

Comment Set A0015
Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians

Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians

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April 4, 2008

CPUC/BLM
c/o Aspen Environmental Group
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San Francisco, CA 94104
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Subject: Recirculation of DEIR Is Necessary to Include Detailed Environmental Analysis of 500 kV Corridor Along Highway 76 between Sunrise Powerlink and LEAPS

Dear CPUC/BLM:

We recently became aware that Sempra/SDG&E have been actively seeking U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) assistance for the last two-and-a-half years to site an extension of the proposed Sunrise Powerlink 500 kV transmission line along Highway 76 with the goal of tying-in the 500 kV line with the Southern California Edison (SCE) transmission grid that serves the greater Los Angeles area.¹ According to the DEIR, the route of this 500 kV line will follow existing 69 kV transmission corridors through the La Jolla reservation and adjacent to the Rincon and Pala reservations. SDG&E has held no meetings with the tribes that would be affected and has not informed any of the tribal leaders of these tribes that a major transmission line project is imminent, despite active lobbying of the DOE by Sempra/SDG&E for more than two years for assistance in placing the line through Indian lands along Highway 76. This is totally unacceptable. The DEIR must be recirculated to include a detailed environmental analysis of the impact of placing a 500 kV transmission line through or near these lands along Highway 76, and to propose measures to mitigate the impact of this line.

A0015-1

A. Detailed Analysis of the Full Loop Route Through Indian Lands Along Highway 76 Must be Included in the DEIR

A0015-2

SDG&E calls the line that will pass through Indian lands the “Full Loop,” as construction of the line would complete a 500 kV full loop transmission line through Southern California. The SDG&E Aug. 4, 2006 application to the Commission describes the general route of the Full Loop (p. VI-13): “Of the Full Loop alternatives originating at Imperial Valley, the best-performing Full Loop alternative went from Imperial Valley to a new “Central” Substation to a new substation in SCE’s territory between the Serrano and Valley Substations. This alternative also had the advantage of combining the Sunrise Powerlink (Imperial Valley – Central 500 kV) with the LEAPS transmission.”²

¹ Sempra comment letter to DOE, November 28, 2005, provided as Attachment A. SDG&E comment letter to DOE, March 6, 2006, provided as Attachment B.

² The complete Full Loop route map is shown in Figure B-12b of the DEIR/EIS at:
http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/Environment/info/aspen/sunrise/deir/figs/Figure%20B-12b_Future%20Expansion_500kV_CE_Riverside.pdf

Vernon Wright
Chairman

Bo Mazzetti
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Council Member

Gilbert Parada
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Charlie Kolb
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The Lake Elsinore Advanced Pump Storage (LEAPS) line is a second proposed 500 kV transmission project that would connect a substation on the northern perimeter of Camp Pendleton to the SCE grid. An existing 230 kV corridor that passes by the western border of the Pala Reservation would be a component of the LEAPS project. A combination of 500 kV Sunrise Powerlink and the 500 kV LEAPS transmission line is presented by SDG&E as the Full Loop option in the application.

A0015-2 cont.

Under “Future Transmission System Expansion,” the DEIR describes the exact route of the expected 500 kV interconnection between the proposed Sunrise Powerlink Central substation and LEAPS, stating (DEIR, p. B-31): *“The potential future 500 kV circuit would exit the proposed Central East Substation, running northwest to parallel the existing 69 kV line past the Warners Substation. It would then follow the existing Warners-Rincon 69 kV transmission line past Lake Henshaw, hugging the lake’s northern banks until it would meet SR76. The route would continue to follow the existing 69 kV line and generally following SR76 for approximately 12 miles to Rincon Substation. From Rincon, the route would continue west along the existing Rincon-Lilac 69 kV transmission line for approximately 9.5 miles across Valley Center and meet the existing Talega-Escondido 230 kV transmission line west of Lilac Substation. The route would parallel the existing 230 kV line north for approximately 13 miles, turning west with the existing corridor near the community of Rainbow. After another 16 miles, the potential future route would be between the northern boundary of Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base and Cleveland National Forest, still following the Talega-Escondido corridor.”*

