

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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The Imperial Irrigation District (IID) and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) to assess the environmental effects of constructing, operating, and maintaining a new substation/switching station on the north side of Hobsonway west of the Blythe Power Plant, approximately 4.5 miles west of Blythe, California, to the Southern California Edison Company's (SCE's) Devers Substation, approximately 10 miles north of Palm Springs, California, a distance of approximately 118 miles. The Proposed Project will operate at either 230-kV or 500-kV and will provide increased transmission line capabilities from the proposed substation/switching station on Hobsonway to the Devers Substation to meet transmission requests.

IID is the State of California lead agency for the preparation of this EIS/EIR in compliance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et. seq.), CEQA implementing guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR] Title 14, Section 15000 et. seq.), and IID's Rules and Regulations to Implement CEQA.

BLM is the federal lead agency for the preparation of this EIS/EIR in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulation for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500 – 1508), and the BLM NEPA guidance handbook (H-1790-1).

The purpose of this document is to inform agency decision-makers and the general public about the potential adverse and beneficial environmental impacts of the Proposed Project and alternatives, and recommend mitigation measures that would reduce the significant adverse impacts to the maximum extent possible, and, where feasible, to a less than significant level. The information in an EIS or EIR does not dictate an agency's final determination on a project. However, under CEQA (Public Resources Code Section 21002.1), the state or local agency must adopt feasible mitigation measures or alternatives within its jurisdiction if they would avoid significant environmental effects identified for the Proposed Project.

### 1.1 Proposed Project (Agency Preferred Alternative) Overview

The Proposed Project includes the construction and operation of a new substation/switching station and an approximately 118-mile transmission line (either double-circuit, 230-kV or single-circuit, 500-kV). The new substation/switching station would be located near Blythe, California, and the transmission line would extend from this location to the Devers Substation north of Palm Springs, California. As shown on Figure ES-1, the Proposed Project transmission line alignment would follow a generally east/west alignment from the new substation/switching station to the Devers Substation. The 230-kV transmission line option under consideration would utilize steel lattice structures for much of its alignment, however, single-steel pole structures would be used in agricultural areas to minimize disturbance of agricultural land. The 500-kV transmission line option under consideration would use steel lattice structures along its entire route. The Proposed Project transmission line would be located along existing transmission line rights-of-way for much of its alignment, and would utilize existing access roads, requiring a limited amount of

new access road construction. Substation/switching station construction would be necessary at a new facility on Hobsonway, approximately 4.5 miles west of Blythe, and substation equipment modifications would be necessary at the existing Devers Substation.

The "agency's preferred alternative" is the alternative which the BLM believes would fulfill its statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical and other factors. Based on the BLM's evaluation of Proposed Action and Alternatives, the BLM identified the Proposed Project as the "Agency Preferred Alternative."

## **1.2 Alternatives to the Proposed Project**

Four alternatives to the Proposed Project are being considered, and are analyzed in this EIS/EIR: 1) Alternative A (a second northern route alternative); 2) Alternative B (a southern route alternative that would include upgrading and use of certain existing transmission facilities); 3) Alternative C (a third northern route alternative with an alignment generally parallel to and north of the Alternative A alignment); and 4) the No Action Alternative. These alternatives, and their alignments, are shown on Figure ES-1.

Alternative A would be similar in design and structure to the Proposed Project. This alternative would include the construction of a new substation/switching station on the north side of Hobsonway, west of the Blythe Power Plant near Blythe, and would include the construction of an approximately 119-mile long transmission line to the Devers Substation that would follow the same alignment as the Proposed Project with the exception being that the Alternative A route would follow Route Option A-2 west of Desert Center. Option A-2 would shift the alignment to the south to parallel the north side of the Devers-Palo Verde Transmission Line. As with the Proposed Project, the Alternative A transmission line configurations under consideration include both a double-circuit, 230-kV configuration and a single-circuit, 500-kV configuration.

Alternative B includes the construction of a new substation/switching station in the same location as that of the Proposed Project, and would interconnect this new facility with the Midway Substation (near Niland, California) with a new double-circuit, 230-kV transmission line that would generally follow the alignment of State Route 78 (SR-78) south from the new substation/switching station to the southern portion of the Chocolate Mountains before turning generally north and continuing to the Midway Substation. This transmission line would be approximately 79 miles long. In addition to these new facilities, Alternative B would require upgrading a total of approximately 35 miles of existing transmission lines south of the Devers Substation, and upgrading substation facilities at the Midway, Coachella, Mirage and Devers Substations.

