
MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert Fletcher, San Diego Gas & Electric

FROM: Melissa Busby, Busby Biological Services, Inc.

DATE: October 27, 2014

RE: Response to Data Request 104: Provide GIS data for the burrowing owl (BUOW, *Athene cunicularia*) habitat assessment.

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has identified data needs for the proposed San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project (Proposed Project), Application No. 14-04-011. Data Request 104 states the following:

“Provide [Geographic Information Systems (GIS)] data for the burrowing owl (BUOW, *Athene cunicularia*) habitat assessment.

The [Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA)] states, ‘The burrowing owl has a moderate potential to nest and winter within the [Biological Survey Area (BSA)]. The BSA is within the known range of this species but there is limited suitable habitat present.’

Provide GIS data that identify the locations of potential BUOW habitat in the BSA and an explanation as to how those locations were determined. In addition, CDFW has requested protocol surveys for BUOW. Protocol surveys will need to be conducted by SDG&E in the spring. The BUOW survey report needs to be provided to CPUC within 30 days of survey completion.

To respond to this data request, Busby Biological Services, Inc. (BBS) will:

- Conduct a focused BUOW habitat assessment within and adjacent to the Proposed Project footprint
- Provide GIS data that identify the locations of potential BUOW habitat
- Provide a BUOW habitat assessment summary report
- Address the other comments in the data request

Given the time constraints provided for response to this data request and the level of effort required to complete this focused habitat assessment, BBS has prepared this memorandum to outline the methods that will be used for the focused BUOW habitat assessment and summary report preparation and to provide a schedule indicating when the

focused BUOW habitat assessment will be performed and when the summary report will be submitted.

This information is intended to supplement the information provided in the Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project Biological Technical Report (BTR) prepared by BBS (March 2014). For additional information pertaining to the biological resources associated with the Proposed Project, such as the project description, please refer to the BTR.

METHODS

BBS will perform a focused BUOW habitat assessment and prepare a BUOW habitat assessment summary report. The methods that will be used for each of these are described, below.

BUOW Habitat Assessment

To better understand the historical BUOW occurrences within the vicinity of the BSA, BBS will obtain historical location data for BUOW within the BSA and a 5-mile buffer around the BSA. BBS will also perform a literature review of pertinent resources that will provide additional information on BUOW use of the Proposed Project vicinity.

The purpose of the BUOW habitat assessment will be to evaluate the Proposed Project area for potential BUOW habitat while also evaluating the probability for the Proposed Project to impact the species should it be detected. BBS will use the habitat assessment methods outlined in the most recent BUOW protocol from California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), titled *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* and dated March 7, 2012. Following this protocol, BBS will conduct a focused BUOW habitat assessment within the BUOW habitat assessment area, which will include the Proposed Project footprint plus a 500-foot buffer around the Proposed Project footprint. For areas within the 500-foot buffer that are inaccessible during the BUOW habitat assessment, BBS will utilize binoculars to assess these areas for their potential to support the BUOW. Because the BUOW protocol requires that the habitat assessment be conducted within the Proposed Project footprint plus a 500-foot buffer area, the BUOW habitat assessment area will be larger than the BSA for the Proposed Project, which included an approximately 500-foot wide survey corridor.

BBS will use high-resolution field maps that clearly depict the BUOW habitat assessment area. Areas that do not provide potential habitat for BUOW will be excluded in the field, and the rationale behind classifying these areas as unsuitable will be recorded. BBS will conduct the focused habitat assessment in all areas that could potentially provide suitable habitat for the BUOW. For areas with potentially suitable habitat, BBS will note the criteria that make the habitat suitable, evaluate the context of the habitat to determine the potential for the BUOW to occur there, and assess the potential for the project to impact the species should it occur there.

Data collected in the field will be digitized by a GIS Analyst and will be used to produce maps and report figures that clearly delineate the suitable BUOW habitat located within the BUOW habitat assessment area.

BUOW Habitat Assessment Summary Report

BBS will prepare a BUOW habitat assessment summary report that provides a detailed description of the methods used for habitat assessment. BBS will present the results of the habitat assessment through both figures and a written description. At a minimum, the BUOW habitat assessment summary report will provide the following information, per the CDFW BUOW Protocol Guidelines:

- A brief description of the Proposed Project
- A brief summary of the Proposed Project setting
- Appropriate maps and figures to illustrate the results of the surveys
- An analysis of historical BUOW use/occurrences within the project vicinity
- A description of the suitable habitat, including a generalized description of vegetation height, density, and other relevant information for the BUOW habitat assessment area
- The location of any owls or sign detected during the habitat assessment
- A general description of burrow locations observed during the habitat assessment

The results of the focused BUOW habitat assessment will be used to determine if additional surveys for the species may be needed for the Proposed Project.

SCHEDULE

The background research will be performed during the week of November 3, 2014.

The focused habitat assessments will be conducted during the weeks of November 10 and 17, 2014, weather permitting.

The BUOW habitat assessment survey summary report will be provided within 30 days of the habitat assessment completion.