SDG&E’s makes clear in its comments on the DEIR that the whole point of its preferred SPL route is to enable the completion of the Full Loop. SDG&E states this explicitly in its March 12, 2008 Phase II testimony on the DEIR, stating (Chapter 1, p. 1-12, 1-13): *“But inexplicably, the DEIR did not treat expandability as a project objective. SDG&E’s Phase 1 testimony shows how the Sunrise Proposed Route can facilitate future system expansion, but that a southern route does not (footnote 15). . . SDG&E’s Phase 1 evidence shows that (1) the Sunrise Proposed Route offers the potential of future interconnection to SCE at 500 kV or 230 kV; (2) the new Central substation design provides for future additional circuits and transformers at 500 and/or 230 kV; and (3) other routes or alternatives under consideration do not offer the future expandability potential of the Proposed Route.”*

The DEIR offers no opinion on when the completion of the Full Loop might occur and provides no analysis of the environmental impacts of linking the proposed Sunrise Powerlink project with the LEAPS project to complete the Full Loop, despite the DEIR describing the exact route of the Full Loop through Indian lands along Highway 76, SDG&E’s explicit intent to complete the Full Loop, and Sempra’s Energy request for DOE assistance to place transmission through Indian lands along Highway 76, and SDG&E’s most recent assertion that the whole point of the Sunrise Powerlink is to complete the Full Loop.³ This is an unacceptable omission in the DEIR.

³ SDG&E, A.06-08-010 Phase II Testimony – Chapter 6: SDG&E’s Enhanced Northern Route, p. 25. *“If future 500 kV and 230 kV circuits cannot not be built due to the location of the substation and route constraints, then one of the*

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It is reasonably foreseeable that SDG&E will move to gain approval to complete the Full Loop as soon as Commission approval is secured for the Sunrise Powerlink. SDG&E cites the Garamendi Principle as a primary criterion in selecting proposal transmission routes.⁴ The Garamendi Principle calls for siting new transmission lines in existing active transmission corridors before developing new corridors. The time to study the impacts on the Warners-Rincon 69 kV and Rincon-Lilac 69 kV corridors is now, when the route of the Sunrise Powerlink is not yet finalized. If the impacts on these 69 kV corridors are high and can not be mitigated, this information could have a material impact on the final route of the Sunrise Powerlink. There may be little option other than forcing the tribe(s) to absorb the impacts if this information is not available until after the Sunrise Powerlink is built along SDG&E's preferred route.

A0015-2 cont.

B. DEIR Must Analyze Expansion of Sunrise Powerlink Along 230 kV Corridor through La Jolla and Rincon Lands

A0015-3

The DEIR also describes the near-term (within the next ten years) expansion of the proposed Sunrise Powerlink project by the addition of one or two 230 kV circuits from the Central East Substation to either the Sycamore Canyon Substation or Chicarita Substation in the San Diego area (DEIR, Figure B-1, p. B-3). The northern 230 kV alternative would follow 69 kV corridors through the La Jolla and Rincon reservations to the Chicarita Canyon substation. The DEIR includes no environmental assessment of the 230 kV expansion route through La Jolla and Rincon lands.

SDG&E has opposed the southern route alternatives to the proposed Sunrise Powerlink route primarily on the basis that collocating transmission lines would result in less reliability than running the lines along distinct and separate corridors).⁵ It is therefore reasonable to assume that SDG&E will prefer the La Jolla and Rincon reservation 69 kV corridors for the 230 kV expansion from the proposed Central East Substation to the Chicarita Substation. There is no analysis of the environmental impacts of this 230 kV expansion in the DEIR, despite the reasonable probability of this 230 kV expansion project through La Jolla and Rincon lands in the near-term.

objectives of the Sunrise Powerlink, "expandability" would not be met. It hardly makes sense from a CAISO ratepayers' perspective to select southern routes if the future expansion of those route are infeasible.

⁴ Ibid, p. 6.30. "Additionally, SDG&E continued to follow one of the primary environmental criteria for routing any transmission line, namely the use of the Garamendi Principles, which encourage always using or expanding existing disturbed rights-of-way where possible."

⁵ Ibid, 6.19. "Because the Southern route is adjacent to SWPL (existing 500 kV Southwest Powerlink) for a much longer distance than the Proposed Route, the exposure of the Southern route to natural disasters that have the potential to simultaneously take out both the proposed and existing 500 kV line is greater for the Southern route."