Alternative C includes the construction of a new substation/switching station in the same location as that of the Proposed Project, and would interconnect this new facility with the Devers Substation in a manner similar to that of the Proposed Project. Alternative C would include the construction of a new transmission line (either double-circuit, 230-kV or single-circuit, 500-kV) that would be approximately 117 miles in length and would follow a similar alignment, although slightly to the north, of the Proposed Project alignment for much of its route.

As required by both NEPA and CEQA, no project alternative is also considered in the analysis in this document. Additional alternatives were also considered during the initial alternatives formulation and screening process. These alternatives, and the reasons for their elimination from further consideration, are discussed in Section 2.7.

### **1.3 Proposed Action Overview**

The Proposed Project and alternatives would be located within the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA), a planning area under jurisdiction of the BLM. The CDCA Plan and amendments provide planning guidelines and land use requirements on BLM land within the CDCA. The CDCA Plan identifies designated utility corridors in which more intensive development of linear utilities is generally considered consistent with the CDCA Plan. Figure ES-2 shows designated utility corridors within the CDCA.

Because the project would be located within areas under BLM jurisdiction, construction and operation of the project requires BLM to authorize a Right-of-Way Grant. The Proposed Project and Alternatives A and C would be located within CDCA Plan-designated utility corridors, and a Right-of-Way Grant for the construction and operation of the Proposed Project or Alternatives A and C would be consistent with the CDCA Plan. Alternative B, however, would require the construction of a transmission line within the CDCA, but in areas outside of designated utility corridors. As such, for the BLM to issue a Right-of-Way Grant for construction and operation of Alternative B, an amendment to the CDCA Plan would be required or an exemption to the CDCA Plan would need to be authorized by the BLM.

The term “Proposed Action” is used within this document to reference the actions that would need to be taken by the BLM for the Proposed Project to be developed. The Proposed Action, therefore, includes the BLM’s issuance of a Right-of-Way Grant for the construction and operation of an approximately 118-mile transmission line as described in Section 2 of this EIS/EIR. Similarly, alternatives to the Proposed Action consist of the actions that would need to be taken by the BLM for Alternative A, B, or C to be constructed. Alternatives to the Proposed Action are associated with the alternatives to the Proposed Project and, therefore, include:

- Issuance of a Right-of-Way Grant for construction of an approximately 119-mile transmission line between Blythe and the Devers Substation (Alternative A as described in Section 2).
- An amendment to or exemption from the CDCA Plan and a subsequent Right-of-Way Grant issuance for the construction and operation of an approximately 79-mile transmission line between Blythe and the Midway Substation (Alternative B as described in Section 2).
- Issuance of a Right-of-Way Grant for construction of an approximately 117-mile transmission line between Blythe and the Devers Substation (Alternative C as described in Section 2).

### **1.4 Project Purpose and Need**

The *California Energy Outlook: Electricity and Natural Gas Trends Report* (CEC 2001) describes the energy supply and demand trends of the past decade to provide perspective on current events. This report provides an overview of expected developments in the near future

and addresses the long-term demand outlooks through 2010. The energy trend considers both electricity and natural gas developments. The report also examines electricity demand, load management, and natural gas infrastructure developments. The report estimates that demand for electrical power in the IID service area will increase at a rate of 20 to 30 megawatts (MW) annually. The report also states that California's peak electricity demand will continue to grow at about two percent per year on average.

New generation facilities have been completed in the region to the north and east of IID's service area that may provide a portion of IID's current and future requirements. These include the Griffith Energy Project in Kingman, Arizona and the South Point Energy Project north of Parker, Arizona. The Blythe Energy Project, west of Blythe, California, is under construction and will begin operation by April 2003. In addition, IID has received requests for transmission and interconnection service that may utilize the proposed transmission project.

Transmission access is the main constraint to utilizing these new generation sources to meet the increased demand for electrical power in IID's service area. IID's primary transmission system includes 92-kV, 161-kV, and 230-kV transmission lines with direct interconnections at Mirage, Imperial, Coachella Valley, Devers, and Blythe Substations. Presently, IID's access to the Western Area Power Administration (Western) transmission grid to the northeast is an existing 161-kV transmission line from the existing Blythe Substation to Niland. This existing transmission line is expected to be operating at or near its maximum capacity by the end of 2002.

The basic objectives of the Proposed Project are to:

**Objective 1:** Ensure access to competitive generation sources that will allow IID to minimize the market price spikes, which adversely effect the region's customers.

