

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Proposed Project

Southern California Edison (SCE), a regulated California utility, filed an application with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on February 28, 2022, for a Permit to Construct (PTC) the Gorman–Kern River Transmission Line Rating and Remediation Project (Proposed Project). The application was deemed complete by the CPUC on September 20, 2023.

Southern California Edison (SCE) is proposing to rebuild portions of their existing subtransmission system located in Kern County and Los Angeles County. The Proposed Project would involve replacing conductor and support structures along the existing Banducci–Kern River 66 kV subtransmission line, Frazier Park–Gorman 66 kV subtransmission line, and Gorman–Kern River 66 kV subtransmission line as well as modifying existing substations facilities associated with those lines.

This Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) has been prepared by the CPUC, as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to inform the Commission in their decision on whether to approve the PTC. This IS/MND will also inform the local, State, and federal agencies that must consider whether to issue a permit or approval for the proposed project.

1.2 Environmental Review Process

1.2.1 CEQA Process and Lead Agency

This IS/MND has been prepared pursuant to:

- CEQA (Public Resources Code [PRC] § 21000 et seq.);
- Amended Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA (CEQA Guidelines) (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] § 15000 et seq.); and

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- Rule 2.4 of the CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure on CEQA compliance.

One of the purposes of CEQA is to ensure informed governmental decisions by identifying ways to avoid or reduce environmental damage through feasible mitigation or project alternatives and to provide public disclosure (CEQA Guidelines § 15002 (a)(1-4)). The CPUC is the Lead Agency for review of the Proposed Project under CEQA because it has the principal responsibility for determining whether to approve or deny the Proposed Project (i.e., it must decide whether to approve or deny the PTC). Under CEQA, an IS/MND is prepared if there is no substantial evidence that a project may have a significant effect on the environment. As the Lead Agency, the CPUC determined that an IS/MND was the appropriate level of environmental review for the Proposed Project because all potentially significant environmental impacts can be avoided or mitigated to less-than-significant levels.

The CPUC has prepared this IS/MND to examine the direct and indirect environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Project and feasible mitigation that would reduce or avoid the Proposed Project's potentially significant effects prior to making a discretionary decision on the PTC application. This IS/MND does not make a recommendation regarding the approval or denial of the project.

The purpose of the IS/MND is to:

- Inform both the CPUC's decision makers and the public about the environmental effects of the Proposed Project;
- Give the public an opportunity to comment on potentially significant environmental issues;
- Describe the existing environmental conditions near the Proposed Project;
- Identify and analyze each potentially significant effect on the environment resulting from the Proposed Project; and
- Identify feasible measures to mitigate each potentially significant effect.

1.2.2 Environmental Analysis

This IS/MND analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Project and identifies mitigation measures that could minimize or prevent those potential environmental impacts. The following environmental resources were

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considered in evaluating the potential effects of the proposed project, in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines Checklist Appendix G:

3.1 Aesthetics	3.11 Land Use and Planning
3.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources	3.12 Minerals
3.3 Air Quality	3.13 Noise
3.4 Biological Resources	3.14 Population and Housing
3.5 Cultural Resources	3.15 Public Services
3.6 Energy	3.16 Recreation
3.7 Geology, Soils, and Paleontology	3.17 Transportation
3.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions	3.18 Tribal Resources
3.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials	3.19 Utilities and Service Services
3.10 Hydrology and Water Quality	3.20 Wildfire
	3.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

1.3 Agency and Use of this Document

The following discussion summarizes the roles of the agencies and the intended uses of the MND.

1.3.1 CPUC Process

Pursuant to Article XII of the Constitution of the State of California, the CPUC is charged with the regulation of investor-owned public utilities, including SCE. This IS/MND includes descriptions and analyses of the environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed project. The IS/MND will be considered by the CPUC, in conjunction with other information developed in the CPUC's formal record, prior action on SCE's application for a PTC to construct, operate, and maintain the Proposed Project. Should the CPUC decide to adopt the IS/MND, it must find that (1) the document reflects the Lead Agency's independent judgment and analysis and (2) there is no substantial evidence that the Proposed Project would have a significant effect

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on the environment (CEQA Guidelines § 15074). The CPUC must also adopt a plan for mitigation monitoring and/or reporting when adopting an MND (see Section 4: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program).