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C. Conclusion – DEIR Must be Recirculated to Address Omissions

The DEIR must be recirculated to include a detailed environmental assessment, including an assessment of alternative routes and mitigation measures, of 1) the 500 kV Full Loop segment that SDG&E will build to link the Central East Substation to the LEAPS transmission line, and 2) the 230 kV expansion to SDG&E's preferred project that starts at the Central East Substation, passes through La Jolla and Rincon lands along existing 69 kV corridors, and terminates at the Chicarita Substation.

We look forward to your prompt response. Please contact Dick Watenpaugh, Director of Tribal Administration at (760) 749-1051, ext. 2021, if you have any questions regarding this comment letter.

Respectfully,

Vernon Wright, Chairman



Bo Mazzetti, Vice Chairman



Stephanie Spencer, Council Member



Gilbert Parada, Council Member



Charlie Kolb, Council Member

cc:

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
Lt. Gov. John Garamendi
Attorney General Jerry Brown
State Senator Christine Kehoe
State Senator Denise Ducheny
State Senator Dennis Hollingsworth
Assemblymember Lloyd Levine
Assemblymember Lori Saldana
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US Senator Barbara Boxer
US Congressman Duncan Hunter
US Congressman Bob Filner
US Congresswoman Susan Davis
US Congressman Darrell Issa
US Congressman Brian Bilbray
BIA Regional Superintendent

A0015-4

Responses to Comment Set A0015, cont. Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians

- A0015-1 The Future Transmission System Expansions were evaluated at an appropriate programmatic level in the Draft EIR/EIS as described in Section B.2.7. Impacts associated with the Future Transmission System Expansions are discussed in Sections D.2.18, D.3.11, D.4.11, D.5.11, D.6.11, D.7.15, D.8.11, D.9.11, D.10.11, D.11.11, D.12.11, D.13.11, D.14.11, and D.15.13 of Volumes 2 and 3 of the Draft EIR/EIS. Because the routes are not well defined and any future transmission project would require an independent permitting and environmental compliance process with project level CEQA/NEPA analysis, the level of detail in the analysis of the Future Transmission System Expansions as carried out in the Draft EIR/EIS is appropriate. No changes to the level of analysis have been made. See also Responses to Comments B0012-10 to B0012-13 and the Recirculated Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS pages 1-1 and 1-4.
- A0015-2 The Future Transmission System Expansions were evaluated at an appropriate programmatic level in the Draft EIR/EIS. As discussed on page B-24 of the Draft EIR/EIS, CEQA requires that the “degree of specificity required in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity involved in the underlying activity which is described in the EIR.” (CEQA Guidelines § 15146.) When the general impacts of a project are reasonably foreseeable, but the specific details have not yet been defined, “the EIR need not be as detailed as an EIR on the specific construction projects that might follow.” (Id., sub. (b).) However, a programmatic level EIR still requires baseline data.
- Additionally, the 500 kV Full Loop Alternative was discussed and screened out in Section 4.9.18 in Appendix 1 (Alternatives Screening Report) in Volume 6 of the Draft EIR/EIS. Please refer to Responses to Comments A0015-1 and B0012-10 to B0012-13 and the Recirculated Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS pages 1-1 and 1-4.
- A0015-3 The commenter is correct that the one of the potential routes of the 230 kV future transmission system expansion identified by SDG&E would pass through the La Jolla and Rincon lands to Escondido Substation. The 230 kV expansion was described in Section B.2.7.1 in the Draft EIR/EIS and was evaluated at a programmatic level for each issue area in Section D of the Draft EIR/EIS. The La Jolla Band and the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians retain their rights as tribal governments to approve or disapprove an easement through their lands.
- A0015-4 The commenter states that the Draft EIR/EIS should be recirculated to include detailed environmental analysis of the 500 kV corridor along SR76 and the 230 kV expansion across the La Jolla and Rincon lands. The analyses of these routes are included in the Draft EIR/EIS. The future transmission line routes are described in Section B.2.7, and impact analyses are presented in each part of Section D of the Draft EIR/EIS. That analysis is adequate to disclose the impacts of such a future 230 kV and/or 500 kV corridors to the public and the decision-makers evaluating the Sunrise Powerlink Project.

As explained in Section B.2.7.2, “...approval of the SRPL [Sunrise Powerlink] would not result in automatic approval of the potential future expansions to the SRPL and all future 230 or 500 kV lines would require new applications by SDG&E, followed by preparation of project-level environmental documents and separate approvals from the CPUC prior to permitting and construction.”