveys. Multiple other sightings have been documented in the area, including one individual that was observed at the River Oaks Pond (eBird 2020g).
white-tailed kite *Elanus leucurus*	MBTA/FP/--	Medium-sized grey hawk with long, pointed wings. Yearlong resident in coastal and valley lowlands; rarely away from agricultural areas. Inhabits herbaceous and open woodlands near moist habitats, mostly in cismontane areas.	**Present** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable nesting and foraging habitat exist in the area. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives; however, several eBird observations are documented from the Templeton and Atascadero areas, with fewer observations near Paso Robles and Bern (eBird 2020h). Several individuals

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				were observed foraging in open areas near Wisteria Lane during the 2019 surveys.
Prairie falcon *Falco mexicanus*	MBTA/WL/- -	Medium-to-large sized falcon with a gray-brown (sandy) colored body above and dark mottling below; has a large dark eye, dark ear patch, and white line over the eye. Found in dry, open country, including grassland, desert, and farmland around lakes and reservoirs, as well as above the treeline in high mountains (National Audubon Society 2017). Will winter in some cities.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable foraging habitat exists in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. However, nesting habitat (e.g., bluffs, scarps, and cliffs) is absent. One CNDDB occurrence is recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. Additionally, individuals have been seen in the Salinas River greenbelt near intersection of North River Road and Union Road and at Barney Shwartz Park (eBird 2020j).
California condor *Gymnogyps californianus*	FE, MBTA/SE/FP-	Largest bird in North America with a wing span of nine and half feet. Black body with a white to reddish purple bald head. Forages in open areas. Roosts on ledges or cavities on cliffs. Also uses old-growth Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, and snags, in undisturbed areas (Polite 2008).	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable foraging habitat is present in grasslands, open oak woodlands, and other open areas in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. While the species could forage in the area, it is unlikely to nest so far inland from the coast. Additionally, suitable cliff and old growth nesting substrate is absent. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. However, one eBird observation

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				of the species is known near Atascadero from 2003 (eBird 2020k).
bald eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	DL, MBTA/SE, FP/--	Dark brown eagle with a white head and yellow legs. Roosts communally in winter in dense, sheltered, remote conifer stands. Nests in large, old growth, or dominant live tree close to lakes and large rivers. Found near coasts, rivers, large lakes or marshes or other large bodies of open water.	**Present** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable nesting (e.g., tall trees in isolated surroundings) and foraging habitat for this species exists in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives vicinity. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives; however, numerous sightings have occurred. Biologists observed one juvenile bald eagle soaring above the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route near Golden Hill Road in 2016 (NEET West and PG&E 2017). Several other observations in the area, including at River Oaks Pond and along the Salinas River, Estrella River, and Huer Huero Creek have been recorded (eBird 2020l).
loggerhead shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*	MBTA/SSC/--	Black, white and grey passerine that generally occurs in open country with scattered shrubs and trees. Sits on low perches to scan for prey (rodents, lizards, birds, and insects).	**Present** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable nesting substrate (e.g., thorny brambles and trees) and foraging habitat exist in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives, but the species is known to occur in the

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				region (eBird 2020m). Several loggerhead shrikes were observed in grassland and agricultural areas near the Proposed Project (along Union Road) during 2016 surveys (NEET West and PG&E 2017).
purple martin *Progne subis*	MBTA/SSC/- -	Dark bluish-purple swallow which is an uncommon to rare, local summer resident that occurs in a variety of wooded, low-elevation habitats. Forages over riparian areas, forest and woodland, and found in a variety of open habitats in migration.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable foraging habitat exists in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. Nesting habitat is relatively limited to forested areas with tree cavities. One occurrence from 2009 near Atascadero is recorded in CNDDB. Additionally, two individuals were observed near the intersection of Wellsona Road and Airport Road in 1991 (eBird 2020n), and several observations have been documented near Atascadero Lake as recently as 2019 (eBird 2020n).
Yellow warbler *Setophaga petechial*	MBTA/SSC/- -	Bird with a yellow body with yellow-green wings, yellow wing bars, and yellow tail patches. Its black eye is outlined by a thin yellow eye-ring outlines black eye (Bird Watcher's Digest 2017). Found in riparian willows and cottonwoods, old orchards, farm hedgerows, streamside	**Possible** (PP, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable nesting and foraging habitat (including Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest) exist along the Salinas River. Although no CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project and alternatives, numerous sightings of this species have been recorded in the area between 2014 and 2019, including at the River Oaks Pond (eBird 2020o).

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
		thickets, suburbs and parks (Bird Watcher's Digest 2017).		
Mammals				
Pallid bat *Antrozous pallidus*	--/SSC/--	Large bat with long forward-pointing ears that occurs in desert areas, moister oak woodlands, and redwood forests of coastal regions. At lower elevations, it is highly associated with oak woodlands and oak savanna.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Potential day and night roost sites exist within the blue oak woodlands and riparian woodland along the Salinas River, while open areas provide suitable foraging habitat. Two CNDDB occurrences (north of the Estrella Road/North River Road intersection along the Salinas River) are recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Townsend's big-eared bat *Corynorhinus townsendii*	--/SSC/--	Medium-sized bat with long, flexible ears, and small lumps on each side of the snout. Requires caves, mines, tunnels, buildings, tree cavities, or other human-made or natural structures for roosting. Found in a variety of habitats, including forests, arid desert scrub, caves, and buildings.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Potential day and night roost sites exist within the blue oak woodlands and riparian woodland along the Salinas River. Open areas represent suitable foraging habitat. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.
Monterey dusky-footed woodrat *Neotoma macrotis luciana*	--/SSC/--	Similar in appearance to the common rat species (*Rattus rattus* and *R. norvegicus*), but with larger ears and eyes, softer coats, and furred tails. Occurs in forest habitats of moderate canopy and	**Possible** (PP, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Dense woodlands along riparian corridors in the Proposed Project and alternatives vicinity may provide suitable habitat. No CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles; however, biologists observed one woodrat midden approximately 0.5-mile

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
		moderate to dense understory. Can be abundant in chaparral habitats. Houses are built of sticks.		northwest of Estrella Substation during a 2016 survey (NEET West and PG&E 2017).
Salinas pocket mouse *Perognathus inornatus psammophilus*	--/SSC/--	Small rodent with a buff to pinkish back with blackish hairs and a white underside. Habitat relations are not well known, but may include sandy loam flats dominated by herbs and grasses.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Open blue oak woodland and grassland areas with sandy and other friable soils in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives (e.g., near Huer Huero Creek) would provide suitable habitat for this species. One CNDDB occurrence was recorded near the convergence of the Estrella River and Salinas River; however, this record dates back to 1918.
American badger *Taxidea taxus*	--/SSC/--	Heavy-bodied, short-legged, grayish mammal that has a white medial stripe from the nose over the top of the head and down the back. Occurs in open grassland, chaparral, and oak woodland with friable soils. Needs sufficient food and open, uncultivated ground.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Grasslands and blue oak woodlands within the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternative areas provide suitable habitat for this species. An abundance of prey species is present within these areas, including California ground squirrels, Botta's pocket gophers, and other small fossorial rodent species. Six CNDDB occurrences have been recorded within 5 miles of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternative areas, including near Camp Roberts. A deceased (road-killed) badger was observed in 2019 along El Pomar

Common and Scientific Name	Legal Status Federal / State / CNPS	Description and Habitat	Potential to Occur	Explanation / Discussion[1]
				Drive near the existing Templeton Substation (PG&E 2019).
San Joaquin kit fox *Vulpes macrotis mutica*	FE/ST/--	Small, tan to yellowish-grey fox with large ears and a long bushy tail. Open, level areas with loose-textured soils supporting scattered, shrubby vegetation with little human disturbance represent suitable habitats for kit foxes. Some agricultural areas may support these foxes. Found in open areas, grasslands, scattered shrubs.	**Possible** (PP, RFDC, SS-1, PLR-1A, PLR-1C, PLR-3, SE-1A, SE-PLR-2, BS-2)	Suitable habitat exists within the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. Grasslands and open blue oak woodlands in the area support an abundance of prey species (e.g., California ground squirrel, Botta's pocket gopher, small mammals, ground-nesting birds, and insects) and could provide den (natal or nonnatal) sites for San Joaquin kit fox. Orchards and vineyards provide marginal habitat. Focused surveys of the Estrella Substation site in 2016 did not identify dens or sign (e.g., tracks, scat) of kit fox (NEET West and PG&E 2017). In total, 61 CNDDB occurrences are recorded from 12 locations between 1971 and 2014, most of which are at Camp Roberts. One kit fox is known to have moved from Camp Roberts to the Carrizo Plain (California State University, Stanislaus 2016). However, Camp Roberts currently does not appear to support a population of kit foxes (Cypher et al. 2013). The nearest CNDDB occurrence was recorded approximately 0.3 mile southwest of the Proposed Project in 1991. Two recent CNDDB records are located near the Shandon Valley.

Notes:

PP = Proposed Project; RFDC = reasonably foreseeable distribution components; SS = Alternative Substation Site; PLR = Alternative Power Line Route; SE = Alternative Substation Expansion; BS = Alternative Battery Storage

1. The eBird database is peer-reviewed and updated more frequently than the CNDDB, so data from eBird were included in the special-status bird species analysis. The eBird database is not an official database maintained by a wildlife agency (e.g., CDFW, USFWS), but it is maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

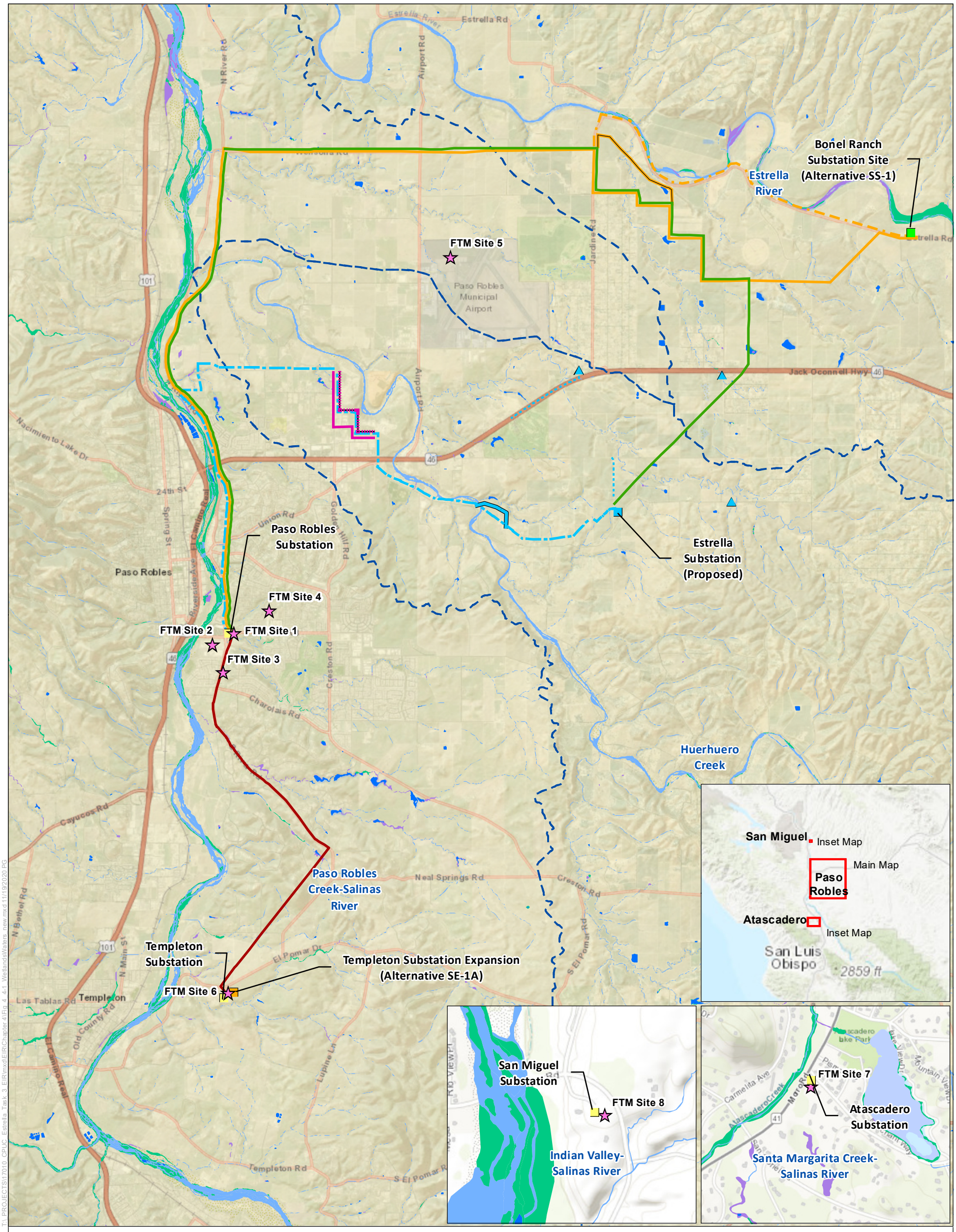
List of Abbreviations for Federal and State Species-Status:

MBTA = Migratory Bird Treaty Act
DL = De-listed
FE = Federal endangered
FT = Federal threatened
FP = State fully protected species
SE = State endangered
ST = State threatened
CT = State candidate threatened
CE = State candidate endangered
SSC = State species of special concern
SR = State rare
WL = North American Bird Conservation Initiative Watch List

1B = plants are considered rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere.
2 = plants are rare, threatened, or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere.