1.3.2 State and Trustee Responsible Agencies

Several other State agencies may rely on the information in this IS/MND to inform their decisions over issuance of specific permits related to project construction, operation, and maintenance. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is a State Trustee Agency. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB) are State Responsible Agencies because they would issue discretionary permits for the Proposed Project.

1.3.3 Other Federal Agencies

Federal agencies with potential review and/or permitting authority include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

1.3.4 Other Permits and Approvals

No local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required because the CPUC has preemptive discretionary jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of SCE facilities in California. SCE must obtain all ministerial building and encroachment permits from local jurisdictions, and the CPUC's General Order (GO) 131-D requires SCE to comply with local building, design, and safety standards to the greatest degree feasible to minimize project conflicts with local conditions. The CPUC's authority does not preempt special districts, such as Air Quality Management Districts (AQMDs), or other State agencies or the federal government. SCE would participate in consultations with and obtain permits, approvals, and licenses from federal, State, and local agencies, as listed in Table 1.3-1, below.

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Table 1.3-1 Anticipated Permits and Approvals

Agency	Permit	Regulation	Protected Resource	Trigger	Application Process	Timing
USACE	404 Permit	Clean Water Act (CWA)	Waters of the United States (including wetlands)	Placement of dredge or fill material into waters of the U.S., including wetlands. If project impacts less than 0.5 acres, a nationwide permit (NWP) is typically issued.	NWP: Prepare a preconstruction notification (PCN) along with the draft Corps' application (Engineer Form 4345). Information in the PCN includes, but is not limited to: results of wetland delineation including areas of waters of the U.S.; temporary and permanent impacts to waters of the U.S. and discussion of avoidance; construction techniques, timeline, and equipment that would be used; special status species that potentially occur in the project area, and discussion of mitigation (if applicable) to replace wetlands	NWP: Takes approximately nine months from the date of application submittal (depending on level of impacts and level of consultation required by other agencies). Initial review is 30 days, after which application is deemed complete or additional information is requested.
				If project would impact more than 0.5 acre, a regional or individual permit may be required.	Regional or Individual Permit: Same requirements as NWP plus preparation and submittal of 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis, which identifies the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). Public notice also required.	Regional or Individual Permit: An additional 3 to 6 months may be required on top of the nine months expected for an NWP. A 30-day public notice is also required to inform the

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Agency	Permit	Regulation	Protected Resource	Trigger	Application Process	Timing
						public about the project before the Corps issues the permit.
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service	Special Use Permit	National Forest Management Act/NEPA	National Forest System lands	Use of federal lands managed by the USDA Forest Service for a transmission line. Typically constitutes a Major Federal Action, which in turn triggers NEPA analysis.	Special Use Permit Application: Prepare a special use application for consideration by the Forest Service. Prior to submitting a proposal, applicant is required to arrange a preapplication meeting at the local Forest Service office. Application typically includes project plan, operating plans, liability insurance, licenses/registrations, and other documents. If it is determined that NEPA is required, either an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be prepared. The NEPA document may be prepared jointly with the CEQA document.	Review of Special Use Permit applications is often dependent upon what level of NEPA analysis is required. An EA is typically 9 to 12 months, and EIS is generally 18 months. NEPA process may occur concurrently with CEQA process.
State Water Resources Control Board	Section 401 Water Quality Certification (WQC) and	Clean Water Act, Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act	Waters of the State	Potential impacts to state water quality standards	A request for 401 WQC is prepared and submitted by the RWQCB. Information required is	Preparation of the 401 WQC application is concurrent with preparation of Corps permit material.

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Agency	Permit	Regulation	Protected Resource	Trigger	Application Process	Timing
(SWRCB)/ RWQCB)	Section 402 NPDES permit				nearly identical to information required for 404 Permit.	Issuance occurs approximately three to six months from the time the application is deemed complete, depending on the level of impacts to waters of the state. Since RWQCB is also required to review CEQA documents for consistency, permits cannot be issued until a Notice of Determination (NOD) is filed.
	Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), Construction General Permit (CGP)	Clean Water Act	Waters of the U.S.	Required if a project will disturb 1 acre or more of soil.	The SWRCB CGP process requires developers to notify the SWRCB of the construction activity by providing a Notice of Intent, developing a SWPPP, and implementing water quality monitoring activities as required.	Once the Permit Registration Documents (PRDs) have been submitted to the SWRCB and the permit fee payment has been made, it takes approximately one week to obtain the Waste Discharger Identification Number