**Objective 2:** Provide improved transmission access to new generation sources (e.g., the Griffith Energy Project, the South Point Energy Project, and the Blythe Energy Project) to meet the increased demands for electrical power in IID's service area and to respond to transmission service and interconnect requests.

**Objective 3:** Enhance system reliability by providing additional transmission line capacity to the Coachella Valley load center and, thus, reduce loading on other transmission lines.

**Objective 4:** Improve operational flexibility during normal as well as contingency situations.

IID proposes to satisfy these objectives by constructing and operating a new transmission line from IID's proposed Hobsonway Substation, near Blythe, California, to the existing Devers Substation, near Palm Springs, California. Operating voltages may be either 230-kV or 500-kV. The optimum operating voltage will be based on the results of system studies that are currently underway.

## **1.5 Consultation and Coordination**

### **1.5.1 NEPA Scoping**

The scoping process for the Proposed Action was designed to solicit input from the public; from federal, state, and local agencies; and from other interested parties on the scope of issues that should be addressed in the Draft EIS/EIR. The scoping process is also intended to identify significant issues related to the Proposed Action.

Since the publication of the first Notice of Intent (NOI), the name of the proposal has been changed to the California Desert Southwest Transmission Project. Publication of the Draft and Final EIS will be under that name. In addition, the Proposed Project and alternatives has been revised to address comments and concerns raised during the scoping process. The scoping process for the Proposed Action is described below.

A Revised NOI describing the Proposed Action and IID's modified Proposed Project was published in the Federal Register on Tuesday, August 13, 2002 (Volume 67, Number 156, pages 52737-52738) announcing the preparation a joint EIS/EIR addressing a proposed 230kV or 500kV transmission line project and possible CDCA Plan Amendment. In accordance with NEPA, a 30-day comment period was provided for the NOI. Two public scoping meetings were held on the following dates: 1) August 14, from 7-9 p.m., at the Blythe City Council Multipurpose Room, Blythe, California; and 2) August 15, from 7-9 p.m., at the IID Board Room, La Quinta, California. A copy of the Revised NOI is provided in Appendix A. Comments received in response to the NOI are provided in Appendix B.

A NOI was published in the Federal Register on Monday, March 26, 2001, (Volume 66, Number 58, pages 16485-16486) announcing the preparation of a CDCA Plan Amendment and EIS for the IID's Proposed New 230-kV "BN-BS" Transmission Line Project. Two public scoping meetings were held on the following dates: 1) March 28, from 7-10 p.m., at the IID Board Room, La Quinta, CA, and 2) March 29, from 7-10 p.m., at the Blythe City Council Multipurpose Room, Blythe, CA. A copy of the NOI is provided in Appendix C. Comments received in response to the NOI are provided in Appendix D.

### **1.5.2 CEQA Notification**

For the IID's Proposed 230-kV "BN-BS" Transmission Line Project a Notice of Preparation (NOP) was sent to the State Clearinghouse and noticed for public and agency review on Tuesday, April 24, 2001 (SCH #2001041105). Since the publication of the NOP, the name of the proposal has been changed to the Desert Southwest Transmission Project. Publication of the Draft and Final EIR will be under that name. In addition, the Proposed Project has been revised to address comments and concerns raised during the scoping process. A copy of the NOP is provided in Appendix C. Comments received in response to the NOP are provided in Appendix D.

As discussed above, IID subsequently modified its Proposed Project and issued a Revised NOP on July 31, 2002. In accordance with CEQA, a 30-day comment period on the Revised NOP was provided. A copy of the Revised NOP is provided in Appendix A. Comments received in response to the NOP are provided in Appendix B.

### **1.5.3 Agency Coordination**

The BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have coordinated with IID representatives throughout the process of collecting information for this environmental analysis.

## **1.6 California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment Process**

### **1.6.1 Regulatory Requirements**

Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) states: “The Secretary shall, with public involvement ... develop, maintain, and when appropriate, revise land use plans which provide by tracts or areas for the use of the public lands” (43 United States Code (USC)1712). The regulations for making and modifying land use plans and planning decisions are found in 43 CFR 1600. The proposed plan amendments must adhere to regulations set forth in 43 CFR 1610, Resource Management Planning. These regulations require an interdisciplinary approach to be used in amending resource plans, and require that the disciplines of the preparers be appropriate to the values involved and the issues identified for the amendment. Such amendments must be analyzed through the NEPA process, enabling public and other federal, state, and local government agencies opportunities to participate in and comment on the preparation of amendments. The analysis and public involvement for the proposed plan amendments must coincide, to the extent possible, with the public notices, hearings, and comment periods of the NEPA/CEQA process for the Proposed Action.