0.1 = Seriously threatened in California (over 80% of occurrences threatened / high degree and immediacy of threat)
0.2 = Fairly threatened in California (20-80% occurrences threatened / moderate degree and immediacy of threat)

Sources: CDFW 2019a; Horizon 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; HWT 2019; NEET West and PG&E 2017; PG&E 2017, 2019



Proposed Project

- Estrella Substation
- 70kV Route
- 70 kV Minor Route Variation 1

Reasonably Forseeable Distribution Components

- New Distribution Line Segments
- Additional 21/12 kV Pad-Mounted Transformer

Existing Infrastructure

- Existing Substations

Project Alternatives

- Front-of-the-Meter (FTM) Battery Storage Sites (Alternative BS-2)
- Alternative SS-1: Bonel Ranch Substation Site
- Alternative SE-1A: Templeton Substation Expansion - 230/70 kV Substation
- Alternative PLR-1A: Estrella Route to Estrella Substation
- Alternative PLR-1C: Estrella Route to Bonel Ranch, Option 1
- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 1
- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 2
- Alternative PLR-3A: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 1
- Alternative PLR-3B: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 2
- Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

Surface Water Features

- HUC 10 Watershed Boundary
- Freshwater Emergent Wetland
- Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland
- Freshwater Pond
- Lake
- Riverine

N

0 1 Miles

Horizon WATER and ENVIRONMENT

Figure 4.4.1
Waters and Wetlands

Source: ESRI 2018, PG&E 2019, USGS NHD 2020, USFWS NWI 2020

Note: The route variations shown are offset and simplified in order to display the alignments of the alternative routes that may overlap in places

Estrella Substation and Paso Robles Area Reinforcement Project

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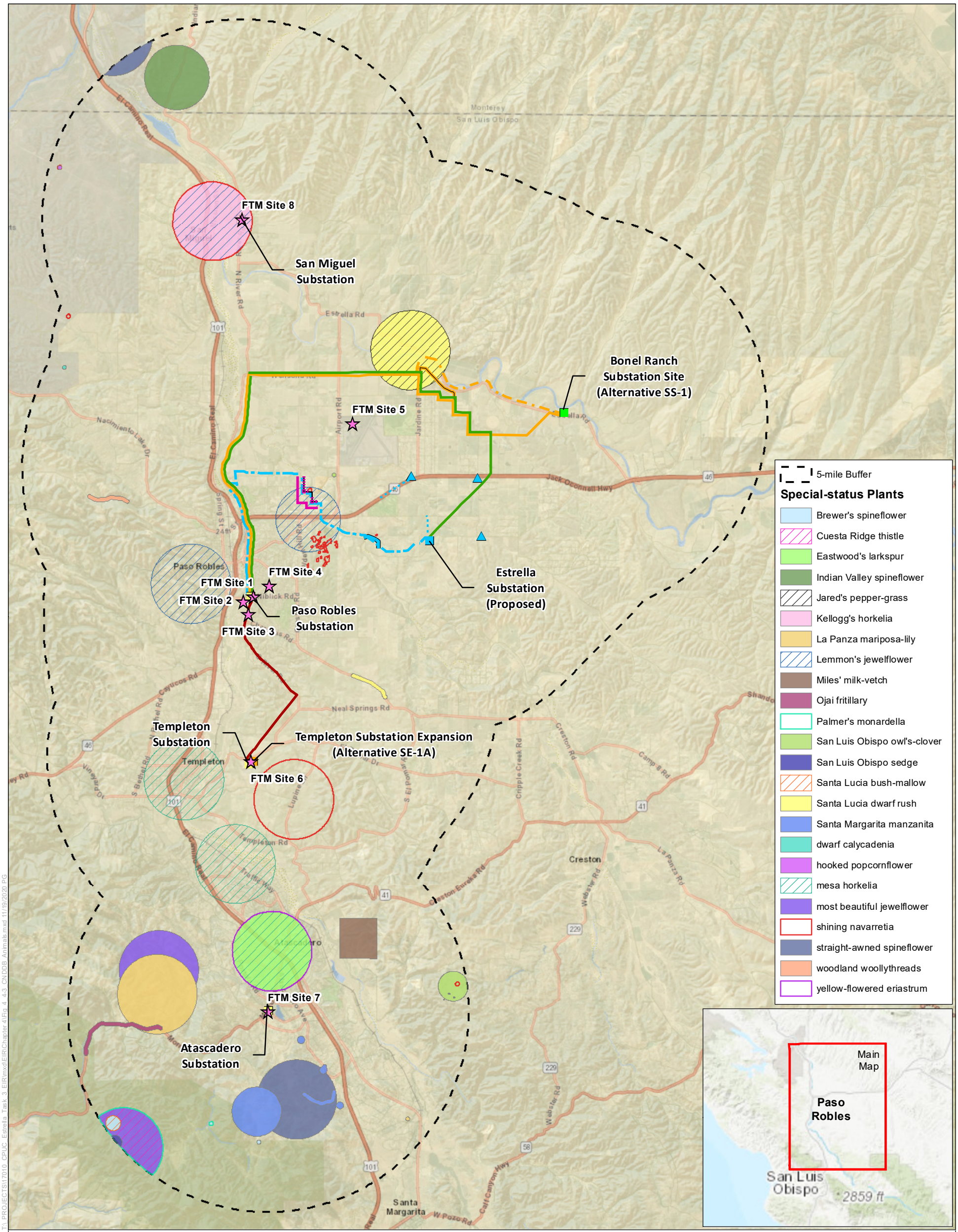

Proposed Project

- Estrella Substation
- 70kV Route
- 70 kV Minor Route Variation 1

Reasonably Forseeable Distribution Components

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- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 2
- Alternative PLR-3A: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 1
- Alternative PLR-3B: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 2
- Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

N

0 2 4 Miles

Figure 4.4-2
Special Status Plants

Source: ESRI 2020, PG&E 2019, SCWA 2017, USFWS 2020

Note: The route variations shown are offset and simplified in order to display the alignments of the alternative routes that may overlap in places

Horizon WATER and ENVIRONMENT

Estrella Substation and Paso Robles Area Reinforcement Project

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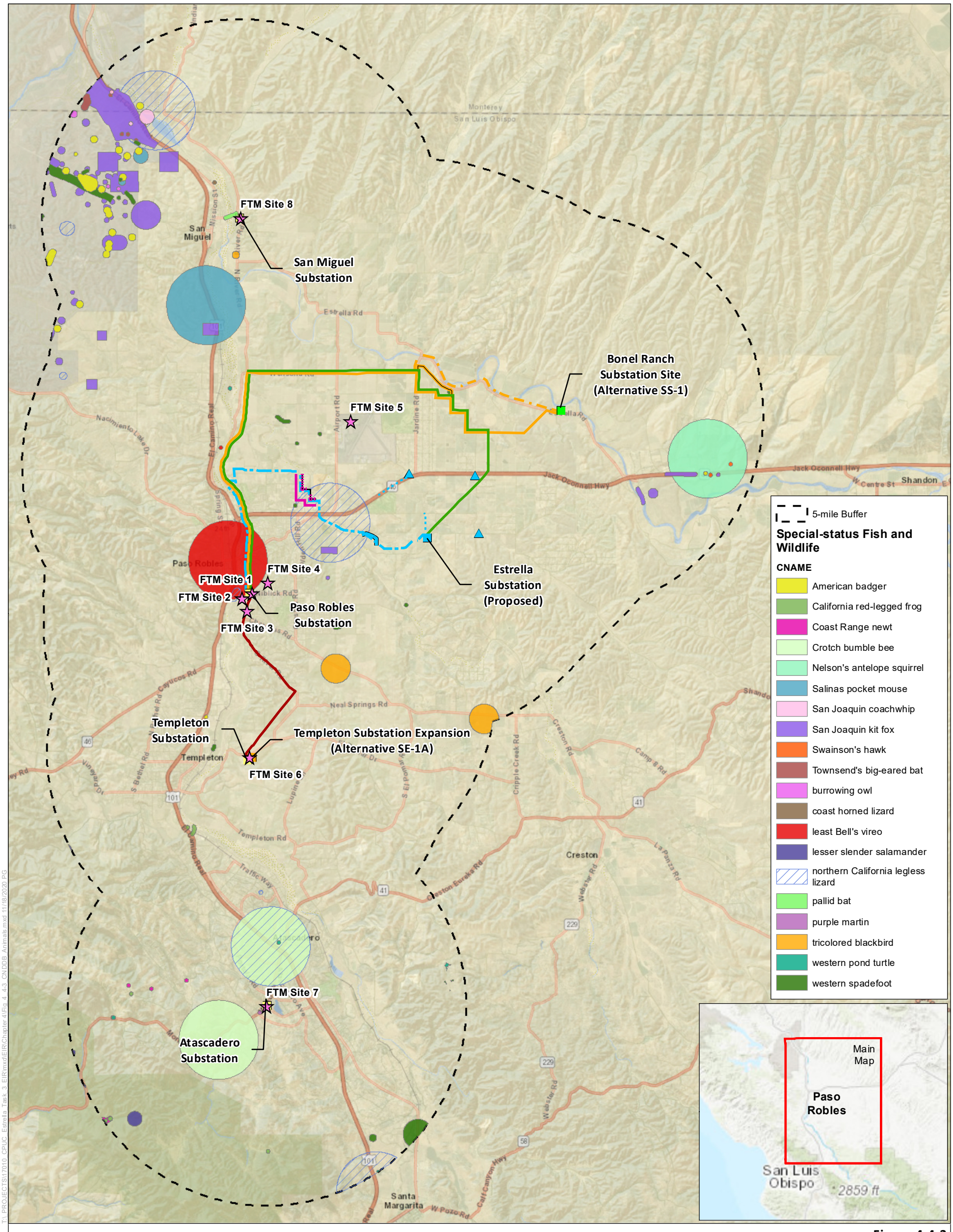

Proposed Project

- Estrella Substation
- 70kV Route
- 70 kV Minor Route Variation 1

Reasonably Forseeable Distribution Components

- New Distribution Line Segments
- Additional 21/12 kV Pad-Mounted Transformer

Existing Infrastructure

- Existing Substations

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- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 1
- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 2
- Alternative PLR-3A: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 1
- Alternative PLR-3B: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 2
- Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

N

0 2 4 Miles

Figure 4.4-3
Special Status Animals

Source: ESRI 2020, PG&E 2019, SCWA 2017, USFWS 2020

Note: The route variations shown are offset and simplified in order to display the alignments of the alternative routes that may overlap in places

Horizon WATER and ENVIRONMENT

Estrella Substation and Paso Robles Area Reinforcement Project

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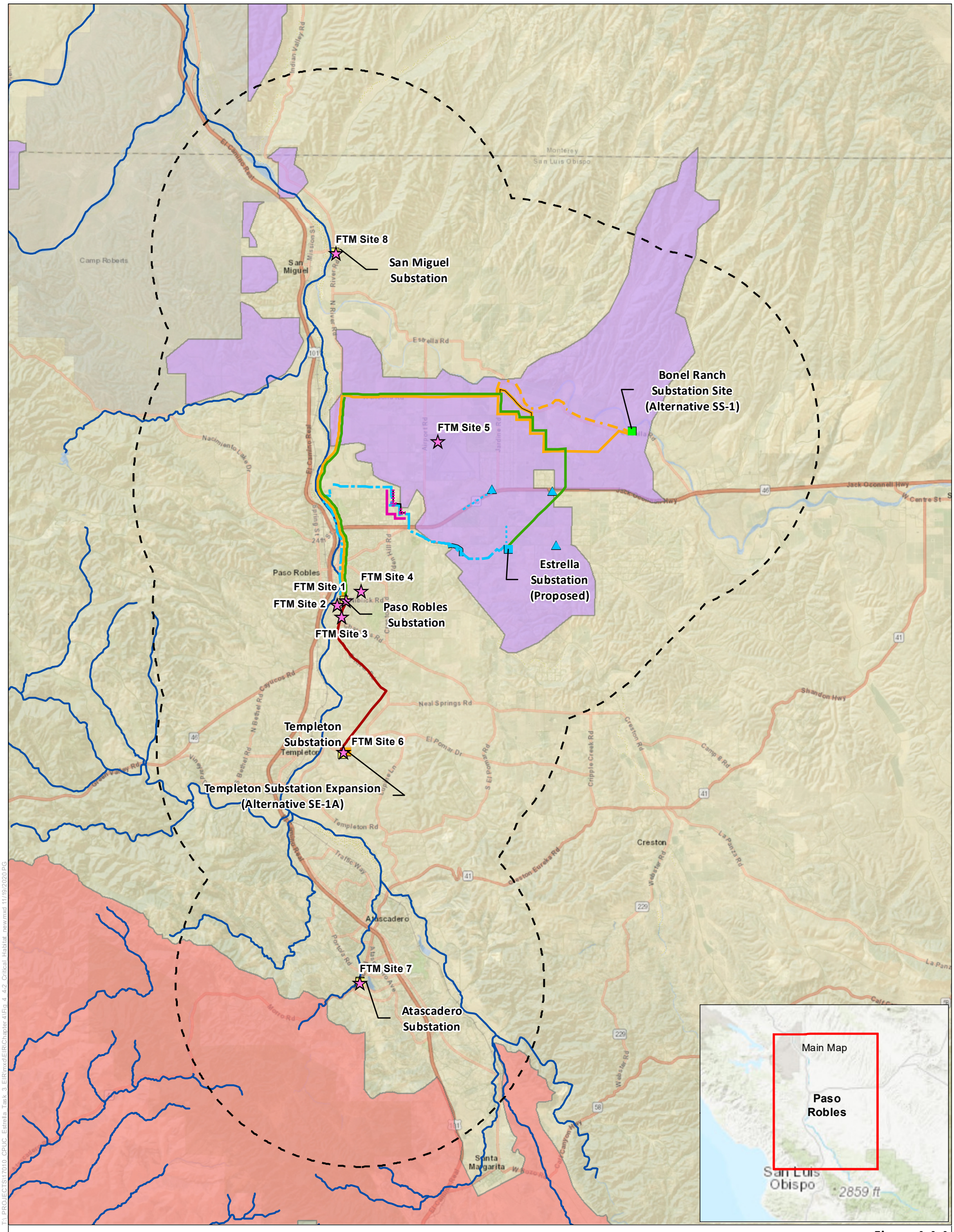