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Agency	Permit	Regulation	Protected Resource	Trigger	Application Process	Timing
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	Section 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA)	California Fish and Game Code (CFGC)	All perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral rivers, streams, and lakes in the state	Required if a project will: 1) substantially obstruct or divert the natural flow of a river, stream, or lake; 2) substantially change or use any material from the bed, channel, or bank of a river, stream, or lake; or 3) deposit or dispose of debris, waste, or other material containing crumbled, flaked, or ground pavement where it can pass into a river, stream, or lake.	The information required for the LSAA application is nearly identical to the information required by the Corps, but a separate application and questionnaire are required.	(WDID). Soil-disturbing activities may not commence until the WDID is obtained. The typical timeline for issuance of a LSAA is approximately 3 to 6 months from the time the application is deemed complete and depending upon the level of impact to CDFW jurisdiction. The initial review period for CDFW is 30 days, in which time the application will be deemed complete or incomplete. If the project is deemed incomplete, CDFG will provide a list of additional information necessary to complete the application. Once the

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Agency	Permit	Regulation	Protected Resource	Trigger	Application Process	Timing
						application has been deemed complete, CDFW has 60 days to review the information and prepare the draft agreement. Once the draft agreement is issued, the project applicant must review, sign, and return it to CDFW for the agreement to be valid. Additionally, CDFW is required to review the CEQA document for consistency and, therefore, the NOD must be filed before the LSAA will be issued.
Federal Agency-USACE and USFS	Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)	National Historic Preservation Act	Cultural Resources	Required if there is a federal undertaking. Requires federal agencies to consider the effects on historic properties of projects	Information on cultural and historical resources gathered during the draft CEQA/NHPA document preparation. Submit Technical Report to Federal Agency(s).The information is then	Once SHPO has received the federal agencies determination, it has approximately 30 days to comment

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Agency	Permit	Regulation	Protected Resource	Trigger	Application Process	Timing
				they carry out, assist, fund, permit, license, or approve. If a federal or federally assisted project has the potential to affect historic properties, a Section 106 review is required.	evaluated by the federal agency for Section 106 compliance. Federal agency makes a determination of effects and consults with tribes and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to obtain concurrence on determination of effects. If an adverse effect is identified, agency will resolve those effects through continual consultation and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).	and may request additional information. If the project is determined to have an adverse effect to historic properties, resolution of effects via an MOA can take 6 or more months.

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1.3.5 Comments on the Draft IS/MND

This Draft IS/MND is being circulated to local, State, and federal agencies and to interested individuals who wish to review and comment on the report. Written comments may be submitted to the CPUC during the 30-day public review period. Written comments on the Draft IS/MND will be accepted via regular mail, fax, and e-mail. All comments received will be addressed in the Final IS/MND. Written comments should be submitted by U.S. mail, fax, or email to:

California Public Utilities Commission
Attn: Gorman-Kern River 66kV Project

c/o Panorama Environmental, Inc.
717 Market Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94103

KernRiverTLRR@panoramaenv.com

1.4 Document Organization and Reader's Guide

This IS/MND has been organized into the following sections:

- **Acronyms and Abbreviations.** This section follows the Table of Contents.
- **Section 1: Introduction.** Outlines the CEQA process and agency use of this IS/MND.
- **Section 2: Project Description.** Provides an in-depth description of the Proposed Project, including construction details and methods.
- **Section 3: Environmental Analysis.** Provides a discussion of existing conditions and analysis of potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project and identifies mitigation measures to reduce potentially significant effects.
- **Section 4: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.** Provides a discussion of the CPUC's Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) requirements for the project if approved by the CPUC. This section includes mitigation measures that SCE must implement as part of the

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project, actions required to implement these measures, monitoring requirements, and timing of implementation for each measure.

- **Section 5: Report Preparation.** Identifies the preparers of the IS/MND and the public agencies consulted during preparation of the IS/MND.
- **Appendix A: Project Detail Maps.** Provides detailed locations of all proposed project components on an aerial map base, including all unpaved access routes and staging yards.
- **Appendix B: Magnetic Field Management Plan.** Provides evaluation of magnetic fields along the Proposed Project alignment and possible magnetic field management measures.
- **Appendix C: Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Supporting Information.** Provides the calculation spreadsheets and summary tables for emissions modeling as well as the Health Risk Assessment.
- **Appendix D: Biological Resources Supporting Information.** Includes special-status species tables and figures.
- **Appendix E: Cultural Resources Supporting Information.** Provides records of communication with Native American tribes and maps of cultural resource survey boundaries.