### **1.6.2 Need for Plan Amendments**

In 1980 when the CDCA Plan was issued, utility corridors 2 to 5 miles wide were designated, mostly along existing pipelines and transmission lines (BLM 1980). Subsequently, several additional corridors were designated. The intent of these designations is to limit future disturbance and land use designation for utilities to previously disturbed areas in existing utility corridors. By the legislation enabling the CDCA Plan, a plan amendment is required to allow an exception to the plan's designated utility corridors.

An amendment to the CDCA Plan would not be necessary for the Proposed Project or Alternatives A and C, because the transmission lines would be located within a designated utility corridor on BLM land. However, an amendment to the CDCA Plan would be necessary for Alternative B because the Alternative B transmission line would not be located entirely within a designated utility corridor.

If the CDCA Plan is not amended, the BLM may authorize installation of a transmission line, 161-kV or larger, within existing corridors only, or the BLM may deny the project if the existing corridor option does not prove feasible. An alternative that must be considered in this EIS/EIR is the use of existing BLM designated corridors as designated in the CDCA Plan (BLM 1980 as amended) for its entire route across public land in California. The Proposed Project and Alternatives A and C, described in Section 2, meet this requirement.

### **1.6.3 Planning Criteria**

The BLM has developed planning criteria for the consideration of proposed plan amendments. Planning criteria (43 CFR 1610.4-2) are parameters that guide development of the plan amendment to ensure the planning process is tailored to the issues and that unnecessary data collection is avoided. Planning criteria are based on standards prescribed by applicable laws and

regulations; agency guidance; and the result of coordination with the public, Native American tribes, and other federal, state, and local government agencies. Planning criteria applicable to Alternative B are as follows:

- **Planning and NEPA** - The proposed plan amendments shall not amend the majority of the decisions, goals, and objectives established in the CDCA Plan and the decisions shall remain in effect. The plan amendment process shall be conducted in compliance with the FLPMA, planning regulations at 43 CFR 1600, BLM manual guidance, and all applicable federal laws affecting BLM land use decisions. The planning process shall include an environmental analysis prepared in compliance with NEPA, the President's CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1500, and BLM guidance.
- **Consistency with Other Land Use Plans** - The BLM's land use plans and amendments must be consistent with officially approved or adopted resource-related plans of Indian tribes, other federal agencies, and state and local government to the maximum extent practical, given that the BLM's land use plans must also be consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of the FLPMA, and other federal laws and regulations applicable to public land (43 CFR 1610.3-2(a)). Consistency with current land use plans is discussed in Section 3.7, Land Use and Recreation.
- **Consistency with BLM Planning Efforts** - The approved Northern and Eastern Colorado (NECO) Desert Plan and Coachella Valley Plan are considered in Section 3.7, Land Use and Recreation throughout the document.

#### **1.6.4 Public Participation in the CDCA Plan Amendment Process**

BLM planning regulations (40 CFR 1601-1610) provide for specific points of public involvement in environmental analysis and land use planning decisions including plan amendments. The review and analysis of the Proposed Project follow IID and BLM guidelines for public participation and opportunity to comment (although the Proposed Project would not require a CDCA Plan amendment, an alternative to the Proposed Project under consideration would require a CDCA Plan amendment were it to be selected). Section 1.3 provides a summary of BLM's and IID's consultation and coordination process for the Proposed Project.

Before the BLM approves the CDCA Plan amendment decisions, the Governor of California must have an opportunity to review the proposed decision for consistency with state and local plans.

### **1.7 Permits, Approvals, and Regulatory Requirements**

Numerous federal, state and local regulations and permit requirements would be applicable to construction and/or operation of the Proposed Project and alternatives. IID or its contractors would be required to comply with all applicable requirements, as well as obtain and comply with terms contained within required permits. **Table 1-1** lists the major federal, state, and local permits, approvals, and consultations identified for the construction and operation of the Proposed Project and alternatives.