Figure 4.4-4
Critical Habitat

Source: ESRI 2018, PG&E 2019, SCWA 2017, USFWS 2020

Note: The route variations shown are offset and simplified in order to display the alignments of the alternative routes that may overlap in places

Estrella Substation and
Paso Robles Area Reinforcement Project

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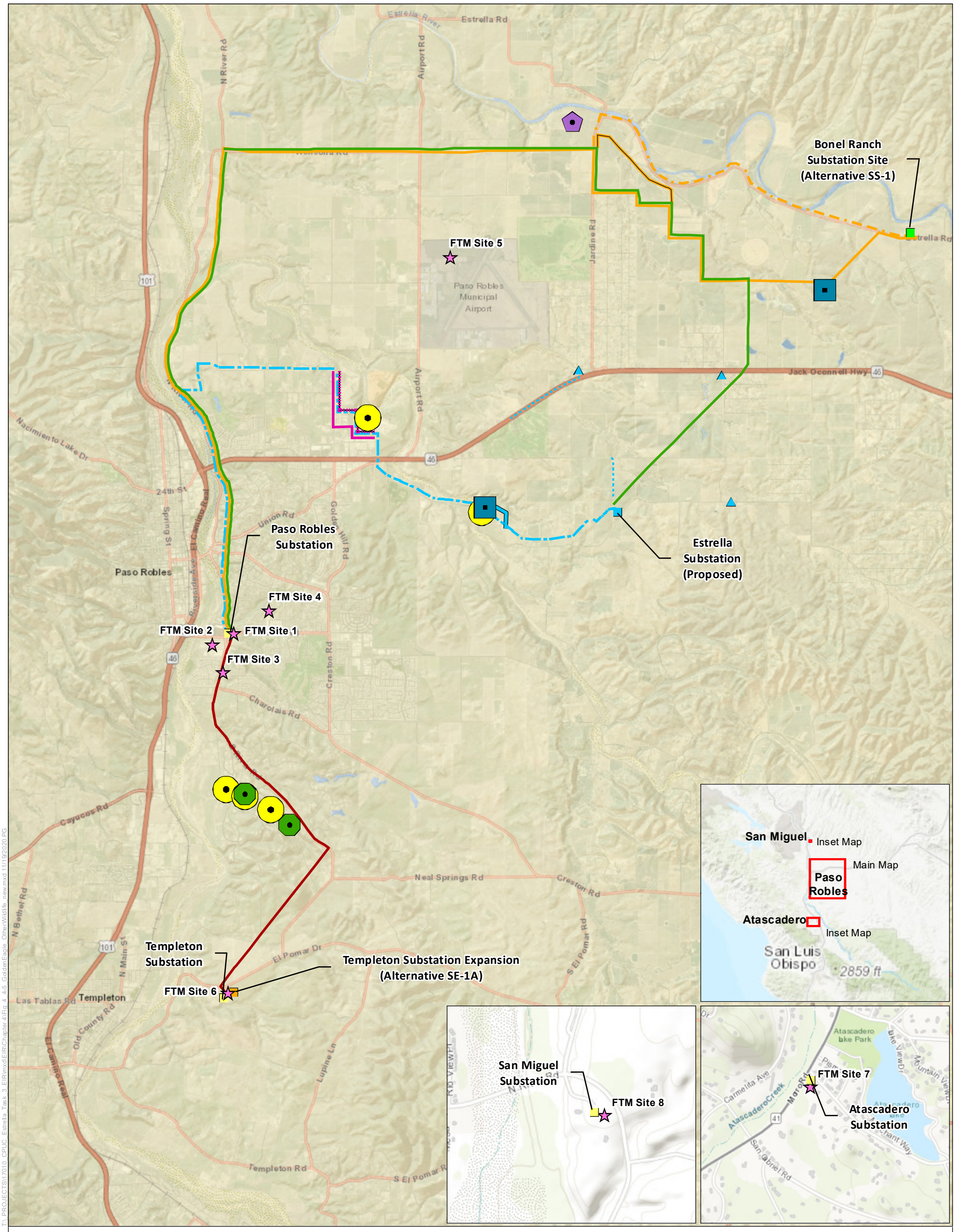

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Proposed Project

- Estrella Substation
- 70kV Route
- 70 kV Minor Route Variation 1

Reasonably Forseeable Distribution Components

- New Distribution Line Segments
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Existing Infrastructure

- Existing Substations

Project Alternatives

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- Alternative PLR-3B: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 2
- Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

Wildlife Observations*

- Golden Eagle Activity
- Western Pond Turtle
- Swainson's Hawk
- Golden Eagle Nest

*Observation icons are enlarged to supress the exact location of the species/nest for resource protection

N

0 1 Miles

Horizon WATER and ENVIRONMENT

Figure 4.4-5
Known Golden Eagle Nest Locations and Other Wildlife Observations

Source: ESRI 2018, NEET West, PG&E 2019, Horizon 2019

Note: The route variations shown are offset and simplified in order to display the alignments of the alternative routes that may overlap in places

Estrella Substation and Paso Robles Area Reinforcement Project

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Habitat Conservation Plans

Based on a review of the Ventura USFWS office's Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and CDFW's California Regional Conservation Plans map (CDFW 2019b), there are no adopted HCPs or Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs) in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, or alternatives.

4.4.4 Impact Analysis

Methodology

The analysis of impacts to biological resources that could result from implementation of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and/or alternatives was primarily qualitative in nature. It involved considering the potential for proposed construction and operation activities to directly or indirectly adversely affect biological resources, including special-status plant and animal species, pursuant to the significance criteria described below.

Criteria for Determining Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would result in a significant impact to biological resources if they would:

A. Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS; or that meet the CEQA criteria for endangered, rare, or threatened; or fully protected or species of special concern;

B. Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by CDFW or USFWS;

C. Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means;

D. Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites;

E. Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; or

F. Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan.

In regard to significance criterion F above, no NCCPs or HCPs are adopted in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. Therefore, there is no potential for conflicts and no impact would occur. This significance criterion is dismissed from further discussion.

The Applicants are independently required to comply with the federal and state Endangered Species Acts and other state or federal laws relevant to the protection of the environment. Specific biological resource mitigation requirements identified in this DEIR may be satisfied through compliance with permit conditions, or other authorizations that may be obtained by the Applicants, if these requirements are equally or more effective than the mitigation identified in this document. The Applicants shall provide the CPUC with copies of permits or other authorizations, and supporting documentation, to show that compliance with permitting conditions would be equally or more effective as mitigation for impacts to biological resources. The CPUC shall have sole discretion to determine whether compliance with permit conditions will also satisfy the performance standards or requirements identified in mitigation measures in this DEIR. If the CPUC determines that compliance with permit conditions would also satisfy the mitigation measures in this DEIR, the Applicants shall submit reports to the CPUC documenting compliance, consistent with the reporting requirements of the equivalent mitigation measure or measures.

Environmental Impacts

Proposed Project

Impact BIO-1: Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS – *Less than Significant with Mitigation*

Construction

Construction of the proposed Estrella Substation and the 70 kV power line would involve vegetation clearing, excavation, grading, and related ground-disturbing activities. Additionally, access roads would be improved and/or established to allow for access to work areas. Helicopters would be used for a variety of tasks during the construction period and approximately 6 helicopter landing zones would be established and utilized in the Proposed Project area. These activities would have potential to impact special-status species both directly (e.g., crushing from mechanical equipment) and indirectly (e.g., habitat degradation, water quality impacts, etc.). The potential impacts for the different types of special-status species are discussed further below.

Plants

As indicated in Table 4.4-1, a number of special-status plant species could occur in the Proposed Project area, although no special-status plant species were identified during any of the several field surveys conducted for the PEA (NEET West and PG&E 2017). The Estrella Substation site is currently in agricultural production (i.e., vineyard); thus, special-status plant species would be unlikely to occur on the site. Much of the new 70 kV power line segment also is under agricultural production, although portions of the alignment along and north of Golden Hill Road

provide better habitat for plant species. The 70 kV reconductoring segment passes through areas of blue oak woodland, which would provide suitable habitat for several special-status plant species. Given that field surveys of the Proposed Project area in 2016 did not identify any special-status species, it would be unlikely that such species have established in the interim. Nevertheless, should unanticipated occurrences of special-status plant species arise along the 70 kV power line route, special-status plants could be directly affected as a result of mechanical crushing or removal, or related direct impacts. Additionally, indirect effects to these species may result from soil compaction, fugitive dust generation, erosion, and accidental releases of toxic substances.

Implementation of several APMs would avoid or minimize potential impacts on special-status plant species. Specifically, APM BIO-1 would require that biologists conduct pre-construction surveys for special-status species. **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** supplements APM BIO-1 and other APM requirements to include appropriately timed surveys for special-status plant species detection. If any federally or state-listed species are discovered, the Applicants would contact the appropriate resource agency (USFWS and/or CDFW). APM BIO-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would require that biologists monitor initial ground-disturbing activities in and adjacent to sensitive habitat areas to ensure that special-status species are not present and adversely affected. Finally, under APM GEN-1, the Applicants would prepare and implement a worker environmental awareness program (WEAP) for construction personnel. The WEAP would include training on the avoidance and minimization measures being implemented to protect biological resources during construction; information on federal and state environmental laws and the consequences/penalties for violating these laws (e.g., unauthorized take of a special-status species), and training on recognizing and avoiding sensitive species and habitat. All on-site construction personnel would be required to attend the training before they begin work on the Proposed Project.

Implementation of the above-described APMs and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would reduce potential for direct impacts to any special-status plants that may be present within the Proposed Project footprint at the time of construction. Upon completion of the WEAP, construction workers would be more apt to identify special-status plant individuals on or near the construction site, while monitoring of initial ground-disturbing activities in and adjacent to sensitive areas would ensure that any special-status plant species present in these areas are avoided, if feasible. If special-status plant species are identified in the construction disturbance area, however, and avoidance is not possible, direct impacts to these species would occur, which would be a significant impact due to the potential loss of a high number of individuals or entire populations within the region. Thus, Mitigation Measure BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would be implemented to require that special-status plants are avoided where feasible and compensatory mitigation is provided for any unavoidable special-status plant species that are directly impacted during construction.

As described in Section 4.10, “Hydrology and Water Quality,” the Proposed Project would be subject to the Construction General Permit, which would require preparation and implementation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). The SWPPP would include BMPs to prevent erosion and protect water quality, including measures that minimize impacts from fugitive dust (APM AIR-3 also would minimize fugitive dust generation). .Compliance with the Construction General Permit, as well as implementation of APMs HYDRO-1 and HAZ-1 (although primarily focused on avoiding harm to people, APM HAZ-1 also serves to prevent

deleterious effects to protected species, their habitats, and protected waters of the U.S. and State), would avoid or reduce potential impacts on water quality and sensitive aquatic habitats, including any potential indirect effects on special-status plants. Overall, with implementation of these measures (APMs and mitigation measures), construction-related impacts to special-status plants would be less than significant with mitigation.

Invertebrates

As described in Section 4.4.3, portions of the Proposed Project area are designated critical habitat for vernal pool fairy shrimp, although no vernal pools or seasonal wetlands were identified within the Proposed Project's disturbance area. As such, no vernal pools or seasonal wetlands that represent potential habitat for vernal pool fairy shrimp are expected to be impacted by the Proposed Project. Additionally, Crotch's bumble bee, which utilize rodent burrows, tufts of grass, old bird nests on the ground, rock piles, or cavities in dead trees for nest construction, has potential to occur within the Proposed Project area. Potential direct impacts to vernal pool fairy shrimp would include injury or death from construction equipment. Indirect effects (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, and accidental releases of toxic chemicals) could also occur, which would be significant without implementation of preventative measures. Direct impacts to Crotch's bumble bee could occur if rodent burrows within the Proposed Project disturbance area were utilized as nests and destroyed through construction activities.

As noted above, implementation of APM HYDRO-1 would avoid impacts to sensitive aquatic features, including vernal pools and seasonal wetlands that represent potential vernal pool fairy shrimp habitat. Specifically, APM HYDRO-1 would require that permanent structures, staging and work areas, and access roads be sited/routed through uplands and outside of existing drainage features to the extent feasible. Prior to construction, sensitive aquatic features slated for avoidance would be identified in the field and clearly marked for avoidance. Additionally, as described above under special-status plants, the Applicants would be required to implement a SWPPP, which would avoid or reduce stormwater and sediment discharges from construction sites, along with fugitive dust (also minimized through APM AIR-3). Implementation of APM HAZ-1 also would minimize potential for hazardous materials releases that could indirectly affect vernal pool fairy shrimp.

Pre-construction surveys required under APM BIO-1 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would identify Crotch's bumble bee individuals or nests that could be present within the Proposed Project footprint. Additionally, implementation of APMs BIO-3 and GEN-1 would further reduce potential for any impacts to Crotch's bumble bee during construction. As a State candidate endangered species, the Applicants would be required to notify and coordinate with CDFW regarding any Crotch's bumble bee nests or individuals identified during pre-construction surveys or during the course of construction activities. If necessary, the Applicants may be required to obtain regulatory approval to relocate the nest. Given implementation of these measures, impacts to special-status invertebrates during construction would be less than significant with mitigation.

Amphibians

Due to the lack of suitable habitat, it is unlikely that special-status amphibians would utilize the proposed Estrella Substation site. However, it is possible that California red-legged frog (CRLF)

and western spadefoot toad could utilize seasonal wetlands, drainages, ponds, other aquatic resources, as well as adjacent grasslands and upland habitats, along the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route for foraging, breeding, or aestivation[1]. As discussed above, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid sensitive aquatic features, which would include any features that would provide suitable aquatic breeding and aquatic non-breeding habitat for these species. Nevertheless, there would be potential for direct significant impacts to CRLF and western spadefoot toad if individuals were present in upland areas where Proposed Project construction activities would occur. Additionally, indirect significant effects to CRLF and western spadefoot toad habitat could occur from discharge of sediment-laden runoff or hazardous materials releases that reach aquatic features.

Implementation of APM BIO-1 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would reduce potential for undetected western spadefoot toad or CRLF individuals in Proposed Project areas to be directly impacted at the start of construction. Likewise, monitoring of initial ground-disturbing activities under APM BIO-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 (through pre-construction surveys, biological monitoring, the monitor's stop-work authority, and exclusion fencing) would ensure that CRLF and western spadefoot toad individuals are not present during these activities, such that they could be directly impacted. Implementation of the WEAP under APM GEN-1 also would minimize potential for adverse direct impacts to special-status amphibians. Further, APM BIO-4 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would require that all trenches and excavations in excess of 2 feet deep have a sloped escape ramp or be covered at the end of the day, which would minimize potential for CRLF or western spadefoot toad individuals to become entrapped in Proposed Project construction areas.

As discussed above, the Applicants would be required to implement a SWPPP, which would avoid or reduce stormwater and sediment discharges from construction sites. Implementation of APM HAZ-1 also would minimize potential for hazardous materials releases that could indirectly affect CRLF and western spadefoot toad. Overall, with implementation of the above-described measures, the impacts to special-status amphibians during construction would be less than significant with mitigation.

Reptiles

As identified in Table 4.4-1, special-status reptiles with potential to occur in the Proposed Project vicinity include the Northern California legless lizard, coast horned lizard, and western pond turtle. Suitable habitat for Northern California legless lizard and coast horned lizard exists along the Dry Creek riparian area, which is located approximately 0.5-mile northeast of the proposed Estrella substation site. Along the 70 kV power line route, suitable habitat exists for all three of these special-status reptile species. Perennial and ephemeral drainages, as well as ponds and other aquatic features in the area of the 70 kV power line alignment could support western pond turtle, and western pond turtle may nest within immediately adjacent upland areas of natural vegetation. If present in Proposed Project construction areas, special-status reptile individuals may be directly injured or killed by vehicles or construction equipment during

[1] Aestivation is a prolonged dormancy for an animal during a hot or dry period. Aestivation is characterized by inactivity and a lowered metabolic rate, which is entered into in response to high temperatures or arid conditions.

vegetation removal, grading, clearing, and excavation activities. Temporary impacts may also occur from disruptive noise and vibration from heavy equipment and other construction activities. Additionally, indirect impacts could occur from fugitive dust landing on their habitats or affecting their prey populations, as well as impacts to water quality from erosion, sedimentation, and hazardous materials. Any of these direct or indirect impacts could be significant.

As described above, substantial adverse impacts would be avoided through implementation of APMs requiring pre-construction surveys (APM BIO-1) and Mitigation Measure BIO-1; monitoring of initial ground-disturbing activities near sensitive areas (APM BIO-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1); providing special-status species protections, including requiring that trenches and excavations in excess of 2 feet deep have sloped escape ramps or are covered overnight (APM BIO-4), implementation of a WEAP (APM GEN-1), and implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Additionally, the Applicants would be required to implement a SWPPP, which would minimize stormwater and sediment discharges from construction sites. Implementation of APM HAZ-1 also would minimize potential for hazardous materials releases that could indirectly affect special-status reptiles. With implementation of these APMs and Mitigation Measure BIO-1, impacts to special-status reptiles from Proposed Project construction would be avoided. As such, the Proposed Project is not expected to result in the loss of special-status reptiles that would substantially affect local populations or the presence of such species in the region. Therefore, effects from the Proposed Project would be less than significant with mitigation.

Birds

Numerous bird species may utilize the region around the Estrella Substation site and along the 70 kV power line route to forage and/or nest, as indicated in Table 4.4-1. These include tri-colored blackbird, grasshopper sparrow, golden eagle, burrowing owl, Swainson's hawk, northern harrier, white-tailed kite, prairie falcon, bald eagle, loggerhead shrike, purple martin, and yellow warbler. The proposed Estrella Substation site generally would not provide suitable habitat for special-status bird species, but suitable foraging habitat (i.e., grasslands) exist adjacent to the substation site, southeast of Union Road. Additionally, special-status birds could use nearby transmission towers, and surrounding grasslands and oak woodlands to nest. Suitable foraging and nesting habitat exists for a variety of special-status bird species along the proposed 70 kV power line route, particularly the portions of the alignment bordering or passing through grasslands and blue oak woodlands.

Construction could disturb breeding and nesting birds in the area by generating noise, creating visual distractions, or having a direct impact on occupied nests (e.g., vegetation removal or nest abandonment) and burrows (used by burrowing owls). Uncovered pipes or conduit could be used as nesting habitat for birds, and if left uncovered, birds could become trapped. Removal and disturbance of vegetation and trees along the proposed 70 kV power line route could directly impact foraging and nesting habitat for special-status birds. There is a higher potential for impacts during the nesting/breeding season for birds because of the potential effects on reproductive success and young. Without implementation of preventative measures, these impacts would be significant.

Implementation of applicable APMs and Mitigation Measure BIO-1, which would supplement the APMs, would substantially avoid or reduce the potential for impacts to special-status birds.

Specifically, as described above, APM BIO-1 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would require pre-construction surveys, which would identify special-status bird species that may be present on or near work sites. If work is scheduled during the nesting season (January 15 through August 31), APM BIO-2 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would require that nest detection surveys be implemented corresponding with the species-specific buffers set forth in PG&E's *Nesting Birds: Specific Buffers for PG&E Activities* (Appendix E to the PEA). The standard buffer distances under these guidelines range from 300 feet for white-tailed kite to 2,640 feet for golden eagle. If active nests containing eggs or young are discovered during these surveys, the buffer would be implemented to preclude mechanical construction activities in these areas until the young have fledged. In addition to these APMs, an MRV is under consideration to route the 70 kV power line around a potential golden eagle nest located along the bank of Huer Huero Creek at Union Road. If this potential nest is determined to be occupied prior to construction, the Applicants would utilize the MRV to avoid potential impacts to the nest from constructing the new power line in close proximity. In the absence of the MRV, if the golden eagle nest is active, construction of the Proposed Project would occur near the nest location and could result in the permanent loss of this nest site, which would be significant. Overall, with implementation of the above-described APMs, and Mitigation Measures BIO-1 and the MRV, impacts to nesting birds and special-status bird species would be less than significant with mitigation.

Mammals

Several special-status mammals have the potential to occur within the vicinity of the Proposed Project, including pallid bat, Townsend's big eared bat, Monterey dusky-footed woodrat, Salinas pocket mouse, American badger, and San Joaquin kit fox (see Table 4.4-1). While the vineyards within the Estrella Substation site provide low to marginal habitat value for these species, it is possible that they could occur. The nonnative grasslands, blue oak woodlands, riparian woodland, and sandy wash along or near the 70 kV power line route provides better habitat for the special-status species. Oak trees and buildings in the vicinity of the substation site and along the power line route may provide suitable day or night roosts for pallid bat and Townsend's big-eared bat, and these species may forage relatively long distances from their roosts.

Direct impacts to special-status mammals that travel into an active construction area could occur from construction equipment and activities. Indirect effects, including displacement, could result from human presence and noise. Additionally, bat roosts could be destroyed through removal of trees along the 70 kV power line. Night lighting may also cause bats to become disoriented and alter their ability to avoid objects. As described previously, implementation of applicable APMs and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 will avoid or minimize the vast majority of potential impacts to special-status species, including special-status mammals. Implementation of APM BIO-1 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 will ensure that no special-status mammal individuals are present on the Proposed Project site work areas prior to construction, while APM BIO-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would ensure that special-status mammal species are not adversely impacted during initial ground-disturbing activities near sensitive areas. Additionally, APM BIO-4 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would provide that trenches and excavations at the construction site are fitted with escape ramps or covered overnight to prevent special-status mammal species from becoming entrapped and requires compliance with the County of San Luis Obispo's San Joaquin Kit Fox CEQA Mitigation Measures. Finally, APM GEN-1 would require that the Applicants prepare and administer a WEAP, which would ensure that construction workers are trained regarding special-status mammal species that could potentially occur on the site.

With respect to potential impacts on special-status bats, implementation of pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would identify potential roosts within trees along the Proposed Project 70 kV power line alignment. If any such roosts or bat individuals were identified, the Applicants would be required to notify and coordinate with CDFW. Additionally, APM AES-2 would require that construction lighting be selectively placed and shielded to minimize nighttime glare, which would minimize potential for this lighting to adversely affect bats. Impacts related to noise and human activity would be temporary, lasting only for the duration of the construction period. Overall, with implementation of the measures described above, impacts to special-status mammals are not expected to result in the loss of individuals that could affect local populations or each species presence within the region. Therefore, impacts to special-status mammals would be less than significant with mitigation.

Conclusion

Although much of the Proposed Project area is agricultural or urban/developed in nature (thus providing marginal habitat for special-status species), portions of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route border or pass through grasslands, blue oak woodland, riparian forest, and other habitats that are suitable for a variety of special-status species. Proposed Project construction activities would have potential to impact special-status species, both directly and indirectly; however, implementation of APMs and Mitigation Measure BIO-1and BIO-2, and the MRV, would reduce impacts to a level that is **less than significant with mitigation.**

Mitigation Measure BIO-1: Actions to Further Avoid and Minimize Impacts to Special-Status Species.

The additional mitigation actions below supplement the APMs included as part of the Proposed Project and as applicable to alternatives and the distribution components and are discussed separately by resource.

a. **Special-Status Plants:** Pre-construction surveys required under APM BIO-1 shall be conducted of all proposed work, plus a 100-foot buffer, within 1 year before commencement of ground-disturbing activities according to the *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities* (CDFW 2018 or current version). Floristic surveys shall be performed during the appropriate bloom period(s) for each species. HWT/PG&E or their contractor(s) shall work with the CDFW-approved qualified botanist to identify plants in the field by staking, flagging, or fencing to avoid, where feasible, special-status plants that are detected within the temporary or permanent work areas, or within a 100-foot radius of these areas.

b. **Biological Monitoring, Sensitive Habitat Areas, and Special-Status Species:** HWT/PG&E shall retain a CPUC-, USFWS-, and CDFW-approved biologist(s) to conduct pre-construction surveys for special-status plants and wildlife prior to initial vegetation clearance, grubbing, and ground-disturbing activities.

The pre-construction surveys shall be conducted no earlier than 30 days prior to surface disturbance. The results of the pre-construction surveys shall be documented by the approved biologist in a pre-construction survey report. The pre-construction survey report shall be submitted to the CPUC for review and approval

prior to the start of construction, and the results shall be submitted to USFWS and CDFW as required by any regulatory permits or approvals. The pre-construction study report shall include the following:

- Type, location, and size of project
- Date, time, weather, surrounding land uses
- Evaluation of type and quality of habitat
- Work description and methods for avoidance or minimization of ground disturbance, including biological monitoring during construction
- Anticipated impacts and proposed mitigation
- Map of location of work area

Sensitive habitat areas, plus a minimum 5-foot buffer for wetlands and waters of the U.S., that will be avoided by construction shall be fenced with orange safety fencing. Biological monitoring required by APM BIO-3 is extended to be necessary when each portion of previously undisturbed ground is disturbed, based on special-status species' requirements and the profession opinion of the qualified biological monitor; however, work near wetlands and waters of the U.S. will be monitored by a biological monitor over its duration.

In order to ensure that habitats are not adversely affected, the USFWS- and CDFW-approved biologist shall flag boundaries of habitat, which must be avoided. When necessary, the biologist shall also demark appropriate equipment laydown areas, vehicle turn around areas, and pads for placement of large construction equipment, such as cranes, bucket trucks, and augers. When appropriate, the biologist shall make office and/or field presentations to field staff to review and become familiar with natural resources to be protected on a project site-specific basis.

The USFWS- and CDFW-approved biologist shall be contacted to perform a pre-activity survey when vegetation trimming is planned in sensitive habitats. Whenever possible, vegetation in sensitive habitats, such as blue oak woodlands, shall be scheduled for trimming in non-sensitive times (i.e., outside of breeding or nesting seasons).