<b>Table 1-1 Potential Permits and Approvals for the Proposed Project and Alternatives</b>		
<b>Agency/Department</b>	<b>Permit/Approval</b>	<b>Action Associated With or Required For</b>
<b>FEDERAL AGENCIES</b>		
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Biological Assessment, Section 7 Consultation, Biological Opinion (Endangered Species Act [ESA] 16 USC 1531-1544)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity where there may be an effect on federally-listed endangered/threatened/proposed species (applies to projects with federal involvement).</li> </ul>
	Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide comments to prevent loss of and damage to wildlife resources.</li> </ul>
Bureau of Land Management	Right-of-Way Grant (FLPMA, 43 USC 1701 <i>et seq.</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easements on BLM-managed land.</li> </ul>
	Temporary use permit (43 USC 1701 <i>et seq.</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short-term activities on BLM-managed land (less than 3 years).</li> </ul>
	Antiquities and Cultural Resources Use Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider issuance of antiquities and cultural resources use permit to conduct surveys and to excavate or remove cultural resources on federal land.</li> </ul>
	Plan of Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider approval of detailed Construction, Operation and Maintenance (COM) Plan.</li> </ul>
	Notice to Proceed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following issuance of the right-of-way grant and approval of the COM Plan, consider issuance of a Notice to Proceed with project development and mitigation activities.</li> </ul>
	California Desert Conservation Plan Amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider amending CDCA Plan (applicable to Alternative B only).</li> </ul>
	Clean Air Act Conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring federal actions are consistent with the Clean Air Act and with federally enforceable air quality management plans.</li> </ul>
Army Corps of Engineers	Individual/Nationwide Section 404 Permit (CWA, 33 USC 1341)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discharge of dredge/fill into Waters of the United States, including wetlands.</li> </ul>
	Section 10, Rivers and Harbors Act Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities, including the placement of structures, affecting navigable waters.</li> </ul>

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<b>Agency/Department</b>	<b>Permit/Approval</b>	<b>Action Associated With or Required For</b>
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation	Section 106 Consultation, National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to comment if project may affect cultural resources listed or eligible for listing on National Register of Historic Places.</li> </ul>
U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration	Encroachment Permits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of permit for transmission line crossing of federally-funded highways (I-10).</li> </ul>
U.S. Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms	Explosive User's Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of permit to purchase, store and use explosives for site preparation during tower footing excavation.</li> </ul>
<b>STATE AGENCIES</b>		
State Water Resources Control Board, Regional Water Quality Control Board	General Construction Activity Stormwater Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stormwater discharges associated with construction activity.</li> </ul>
	Waste Discharge Requirements. (Water Code 13000 <i>et seq.</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discharge of waste that might affect groundwater or surface water (nonpoint-source) quality.</li> </ul>
	401 Certification (CWA, 33 USC 1341. If the project requires COE 404 permit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discharge into waters and wetlands (see COE Section 404 Permit).</li> </ul>
California State Lands Commission	Right-of-Way Permit (Land Use Lease)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of a grant of right-of-way across state land.</li> </ul>
State Department of Fish and Game	California ESA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity where a listed candidate, threatened, or endangered species under California ESA may be present in the project area and a state agency is acting as lead agency for CEQA compliance. Consider issuance of a Section 2081 incidental take permit for state-only listed species and a Section 2081.1 consistency determination for effects on species that are both state and federally listed.</li> </ul>
	California Native Plant Protection Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of mitigation agreement and mitigation plan for plants listed as rare.</li> </ul>

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<b>Agency/Department</b>	<b>Permit/Approval</b>	<b>Action Associated With or Required For</b>
	Lake/Streambed Alteration Agreement (California Fish and Game Code Section 1601)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in natural state of river, stream, lake (includes road or land construction across a natural streambed).</li> </ul>
California Department of Transportation	Encroachment Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of permits to cross state highways.</li> </ul>
California State Historic Preservation Office	Section 106 Consultation, NHPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with BLM, project applicant, appropriate land management agencies, and others regarding activities potentially affecting cultural resources.</li> </ul>
<b>LOCAL AGENCIES</b>		
Coachella Valley Water District	Utility Clearance and Encroachment Permit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of encroachment permit.</li> </ul>
Imperial County, Public Works Department	Road Crossing Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of a road crossing permit.</li> </ul>
	Grading Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excavation and fill activities.</li> </ul>
Imperial County, Planning Department	Conditional Use Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities where use is conditional in a particular zone.</li> </ul>
Imperial County, Sheriff's Department	Explosives Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of a license to store flammable explosives.</li> </ul>
Riverside County, Transportation Department	Encroachment Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider issuance of encroachment permit.</li> </ul>
Riverside County, Public Works Department	Grading Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excavation and fill activities.</li> </ul>
Riverside County, Planning Department	Conditional Use Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities where use is conditional in a particular zone.</li> </ul>