HWT/PG&E shall maintain a library of special-status plant species locations; known to HWT/PG&E, occurring within the project survey area. "Known" means a verified population either extant or documented using record data. Information on known sites may come from a variety of record data sources, including local agency HCPs, focused plant surveys, pre-construction surveys, or biological surveys conducted for environmental compliance of the Project. Plant inventories shall be consulted as part of pre-construction survey procedures.

In the event of the discovery of a previously unknown special-status plant, the area shall be marked as an environmentally sensitive area, and avoided to the maximum

extent practicable. If avoidance is not possible, HWT/PG&E shall consult with USFWS and/or CDFW, as appropriate, given the species' status.

Gravel bags shall be placed along the bottom of the fence to minimize erosion or sedimentation into nearby wetlands and/or waters of the U.S., and removed upon completion of construction. Any project related work scheduled to occur within the exclusion/buffer zone of the wetland shall be conducted when the wetland is dry as determined by the approved biological monitor. Best management practices (BMPs) referred to in APM BIO-3 indicate stormwater and water quality projection BMPs. Weekly biological construction monitoring reports shall be prepared and submitted to the appropriate permitting and responsible agencies throughout the duration of the ground-disturbing and vegetation-removal construction phase. Monthly biological construction monitoring reports shall be prepared and submitted to the CPUC throughout the duration of project construction to document compliance with environmental requirements. In the event that any work will occur beyond the approved limits, it shall be reported to HWT's and PG&E's compliance teams and the CPUC.

c. **Wildlife Protection from Work Areas:** In addition to the requirements of APM BIO-4, HWT/PG&E shall retain a CPUC-approved biologist to inspect all steep trenches and excavations during construction twice daily (i.e., morning and evening) to monitor for wildlife entrapment. Large/steep excavations shall be covered and/or fenced nightly to prevent wildlife entrapment. Excavations shall provide an earthen ramp to allow for a wildlife escape route.

If wildlife is located in a trench or excavation, the on-site biological resource monitor shall be contacted immediately to remove them if they cannot escape unimpeded. If the biological resource monitor is not qualified to remove the entrapped wildlife, a recognized wildlife rescue agency may be employed to remove the wildlife and transport them safely to other suitable habitats outside of the work area.

d. **Nesting Birds:** Activities conducted pursuant to APM BIO-2 shall consider the nesting bird season revised to be January 15 through August 31.

e. **San Joaquin Kit Fox:** HWT/PG&E shall implement the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures, including the following:

- Retain qualified biologist to conduct pre-construction survey of the project site and conducting a pre-construction kit fox briefing for construction workers to minimize kit fox impacts.
- Include kit fox protection measures on project plans.
- Require a maximum 25 mile per hour speed limit at the project site during construction.
- Cover excavation deeper than 2 feet at the end of each working day or provide escape ramps for kit fox.

- Inspect pipes, culverts, or similar structures for kit fox before burying, capping, or moving.
- Remove food-related trash from project site.
- If a kit fox is discovered at any time in the project area, all construction must stop and the CDFW and USFWS contacted immediately. The appropriate federal and state permits must be obtained before the project can proceed.

Mitigation Measure BIO-2: Compensate for Impacts to Special-Status Plant Species.

If avoidance of special-status plants is not feasible, HWT and PG&E shall implement measures to compensate for impacts to special-status plants. Compensation may be provided by purchasing credits at a CDFW-approved mitigation bank (provided at a minimum 1:1 ratio [mitigation to impact]), or through transplanting perennial species and collecting and dispersing seed of annual species (i.e., salvage and relocation) under the direction of CDFW. Where salvage and relocation is demonstrated to be feasible and biologically preferred by the CDFW, it shall be conducted pursuant to a CPUC- and CDFW-approved salvage and relocation plan that details the methods for salvage, stockpiling, and replanting, as well as the characteristics of the receiver sites. Monitoring of plant populations shall be conducted annually for 5 years to assess the mitigation's effectiveness. At the end of the 5-year monitoring period, the mitigation shall have met the following success criteria:

- A surveyed plant population size count roughly equal to or greater than the number of individuals transplanted (this total may include both transplanted individuals that have survived, as well as any additional supplemental plantings following the initial transplantation that have survived at least two growing seasons), and
- Less than 5 percent cover of invasive weeds within the restoration area.

Operation and Maintenance

As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description,* the Proposed Project components would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. The substation and power line would be inspected periodically, with any maintenance and repairs conducted on an as-needed basis. In general, operation and maintenance activities would have low potential to substantially impact special-status species. Vegetation management activities to maintain clearances would not be expected to substantially impact special-status plants, particularly since special-status plants have not been observed along the Proposed Project 70 kV route.

The transmission and power lines, towers and poles associated with the Proposed Project could cause electrocution and be collision hazards for birds. Raptors often perch or nest on transmission towers and are attracted to power poles in open habitats (e.g., grasslands, agricultural fields, deserts, pastures) where few natural perches exist (Avian Power Line Interaction Committee [APLIC] and USFWS 2005). In the APLIC's 1975 first edition of *Suggested Practices for Raptor Protection on Power Lines*, the text stated that, "…studies conducted in the western United States document electrocution losses of egrets, herons, crows, ravens, wild

turkeys and raptors, with 90% of the electrocution victims being golden eagles" (APLIC 2006). Electrocution occurs when a perching bird (typically large perching birds such as hawks and eagles) simultaneously contacts two energized phase conductors or an energized conductor and grounded hardware. As described in Section 4.4.3, numerous special-status birds, including golden eagle, are known to occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Project and could be vulnerable to electrocution. In addition to electrocution, birds could collide with towers, poles, or power lines, especially during the spring migration when strong winds and storms are more likely to force birds to fly at relatively low altitudes. Juvenile birds, in particular, may be inept flyers that can collide with power lines and structures, resulting in injury or death. Electrocution of special-status birds or collisions with power line facilities would be considered a significant impact.

As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description,* and the PEA, the conductors for the Proposed Project would be installed in accordance with raptor safety requirements. Specifically, the conductors would be specular (i.e., shiny) and more visible to birds upon initial installation, allowing them time to adjust to the new facilities. Additionally, the Applicants would implement the avian protection measures outlined in *Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines: The State of the Art in 2006* (APLIC 2006), which include solutions such as spacing phase conductors (e.g., greater than the width of birds' wingspans) such that electrocution hazards are minimized. To ensure that all potential hazards to special-status birds are minimized to the extent possible, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** also would be implemented, which would require that the Applicants incorporate guidance in *Reducing Avian Collisions with Power Lines: State of the Art in 2012* (APLIC 2012) and develop an Avian Protection Plan. Finally, as noted above under "Construction", the Applicants would implement an MRV prior to construction to avoid a potential golden eagle nest along Huer Huero Creek at Union Road if this nest is determined to be occupied or is expected to be used by golden eagles in future nesting seasons (based on prior observations and the species' nest site fidelity). This would reduce potential for juvenile eagles to collide with the power line close by the nest, or for eagles associated with the nest to be electrocuted from perching on the nearby power line or supporting structures.

Overall, it is worth noting that the area in which the Proposed Project facilities would be installed already includes large 230/500 kV transmission lines, as well as 70 kV and 21 kV lines. Thus, the additional risk to special-status species, including birds, would be incremental and not substantially new for this region. Operation and maintenance activities are not anticipated to substantially affect the local population resilience or presence of special-status invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals in the region due to the infrequent and limited nature of these activities. As such, the Proposed Project's impacts to special-status species during operation and maintenance would be **less than significant with mitigation.**

Mitigation Measure BIO-3: Minimize Impacts to Raptors and Other Avian Life from Transmission and Power Line Facilities.

HWT, PG&E, and/or their contractor(s) shall construct all aboveground power transmission and power lines to the APLIC's recommended publications: *Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines: The State of the Art in 2006*, and *Reducing Avian Collisions with Power Lines: State of the Art in 2012* (APLIC 2006, 2012). In conjunction with these publications, HWT and PG&E shall be responsible for creating an Avian Protection Plan that incorporates relevant project-specific guidelines found in APLIC's and USFWS' 2005 *Avian Protection Plan Guidelines*. As part of the Avian

Protection Plan development, HWT and PG&E shall work with USFWS to determine the need for installation of bird diverters in areas near known golden and bald eagle nests.

Operational construction or replacement work shall be avoided during the nesting bird season (January 15 to August 31) to the extent feasible. If infeasible, HWT and PG&E shall retain a CPUC-approved biologist to conduct a nesting bird survey of the surrounding 500-foot area to determine if any active nest is present. If an active nest is found, the biologist shall establish a no-disturbance nesting buffer until the nest is inactive. If operational construction activities must occur within this buffer, the biologist shall coordinate with CDFW and, as necessary, USFWS to determine buffer reductions and/or nest monitoring to avoid impacts to active nests.

Impact BIO-2: Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by CDFW or USFWS – *Less than Significant with Mitigation*

Construction

The proposed Estrella Substation site is currently in agricultural production and there are no riparian habitats or sensitive natural communities within the site. The Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route, by contrast, would span several riparian corridors, including those along Huer Huero Creek and other unnamed ephemeral drainages in the area (see Figure 4.4-1). Additionally, three vegetation communities observed in the vicinity of the Proposed Project power line route (blue oak woodland, Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest, and coastal and valley freshwater marsh) are considered sensitive communities under the City of Paso Robles General Plan (2011). Five vegetation communities (blue oak woodlands, central [Lucian] coastal scrub, Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest, coastal and valley freshwater marsh, and sandy wash) are considered sensitive natural communities by CDFW.

As described in Impact BIO-1, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid all riparian habitats. APM HYDRO-1 requires that permanent structures, staging and work areas, and access roads be sited/routed through uplands and outside of existing drainage features to the extent feasible. Prior to construction, sensitive aquatic features slated for avoidance would be identified in the field and clearly marked. As a result, riparian areas would be avoided and no direct impacts to riparian areas would occur as a result of Proposed Project construction. Similarly, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid central coastal scrub, Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest, coastal and valley freshwater marsh, and sandy wash vegetation communities; however, up to 0.13 acre of direct permanent impacts to blue oak woodlands would occur as a result of pole and tower installation, vegetation removal, and clearing activities. This would include up to three oak trees that would need to be removed for Proposed Project construction. Further, approximately 6.41 acres of blue oak woodlands would be temporarily affected from construction activities. As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description,* all areas temporarily disturbed by the Proposed Project would be restored to the extent practicable, following construction.

Although the three oak trees that would be removed as part of the Proposed Project construction would represent a small fraction of the trees in the area, given blue oak woodland's status as a sensitive natural community, the permanent and temporary impacts described above would be considered significant without mitigation. To mitigate these impacts,

Mitigation Measure BIO-4 would be implemented, which would require development and implementation of a Habitat Restoration Plan for impacts to blue oak woodland habitat. This would include replacement of permanently impacted blue oak woodland at a ratio of 1.1:1, including replacement of removed trees based on the tree diameter at breast height (dbh) (approximately 4.5 feet above grade). This mitigation is consistent with the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance and would reduce the impacts on blue oak woodland from the Proposed Project to a level that is less than significant.

In addition to the direct impacts, ground disturbance during construction of the Proposed Project could result in release of sediments off-site and stormwater runoff, resulting in indirect impacts to riparian areas and sensitive natural communities. Construction also requires the use of heavy equipment, fuels, lubricants, and solvents, which if released off-site, could impact these same areas. These potential impacts would be avoided or minimized through implementation of the SWPPP, which would be required per the Construction General Permit. Additionally, implementation of APM HAZ-1 would minimize potential for hazardous materials releases. Implementation of these measures would reduce indirect impacts to riparian habitat to a less than significant level. Overall, the construction-related impacts to riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities would be **less than significant with mitigation.**

Mitigation Measure BIO-4: Develop and Implement a Restoration Plan for Blue Oak Woodland Habitat.

HWT, PG&E, and/or their contractor(s) shall develop and implement a Habitat Restoration Plan to mitigate any temporary and permanent impact on blue oak woodland habitat. For any temporary impact, all disturbed soils and new fill in this habitat shall be revegetated with site-appropriate native species. For any permanent impact, blue oak woodland habitat shall be mitigated at a ratio of 1.1:1 (replacement to impact). Blue oak trees and valley oak trees that are removed shall be mitigated at a ratio that shall be determined based on the dbh of the tree, as described further below.

Oak trees in construction work areas shall be safeguarded by implementing the conditions stated in the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance, Section 10.01.090. Prior to construction, oak trees that have a dbh of 6 inches or greater requiring removal shall be documented. A description of the species of oak, dbh, estimated height, and general health of the trees to be removed shall be recorded. Replacement ratios of removed oak trees shall, at a minimum, be equivalent to 25 percent of the diameter of the removed trees, as described in Section 10.01.050 (E) of the City's Oak Tree Ordinance.

Blue oak woodland restoration or compensation may be completed at the work area, in the vicinity, or at a conservation bank with a service area that covers the Proposed Project or selected alternative. Revegetated or restored areas shall be maintained and monitored to ensure a minimum of 65 percent survival of woody plantings after 5 years.

Operation and Maintenance

As described in Impact BIO-1, operation and maintenance activities would be limited to infrequent inspections of the Proposed Project components, and as-needed maintenance and repair activities. Because there are no riparian habitats near the proposed Estrella Substation

site, no direct impacts to these habitats would occur during operation and maintenance of the substation. The Proposed Project's 70 kV power line has been designed to avoid riparian habitats and only minimal impacts to this habitat could occur from vegetation trimming to maintain acceptable clearances per G.O. 95. Herbicides associated with vegetation management and/or equipment and vehicles used during operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project may release hazardous materials (e.g., fuels, lubricants, and solvents) that may travel off-site and indirectly impact riparian areas; however, implementation of APM HAZ-1 would minimize potential for impacts.

Operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line could affect blue oak woodland and potentially other sensitive natural communities in the vicinity. Specifically, impacts to these sensitive natural communities could result from tree trimming and/or vegetation removal activities required under G.O. 95. As applicable, an approximate 10-foot radius would be maintained around new power poles, dependent on location and equipment installed. As such, mature vegetation that grows within 10 horizontal feet of any conductor within the easement would be trimmed. Additional impacts from operation and maintenance within sensitive natural communities could result from overland access, work and staging in blue oak woodland, and drift of herbicides. Implementation of APM HAZ-1 would prevent the introduction of hazardous materials into natural communities, which could result in the loss or degradation of these communities, and would reduce these potential impacts to a less than significant level. Overall, operation-related impacts to riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities would be **less than significant**.

Impact BIO-3: Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means – *Less than Significant with Mitigation*

The proposed Estrella Substation site is currently in agricultural cultivation and there are no jurisdictional waters on the site. The closest potentially jurisdictional water (Dry Creek) is located approximately 1,400 feet northeast of the site.

The 70 kV power line would cross a number of drainage features, including Huer Huero Creek; however, the proposed 70 kV power line has been designed to avoid direct impacts to these features. In accordance with APM HYDRO-1, permanent structures, staging and work areas, and access roads would be sited/routed through uplands and outside of existing drainage features to the extent feasible. Prior to construction, sensitive aquatic features slated for avoidance would be identified in the field and clearly marked as required by APM HYDRO-1. Thus, at this time, it is not anticipated that the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would directly impact State or federally protected wetlands, such as through direct removal or filling.

Indirect impacts to wetlands could potentially occur from construction activities due to erosion, sedimentation, fugitive dust, and accidental releases of hazardous materials. These impacts could be significant. As described in Impact BIO-1, however, these potential impacts would be avoided or minimized through implementation of applicable APMs (GEN-1, AIR-3, HAZ-1), as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**, and compliance with the Construction General Permit (i.e., implementation of the SWPPP). Potential indirect impacts to wetlands during operation and maintenance activities (e.g., herbicide drift from vegetation management

activities, accidental releases of hazardous materials) would similarly be reduced through implementation of APM HAZ-1. With implementation of these measures, substantial adverse impacts to State or federally protected wetlands would not occur during construction or operation. As a result, this impact would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Impact BIO-4: Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites – *Less than Significant with Mitigation*

The Proposed Project substation would be constructed on land that is being used as a vineyard and does not function as a significant movement corridor for wildlife. As such, placement of the substation at its proposed location would not interfere substantially with the movement of native resident or migratory wildlife species. Dry Creek, located approximately 1,400 feet northeast of the Estrella Substation site, provides a migration route for wildlife; however, this creek would not be directly impacted or altered due to the Proposed Project. Likewise, no wildlife nursery sites exist on the substation site and thus substation construction would not impede the use of any nursery sites.

The Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route (including the reconductoring segment) would be 10 miles long and would traverse a variety of areas and habitats, including crossing several drainages (e.g., Huer Huero Creek). While these drainages may act as wildlife corridors, the 70 kV power line would not substantially interfere with wildlife movement. The power line would not include fencing or other obstructive facilities and the poles would be spaced hundreds of feet apart. Thus, upon completion of the power line construction, wildlife would not be inhibited by the power line structures. Construction activities for the 70 kV power line could temporarily affect wildlife movement due to the ground-disturbing activities (clearing, excavation, grading), pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). However, these effects would last only for the duration of construction activities, which would be limited in any one area because the power line would be constructed linearly.

No wildlife nursery sites were identified during surveys of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line in 2016, subsequent surveys in 2019, and professional judgment exercised in the preparation of this document, but pre-construction surveys of the Proposed Project area per APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that no nursery sites have since been established. While the Salinas River, Huer Huero Creek, and other waterbodies in the vicinity could be used by native and migratory fish species (e.g., steelhead), these waterbodies would not be directly impacted by the Proposed Project and movement of fish and other wildlife within these waterbodies would not be affected. Operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project facilities would not include activities that could substantially interfere with wildlife movement or migration. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Impact BIO-5: Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance – *Less than Significant with Mitigation*

The CPUC has exclusive jurisdiction over the siting and design of electric transmission projects in California. As such, projects under CPUC jurisdiction, including the Proposed Project, are exempt

from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the Proposed Project would be consistent with the intent of local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources.

In accordance with the County of San Luis Obispo's General Plan, Open Space and Conservation Element (2010) goals to preserve and protect biological resources, Estrella Substation would be located in a vineyard, which contains limited habitat for most wildlife species, and is away from wetlands, water features and riparian areas. Likewise, the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would largely avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive biological resources, and has been designed to avoid wetlands, other waters and riparian areas. However, constructing 70 kV power line would require removal of approximately three oak trees and would result in permanent impacts to 0.13 acre of blue oak woodland habitat. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-4** would require replacement of permanently impacted blue oak woodland habitat and removed trees, which would be consistent with the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance. Additionally, the APMs, supplemented by Mitigation Measure BIO-1, would incorporate all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures (see text of Mitigation Measure BIO-1 and description of the measures in Appendix A).

Operation and maintenance of Estrella Substation would primarily occur within the substation footprint and along access roads and would not substantially conflict with local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources. Operation and maintenance of the 70 kV power line may require occasional tree trimming, should surrounding vegetation interfere with the power line and/or create a safety hazard. Temporary or permanent impacts to oak trees may occur to maintain minimum clearances and to prevent dead, rotten, or diseased portions of otherwise healthy trees from falling onto the power line. However, the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance allows tree trimming by public utilities under the jurisdiction of the CPUC, as necessary, to maintain a safe operation for facilities. Therefore, these activities would not conflict with local ordinances or policies protecting biological resources. Overall, this impact would be **less than significant with mitigation.**

Reasonably Foreseeable Distribution Components and Ultimate Substation Buildout

The reasonably foreseeable distribution components and ultimate buildout of the Estrella Substation would have reduced potential to substantially adversely affect biological resources, as compared to the Proposed Project components. In general, construction for the reasonably foreseeable distribution components and infrastructure projected for ultimate substation buildout would be minor in scale compared to the Proposed Project. The reasonably foreseeable distribution line segments would be installed along an existing unpaved road through agricultural fields and along existing roadways where there is low potential for suitable habitat. Likewise, components proposed as part of ultimate buildout of the Estrella Substation would be primarily located within the already-constructed substation site or immediately adjacent (additional 230 kV interconnection). Note that the routes of any additional distribution feeders and/or 70 kV power lines that could be established through ultimate substation buildout are not known, and thus any impacts associated with these facilities are speculative and not evaluated in this DEIR. Given the above, the potential for impacts to sensitive vegetative communities and special-status plant and wildlife species is generally much lower than that of the Proposed Project. Nevertheless, if species are determined present within temporary and/or permanent work areas, similar direct and indirect adverse impacts to biological resources may occur.

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species during construction of the reasonably foreseeable distribution and ultimate substation buildout components. Although special-status plants are not likely to be encountered, if such species are discovered within the proposed work area and cannot be avoided impacts would be significant. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3.

Because the reasonably foreseeable distribution components may not disturb greater than one acre of land and, therefore, may not be subject to the Construction General Permit, **Mitigation Measure HYD/WQ-1** would be implemented to require construction best management practices for erosion control. This mitigation measure would minimize potential off-site discharges that could adversely affect habitat or species; therefore, such indirect effects would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Like the Proposed Project, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components and ultimate substation buildout facilities would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. Based on the reasonably foreseeable distribution line segments routes through agricultural fields and within road right-of-ways, substantial vegetation trimming would not be needed to maintain clearances and these activities would not affect special-status plants or other species. Similar to the Proposed Project's transmission and power line components, the 21 kV distribution line segments would have potential to adversely impact raptors, such as golden eagle and other special-status bird species (e.g., electrocution), which would constitute a significant impact. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the distribution line operational construction activities avoid the nesting season to the extent feasible; that additional precautions are implemented if an active nest is found; the Applicants coordinate with state and federal wildlife agencies; and that APLIC guidelines for avian protection are followed. Other operation and maintenance activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The reasonably foreseeable distribution components and proposed infrastructure for ultimate substation buildout would not directly impact riparian habitat or other sensitive natural communities. As discussed in Section 4.4.3, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would be installed within agricultural areas and along existing roads and highways. Although the northern reasonably foreseeable distribution line segment would cross Dry Creek, the distribution line would be installed within the median of SR 46 (which crosses over Dry Creek via a bridge/culvert) and would not directly impact these waters or adjacent habitat. The reasonably foreseeable distribution components would not impact blue oak woodland or any other sensitive natural communities, as determined by City of Paso Robles and CDFW. Similarly, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would not directly impact State or federally protected wetlands. Indirect effects to riparian habitat, sensitive natural communities, and wetlands in the area (e.g., discharge of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; **Mitigation**

Measure BIO-1; and **Mitigation Measure HYD/WQ-1**. As mentioned above, components anticipated as part of ultimate buildout of the Estrella Substation would be primarily located within the already-constructed substation site and, therefore, would not be expected to impact riparian habitat, other natural communities, and/or State and federally protected wetlands. With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criteria B and C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The area in which the reasonably foreseeable distribution components and ultimate substation buildout facilities would be installed (largely agricultural in nature or the already-built substation site) would not be anticipated to serve as a migration corridor for wildlife, although it is possible that wildlife species could move through the area. As such, construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). However, these effects would be temporary and would only last for the duration of construction (approximately 19 weeks for the reasonably foreseeably distribution components). Once constructed, the distribution components would not impede wildlife movement, as the distribution poles would be spaced many feet apart and no fencing or other obstructive facilities would be installed. With respect to ultimate substation buildout, installation of additional transmission and distribution transformers and associated equipment within the 70 kV and 230 kV substations is assumed to result in relatively minimal additional permanent ground disturbance (from installation of the additional 230 kV interconnection in agricultural lands adjacent to the substation) and would not substantially increase the height of the substation. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The siting of the reasonably foreseeable distribution components and ultimate substation buildout components through agricultural areas and along existing roads would be consistent with local policies protecting biological resources, such as those in the County of San Luis Obispo and City of Paso Robles General Plans. As discussed under Impact BIO-5, the APMs and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** included for the Proposed Project (which would also be implemented for the distribution components) are consistent with the County's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Additionally, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would not require removal of any oak trees. Thus, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components and ultimate substation buildout would not conflict with local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources. As a result, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation.**

Alternatives

No Project Alternative

Under the No Project Alternative, no new substation or 70 kV power line would be constructed or operated. Thus, there would be no potential for adverse impacts to biological resources and there would be no changes to the existing baseline conditions. Therefore, **no impact** would occur for any of the significance criteria related to biological resources.

Alternative SS-1: Bonel Ranch Substation Site

Construction and operation of Alternative SS-1 would be similar to the proposed Estrella Substation. Thus, if species are determined to be present, similar direct and indirect adverse impacts to natural vegetation communities and special-status species may occur at the Bonel Ranch Substation Site. Similar to the Estrella Substation, the Bonel Ranch site is currently in agricultural production; however, the site is located relatively close (approximately 350 feet) to the Estrella River. Thus, there would be elevated potential for special-status species that frequent riparian habitat or that may use the Estrella River corridor for movement across the region to occur in the area of the Alternative SS-1 site.

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species during construction of Alternative SS-1, through similar avoidance and minimization methods discussed for the Proposed Project above. If special-status plant species are discovered within the proposed work area and cannot be avoided, implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Like the Proposed Project, Alternative SS-1 would require implementation of a SWPPP in accordance with the Construction General Permit, which would minimize potential indirect effects on species and habitat from construction-related pollutant discharges. Implementation of these measures would minimize potential direct and indirect effects on special-status species during construction to a level that is less than significant.

Like the Estrella Substation, the substation under Alternative SS-1 would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. While the operation and maintenance activities at the substation would not be anticipated to impact special-status species, the 230 kV interconnection would have potential to impact special-status birds (e.g., via electrocution or collision) if not designed properly, which would be a significant impact. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the 230 kV interconnection follow APLIC guidelines for avian protection. Implementation of this mitigation measure would reduce effects on special-status species during operation to a level that is less than significant. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Construction of the substation and 230 kV interconnection under Alternative SS-1 would not directly impact riparian habitat, as the substation and 230 kV interconnection would avoid the Estrella River riparian corridor. However, the alternative would require removal or trimming of up to approximately three oak trees. The substation site consists of ruderal and nonnative grassland communities, as the oak trees are too sparse to be considered blue oak woodland habitat. Alternative SS-1 would not affect central coastal scrub, Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest, coastal and valley freshwater marsh, and sandy wash vegetation communities. As a result, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant.**

No State or federally protected wetlands are located on the Alternative SS-1 site; therefore, no direct impacts (e.g., direct removal or filling) to such resources would occur. Indirect effects to wetlands present along and within the Estrella River channel (see Figure 4.4-1) (e.g., discharge

of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**; and compliance with the Construction General Permit. With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The Estrella River, which passes approximately 350 feet east of the Alternative SS-1 site, could be used as a movement corridor by native resident or migratory fish and wildlife species, including special-status species. While Alternative SS-1 would not directly affect the river or preclude movement of species along this route, construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement over short segments actively undergoing construction due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). As described in Impact BIO-4, these effects would be temporary, limited in scale, and would only last for the duration of active construction (total construction would be approximately 7 months). Once constructed, the substation would not substantially impede wildlife movement and the Estrella River corridor would remain largely unaffected. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. As a result, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of Alternative SS-1 would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the alternative would be consistent with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources. Specifically, by locating the substation outside of sensitive habitat areas, the alternative furthers the goals and policies in the County's General Plan to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources. As discussed in Impact BIO-5, the APMs that would be implemented for Alternative SS-1, as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1,** would include all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Because the Bonel Ranch site is located outside of the City of Paso Robles, the City's Oak Tree Ordinance would not apply, and the isolated impacts to oak trees would be less than significant. As such, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation.**

Alternative PLR-1A: Estrella Route to Estella Substation

Construction and operation activities required for Alternative PLR-1A would be similar to those described for the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line. As such, Alternative PLR-1A could result in similar adverse effects on biological resources from construction and operation activities. Relative to the Proposed Project 70 kV power line, Alternative PLR-1A passes primarily through lower density areas that consist of rural residential developments and agricultural areas dominated by vineyards; however, the route does pass through several isolated areas of blue oak woodland (PG&E 2017). No known golden eagle nests are present along the Alternative PLR-1A route, and the alternative would avoid the two nests identified along the Proposed Project 70 kV route (see Figure 4.4-5).

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species during construction of Alternative PLR-1A. If special-status plant species are discovered during pre-construction surveys and cannot be avoided, implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species

during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Like the Proposed Project, construction of Alternative PLR-1A would require implementation of a SWPPP in accordance with the Construction General Permit, which would minimize potential off-site discharges that could adversely affect habitat or species.

Like the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, Alternative PLR-1A would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. Some vegetation trimming would be required to maintain acceptable clearances per G.O. 95, but these activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status plants or species. As described in Impact BIO-1, the 70 kV power line under Alternative PLR-1A would have potential to adversely impact raptors, such as golden eagle and other special-status bird species (e.g., electrocution), which would constitute a significant impact. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the power line follow APLIC guidelines for avian protection. Other operation and maintenance activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The Alternative PLR-1A route would cross several major surface water bodies (i.e., Dry Creek, Huer Huero Creek), as well as several unnamed drainages. As noted above, the route also would pass through several isolated areas of blue oak woodland (PG&E 2017), which is considered a sensitive natural community by the City of Paso Robles and CDFW. Alternative PLR-1A could permanently impact 0.05 acre of blue oak woodland habitat. Construction activities could temporarily impact 5.15 acres of this sensitive natural community. These impacts would be considered significant. To mitigate the impacts to blue oak woodland, **Mitigation Measure BIO-4** would be implemented, which would require development and implementation of a blue oak woodland habitat restoration plan. This would include replacement of any removed trees and would reduce impacts on blue oak woodland from Alternative PLR-1A to a level that is less than significant. As a result, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As described above, the Alternative PLR-1A route would cross several drainage features that could be subject to State or federal jurisdiction (including Dry Creek and Huer Huero Creek) (see Figure 4.4-1). Alternative PLR-1A would also pass near or over several isolated pond and wetland features that could be protected under State or federal laws. However, the alternative would be designed to avoid direct impacts to wetlands in accordance with APM HYDRO-1. At this time, there is no reason to believe that State or federally protected wetlands or waters would be directly impacted by Alternative PLR-1A; however, if it were to become necessary to site a pole or work area within a wetland or waters, the Applicants would be required to obtain authorization from regulatory agencies and provide mitigation. Indirect effects to wetlands present along and within the drainages in the Alternative PLR-1A area (e.g., discharge of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**; and compliance with the Construction General Permit (SWPPP). With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Much of the length of the 70 kV power line route under Alternative PLR-1A would pass through agricultural areas that would not be anticipated to serve as a migration corridor for wildlife; however, as noted above, Alternative PLR-1A would cross several important drainages (e.g., Dry Creek, Huer Huero Creek) and would also parallel Salinas River, which could be used as a movement corridor by native resident or migratory fish and wildlife species. Construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement in these areas due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). However, these effects would be temporary, limited to short segments, and would only last for the duration of active localized construction (total overall construction would be approximately 34 months). Once constructed, the 70 kV power line would not impede wildlife movement, as the poles would be spaced many feet apart and no fencing or other obstructive facilities would be installed. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of Alternative PLR-1A would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the alternative would be consistent with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources. By locating Alternative PLR-1A largely outside of sensitive habitat areas, the alternative would further the goals and policies in the County's and City's General Plans to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources. As discussed in Impact BIO-5, the APMs that would be implemented for Alternative PLR-1A, as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1,** would include all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Alternative PLR-1A may require removal of some oak trees and would result in permanent and temporary impacts to blue oak woodland, as described above; however, impacts to oak trees would be mitigated through **Mitigation Measure BIO-4**, which would be consistent with the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance. As a result, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-1C: Estrella Route to Bonel Ranch, Option 1

Much of the Alternative PLR-1C route is identical to Alternative PLR-1A route; as such, this alternative would have similar potential to impact biological resources as that described for Alternative PLR-1A. One important difference is that in starting at the Bonel Ranch Substation Site (Alternative SS-1), Alternative PLR-1C would parallel the Estrella River at the outset, where there would be increased potential for special-status species to be present, including nesting birds, which may use the Estrella River corridor. In particular Alternative PLR-1C, MRV 1 would follow Estrella Road, which parallels Estrella River, for approximately 4.5 miles. Like Alternative PLR-1A, the Alternative PLR-1C route would pass through primarily agricultural areas, as well as some isolated areas of blue oak woodland (PG&E 2017). No known golden eagle nests occur along the Alternative PLR-1C alignment and the alternative would avoid the nests identified near the Proposed Project 70 kV power line route (see Figure 4.4-5).

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species during construction of Alternative PLR-1C. If special-status plant species are discovered during pre-construction surveys and cannot be avoided, implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous

materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Like the Proposed Project, construction of Alternative PLR-1C would also require implementation of a SWPPP in accordance with the Construction General Permit, which would minimize potential off-site discharges that could adversely affect habitat or species.

Like the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, Alternative PLR-1C would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. Some vegetation trimming would be required to maintain acceptable clearances per G.O. 95, but these activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status plants or species. As described in Impact BIO-1, the 70 kV power line under Alternative PLR-1C would have potential to adversely impact raptors, such as golden eagle and other special-status bird species (e.g., electrocution), which would constitute a significant impact. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the power line follow APLIC guidelines for avian protection. Other operation and maintenance activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The Alternative PLR-1C route would parallel Estrella River for a portion of its length and would cross Huer Huero Creek, as well as several unnamed drainages. As noted above, the route also would pass through several isolated areas of blue oak woodland (PG&E 2017), which is considered a sensitive natural community by the City of Paso Robles and CDFW. Alternative PLR-1C could permanently impact 0.19 acre of blue oak woodland habitat. Construction activities could temporarily impact 3.40 acres of this sensitive natural community. These impacts would be considered significant. To mitigate the impacts to blue oak woodland, **Mitigation Measure BIO-4** would be implemented, which would require development and implementation of a blue oak woodland habitat restoration plan. This would include replacement of any removed trees and would reduce impacts on blue oak woodland from Alternative PLR-1C to a level that is less than significant. As a result, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As described above, the Alternative PLR-1C route would cross several drainage features that could be subject to State or federal jurisdiction (including Huer Huero Creek) (see Figure 4.4-1). Alternative PLR-1C would also pass near or over several isolated pond and wetland features that could be protected under State or federal laws. However, the alternative would be designed to avoid direct impacts to wetlands in accordance with APM HYDRO-1. At this time, there is no reason to believe that State or federally protected wetlands would be directly impacted by Alternative PLR-1C; however, if it were to become necessary to site a pole or work area within a wetland or waters, the Applicants would be required to obtain authorization from regulatory agencies and provide mitigation. Indirect effects to wetlands present along and within the drainages in the Alternative PLR-1C area (e.g., discharge of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**; and compliance with the Construction General Permit (SWPPP). With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Much of the length of the 70 kV power line route under Alternative PLR-1C would pass through agricultural areas that would not be anticipated to serve as a migration corridor for wildlife; however, as noted above, Alternative PLR-1C would cross Huer Huero Creek and other drainages and would also parallel Estrella River and Salinas River, which could be used as a movement corridors by native resident or migratory fish and wildlife species. Construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement in limited portions of these areas while actively under construction due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). However, these effects would be temporary, affect limited portions of the route, and would only last for the duration of active construction (total construction duration of the overall route is approximately 33 months). Once constructed, the 70 kV power line would not impede wildlife movement, as the poles would be spaced many feet apart and no fencing or other obstructive facilities would be installed. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of Alternative PLR-1C would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the alternative would be consistent with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources. By locating Alternative PLR-1C largely outside of sensitive habitat areas, the alternative would further the goals and policies in the County's and City's General Plans to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources. As discussed in Impact BIO-5, the APMs that would be implemented for Alternative PLR-1C, as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1,** would include all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Alternative PLR-1C may require removal of some oak trees and would result in permanent and temporary impacts to blue oak woodland, as described above; however, impacts to oak trees would be mitigated through **Mitigation Measure BIO-4**, which would be consistent with the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance. As a result, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-3: Strategic Undergrounding (Option 1 & 2)

Alternative PLR-3 would underground the portion of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line that passes through the Golden Hill Industrial Park area and north along Golden Hill Road. While Alternative PLR-3B (Option 2) would follow the Proposed Project's 70 kV overhead power line route precisely, Alternative PLR-3A (Option 1) would divert slightly onto Wisteria Lane and then north on Golden Hill Road (see Figure 3-8 in Chapter 3, *Alternatives Description*). As such, the biological resources and habitat in this area are largely the same as that described for the Proposed Project 70 kV power line. Vegetation communities in this area include primarily nonnative grassland, as well as blue oak woodland along the northern portion of Alternative PLR-3 route (NEET West and PG&E 2017). Alternative PLR-3 does pass relatively close (500 to 1,700 feet) to Huer Huero Creek, including near the location of a known eagle nest (see Figure 4.4-5). In general, while construction of Alternative PLR-3 would include more excavation/ground disturbance (and associated potential impacts to biological resources) compared to the same segment of the Proposed Project's overhead 70 kV power line, the underground line once constructed would pose less of a hazard to special-status birds, as discussed further below.

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species

during construction of Alternative PLR-3. If special-status plant species are discovered during pre-construction surveys and cannot be avoided, implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Of particular importance for Alternative PLR-3, which would involve substantial trenching and excavation for installation of the underground line, APM BIO-4 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would require that trenches and excavations are fitted with escape ramps or covered at the end of the day to avoid entrapment of special-status species. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Alternative PLR-3 would be constructed along with the remainder of the Proposed Project and would require implementation of a SWPPP in accordance with the Construction General Permit, which would minimize potential off-site discharges that could adversely affect habitat or species.

Like the Proposed Project's overhead 70 kV power line, Alternative PLR-3 would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. Some vegetation trimming would be required to maintain acceptable clearances from overhead components (e.g., transition stations) per G.O. 95, but these activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status plants or species. The undergrounded power line under Alternative PLR-3 would have no potential to cause substantial adverse effects (e.g., electrocution, collision) to special-status birds; however, the transition stations and riser poles at each end of the underground line would include above-ground electrified components that could pose an electrocution hazard to birds, which would be a significant impact. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the above-ground power line components follow APLIC guidelines for avian protection. Other operation and maintenance activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As noted above, the Alternative PLR-3 route would pass fairly close to Huer Huero Creek, but it would not cross or directly impact this waterbody or associated riparian habitat. Based on current alternative design and vegetation mapping, Alternative PLR-3 would permanently impact 0.52 acre and temporarily impact 3.44 to 3.51 acres of blue oak woodland habitat, which is a sensitive natural community. These impacts would be considered significant. To mitigate the impacts to blue oak woodland, **Mitigation Measure BIO-4** would be implemented, which would require development and implementation of a blue oak woodland habitat restoration plan. This would include replacement of any removed trees and would reduce impacts on blue oak woodland from Alternative PLR-3 to a level that is less than significant. As a result, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-3 would not directly impact Huer Huero Creek. While the Alternative PLR-3 components would be installed primarily within the existing roadway, it is possible for construction of Alternative PLR-3 to temporarily or permanently impact two manmade drainage features in the area of Golden Hill Road. As described in further detail in Section 4.10, "Hydrology and Water Quality," these include a rip-rapped swale along the eastern side of Golden Hill Road that receives runoff from the Cava Robles RV Resort and a stormwater detention basin east of Golden Hill Road and south of the Cava Robles RV Resort driveway.

These features do not show connectivity to larger, named waterbodies, and thus would most likely not be considered waters of the U.S. or State. Per APM HYDRO-1, the alternative would be designed to avoid direct impacts to wetlands and waters to the extent feasible. Should the Alternative PLR-3 activities affect these drainage features and the features are determined to be jurisdictional, the Applicants would be required to obtain authorization from regulatory agencies and provide mitigation. Indirect effects to wetlands present along and within the drainages in the Alternative PLR-3 vicinity (e.g., discharge of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**; and compliance with the Construction General Permit. With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

While the underground 70 kV power line under Alternative PLR-3 would largely be installed within existing roadways, it would be located near Huer Huero Creek, which may be used as a movement corridor by native resident or migratory fish and wildlife species. Additionally, wildlife species could pass through the blue oak woodland and nonnative grassland habitats that occur along the alignments (i.e., Option 1 and 2), particularly the northern portions. Construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement in these areas due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). However, these effects would be temporary, limited to areas undergoing active construction, and would only last for the duration of active construction (total construction approximately 12 months). Once constructed, the underground 70 kV power line would not impede wildlife movement. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of Alternative PLR-3 would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the alternative would be consistent with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources. By undergrounding the 70 kV power line, the alternative would avoid or minimize impacts on special-status bird species (e.g., golden eagle), which would further the goals and policies in the County's and City's General Plans to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources. As discussed in Impact BIO-5, the APMs that would be implemented for Alternative PLR-3, as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1,** would include all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Alternative PLR-3 may require removal of some oak trees and would result in permanent and temporary impacts to blue oak woodland, as described above; however, impacts to oak trees would be mitigated through **Mitigation Measure BIO-4**, which would be consistent with the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance. As a result, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative SE-1A: Templeton Substation Expansion – 230/70 kV Substation

Construction and operation of Alternative SE-1A would be similar to the proposed Estrella Substation. Thus, Alternative SE-1A could result in similar direct and indirect adverse impacts to biological resources as described for the Estrella Substation. The Templeton Substation Expansion Site is currently undeveloped and supports nonnative grassland, and there are no waters or wetlands on the site (although there are two potentially jurisdictional drainage features in the area [south of the Templeton Substation] that drain to the Salinas River) (HWT

2019). Additionally, there is blue oak woodland habitat to the south of the site and a road-killed American badger was found along El Pomar Drive in the area of Templeton Substation (HWT 2019).

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species during construction of Alternative SE-1A. If special-status plant species are discovered within the proposed work area and cannot be avoided, implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Like the Proposed Project, Alternative SE-1A also would require implementation of a SWPPP in accordance with the Construction General Permit, which would minimize potential indirect effects on species and habitat from construction-related pollutant discharges. Implementation of these measures would minimize potential direct and indirect effects on special-status species during construction to a level that is less than significant.

Like the Estrella Substation, the substation under Alternative SE-1A would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. While the operation and maintenance activities at the substation would not be anticipated to impact special-status species, the 230 kV interconnection would have potential to impact special-status birds (e.g., via electrocution or collision) if not designed properly, which would be a significant impact. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the 230 kV interconnection follow APLIC guidelines for avian protection. Implementation of this mitigation measure would reduce effects on special-status species during operation to a level that is less than significant. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The substation under Alternative SE-1A would not directly impact riparian habitat or the drainage features to the south of the site. While the alternative site is characterized as nonnative grassland, there are several oak trees on the site that would require removal for construction of Alternative SE-1A. Alternative SE-1A would not directly affect any of the vegetation communities considered sensitive by CDFW (i.e., blue oak woodland, central coastal scrub, Central Coast cottonwood-willow riparian forest, coastal and valley freshwater marsh, and sandy wash). Because the individual oak trees on the site would not be part of a larger sensitive natural community, these impacts would not be significant and would not require mitigation. As a result, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant.**

As noted above, no State or federally protected wetlands or waters are located within the Alternative SE-1A site footprint, although there are two drainage features to the south of the site (HWT 2019); therefore, no direct impacts (e.g., direct removal or filling) to such resources would occur. Indirect effects (e.g., discharge of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) to the drainage features, which ultimately drain to Salinas River, would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**; and compliance with the Construction General Permit (SWPPP). With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The drainage features in the Alternative SE-1A site vicinity could be used as movement corridors by native resident or migratory fish and wildlife species, including special-status species. While Alternative SE-1A would not directly affect the drainage features or preclude movement of species along this route, construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). As described in Impact BIO-4, these effects would be temporary and would only last over limited segments for the duration of active construction (approximately 7 months). Once constructed, the substation would not substantially impede wildlife movement and would not represent a substantial change to existing conditions considering the presence of the existing Templeton Substation. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. As a result, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of Alternative SE-1A would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the alternative would be consistent with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources. Specifically, by locating the substation outside of sensitive habitat areas and adjacent to an existing substation, the alternative would further the goals and policies in the County's General Plan to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources. As discussed in Impact BIO-5, the APMs that would be implemented for Alternative SE-1A, as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1,** would include all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Because the Templeton Substation Expansion Site is located outside of the City of Paso Robles, the City's Oak Tree Ordinance would not apply, and the impacts to isolated oak trees on the site would be less than significant. As such, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation.**

Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

Alternative SE-PLR-2 would involve similar construction processes as the Proposed Project 70 kV power line and thus would have similar potential for adverse impacts to biological resources. The new 70 kV power line under Alternative SE-PLR-2 would be shorter (4.8 miles shorter) than the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line alignment, and the reconductoring segment would not be needed. As such, the construction schedule for Alternative SE-PLR-2 would be 9 months shorter than that for the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line. The Alternative SE-PLR-2 route would traverse agricultural areas and nonnative grassland (particularly the southern portions of the route near Templeton Substation), as well areas of blue oak woodland that line South River Road (PG&E 2019). Alternative SE-PLR-2 also would parallel and cross Spanish Camp Creek, as well as a seasonal wetland/potential vernal pool near the intersection of South River Road and Lothar Lane (PG&E 2019). Additionally, three golden eagle nests that were actively used in 2019 and prior years are located near Santa Ysabel Lake, approximately 0.25-mile from the Alternative SE-PLR-2 route.

Implementation of applicable APMs (BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-4, BIO-5, GEN-1, and AES-2) and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would avoid or minimize potential impacts to special-status species during construction of Alternative SE-PLR-2. If special-status plant species are discovered during pre-construction surveys and cannot be avoided, implementation of **Mitigation Measure BIO-2** would compensate for these adverse impacts. Potential indirect effects on habitat and species during construction (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, fugitive dust, release of hazardous

materials) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3 and Mitigation Measure BIO-1. Like the Proposed Project, construction of Alternative SE-PLR-2 also would require implementation of a SWPPP in accordance with the Construction General Permit, which would minimize potential off-site discharges that could adversely affect habitat or species.

Like the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, Alternative SE-PLR-2 would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. Some vegetation trimming would be required to maintain acceptable clearances per G.O. 95, but these activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status plants or species. As described in Impact BIO-1, the 70 kV power line under Alternative SE-PLR-2 would have potential to adversely impact raptors, such as golden eagle and other special-status bird species (e.g., electrocution), which would constitute a significant impact. This risk would be elevated for the Alternative SE-PLR-2 route given the presence of several known golden eagle nests within proximity to this route. To avoid or minimize these effects, **Mitigation Measure BIO-3** would be implemented, which would require that the power line follow APLIC guidelines for avian protection. Other operation and maintenance activities would not be expected to substantially affect special-status invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals. Overall, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As discussed above, the Alternative SE-PLR-2 route would parallel and cross Spanish Camp Creek at South River Road. The route also would pass through areas of blue oak woodland (PG&E 2019), which is considered a sensitive natural community by the City of Paso Robles and CDFW. Based on current alternative design and vegetation mapping, Alternative SE-PLR-2 would permanently impact 0.91 acre and temporarily impact 6.58 acres of blue oak woodland habitat. To mitigate the impacts to blue oak woodland, **Mitigation Measure BIO-4** would be implemented, which would require development and implementation of a blue oak woodland habitat restoration plan. This would include replacement of any removed trees and would reduce impacts on blue oak woodland from Alternative SE-PLR-2 to a level that is less than significant. As a result, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As described above, the Alternative SE-PLR-2 route would cross Spanish Camp Creek, as well as a seasonal wetland/potential vernal pool near the intersection of South River Road and Lothar Lane (PG&E 2019), which could be protected under federal and State law. However, the alternative would be designed to avoid direct impacts to wetlands in accordance with APM HYDRO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1**. At this time, there is no reason to believe that State or federally protected wetlands would be directly impacted by Alternative SE-PLR-2; however, if it were to become necessary to site a pole or work area within a wetland or waters, the Applicants would be required to obtain authorization from regulatory agencies and provide mitigation. Indirect effects to wetlands present along and within the drainages in the Alternative SE-PLR-2 area (e.g., discharge of sediment and pollutants, fugitive dust) would be minimized through implementation of APMs HYDRO-1, HAZ-1, GEN-1, and AIR-3; Mitigation Measure BIO-1; and compliance with the Construction General Permit (SWPPP). With implementation of these measures, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

The blue oak woodland and grassland areas along Alternative SE-PLR-2, as well as Spanish Camp Creek, could serve as migration corridors for wildlife. Construction activities may temporarily impede wildlife movement in these areas due to the ground disturbance, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and noise (which could frighten wildlife and cause them to avoid these areas). However, these effects would be temporary and would only last over limited segments for the duration of active construction (total overall construction would be approximately 33 months). Once constructed, the 70 kV power line would not impede wildlife movement, as the poles would be spaced many feet apart and no fencing or other obstructive facilities would be installed. Pre-construction surveys under APM BIO-1 and **Mitigation Measure BIO-1** would ensure that wildlife nursery sites are not present on the construction site that could be adversely impacted. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of Alternative SE-PLR-2 would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Nevertheless, the alternative would be consistent with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources. By locating Alternative SE-PLR-2 outside of sensitive habitat areas (i.e., largely following existing roads), the alternative would further the goals and policies in the County's and City's General Plans to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources. As discussed in Impact BIO-5, the APMs that would be implemented for Alternative SE-PLR-2, as supplemented by **Mitigation Measure BIO-1,** would include all of the County of San Luis Obispo's standard kit fox mitigation measures. Alternative SE-PLR-2 may require removal and/or trimming of some oak trees and would result in permanent and temporary impacts to blue oak woodland, as described above; however, impacts to oak trees would be mitigated through **Mitigation Measure BIO-4**, which would be consistent with the City of Paso Robles's Oak Tree Ordinance. As a result, impacts under significance criterion E would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative BS-2: Battery Storage to Address the Distribution Need

As described in Chapter 3, *Alternatives Description,* potential FTM battery storage sites are identified under Alternative BS-2 for illustrative purposes for this DEIR. FTM battery storage facilities could be constructed at the example FTM sites (1 through 8) or at other sites identified in the future. Biological effects resulting from FTM BESSs sited at the example sites are discussed here for illustrative purposes.

The illustrative FTM BESS sites considered as part of this analysis under Alternative BS-2 (see Figure 3-17 to 3-24 in Chapter 3*, Alternatives Description*) are generally located on vacant parcels within developed areas of Paso Robles or adjacent to existing substations in the County. There is potential for biological resources to occur on some of these sites; however, generally these sites do not include suitable habitat for special-status species. Additionally, no known wetlands or waters occur on any of the potential FTM sites, although the same drainage features described above for Alternative SE-1A would be located to the south of FTM Site 6. Nevertheless, if special-status species were present on the sites prior to construction, substantial adverse effects could occur due to the construction equipment and activities that would be required for installation of BESSs. Once constructed, the FTM BESSs under Alternative BS-2 would be operated remotely and no staff would be present on-site. Inspections of the facilities would occur periodically and maintenance and repairs would be conducted on an as-needed basis. The FTM BESSs would likely not include above-ground power lines that could pose an electrocution or collision hazard to special-status birds. No other operational activities associated with Alternative BS-2 would be expected to substantially affect special-status species.

For those FTM BESS sites considered under Alternative BS-2, construction would not directly impact riparian habitat, as there is no such habitat present on the FTM sites. Likewise, the FTM BESSs would not affect blue oak woodland or any other sensitive natural communities. There are several oak trees present on potential FTM Site 6, as well as on potential FTM Sites 3 and 7, which could require removal depending on the ultimate size of the BESSs. However, removal of these isolated trees would not constitute a substantive impact to a sensitive natural community. As noted above, no State or federally protected wetlands or waters are located on the illustrative FTM sites under Alternative BS-2, although there are two drainage features to the south of potential FTM Site 6 (HWT 2019). In general, the FTM sites themselves would not be expected to support significant wildlife movement and/or migration. Once constructed, the FTM BESSs would not substantially impede wildlife movement and would not represent a substantial change to existing conditions considering the presence of the existing substation infrastructure adjacent to several of the sites and/or the developed surroundings for other sites. As with the Proposed Project, the siting and design of FTM BESSs under Alternative BS-2 would be exempt from local regulations and permitting. Locating the BESSs outside of sensitive habitat areas and adjacent to other existing electrical infrastructure would further the goals and policies in the County's General Plan to avoid or minimize impacts on biological resources.

Overall, FTM BESS sites were selected for illustrative purposes only, BESS installations have not been designed and technologies have not been selected, and the specifics of Alternative BS-2 are unknown. Thus, project-level determinations cannot be made as impacts are speculative. Therefore, consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15145, no significance conclusion is provided for any of the significance criteria.

Alternative BS-3: Third Party, Behind-the-Meter Solar and Battery Storage

The BTM solar systems and BESSs under Alternative BS-3 would primarily be installed on and within existing homes and businesses in the greater Paso Robles area. In some instances, a property owner may install a solar system and/or BESS on an unused portion of the property, potentially resulting in new ground disturbance, but the size and scale of these facilities/activities would be expected to be minor. As a result, the BTM facilities under Alternative BS-3 would not be expected to substantially affect special-status species or habitats; riparian habitat or sensitive natural communities; jurisdictional waters or wetlands; wildlife movement corridors, or local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources.

Due to the fact that specific locations and characteristics of BTM resources procured under Alternative BS-3 are unknown at this time, project-level impact determinations are not possible as the impacts are speculative. Therefore, consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15145, no significance conclusion is reached under any of the significance criteria.